

## **Pasquale Scuderi**

Q: Looking back at the year, what would you say were the highlights for you?

I feel I have just started to get things done in a job that has been like being in a washing machine from the beginning, so... there hasn't been time to stop and reflect because the one thing the job is is constant in terms of its pace.

It was sort of easy for people who are not part of our daily operations to just let what was covered – the weapons and sun – sort of define us. For those of us who are here every day, that wasn't the case. We're still sending kids to Ivy League schools and running some very creative programs.

I could point to something in almost every community that was emblematic of the great work and great teaching that was going on in all of those communities, from the bus commemorating the Montgomery boycott that AHA did, to the girls' basketball team, not only in how they did in the state tournament, but also being a model for teaching xxx.. The list is too long to enumerate, but I can much say there was something pretty terrific happening here every day in terms of teaching and learning.

That's something that you don't see if you're not hear every day, and it's not something that people write about. Hey you saw a kid give a fantastic presentation in a random biology class, or you watched a great bit of lecturing or a great Socratic seminar going on with the kids in a classroom. They tend not to make the headlines but they happen pretty consistently and pretty well here.

So in that sense I'm very pleased.

Q: Did you go into the year with a few specific goals and did you manage to achieve those?

The primary goal was for me to get a sense of what was going on here, so the one commitment that I did make was to try to be in classrooms with a much higher frequency one would imagine someone in my position and in a place this size one would imagine would be.

I did feel that particularly in the second semester we got into a groove where I was very protective of my time and schedule and made a point of getting into teachers' classrooms.

I don't personally think that there is anything I can do that will make a bigger impact on improving teaching and learning than actually being in classrooms and giving direct feedback to teachers and students. I think that's quality control, and education consulting and just good policy as a principal .. I don't think there's a more important place for me to be than in the classroom.

So we really have worked and are in a position next year to embed that time day to day and be very protective of it. And we did pretty well at that even despite all the demands on our time as an administrative team. We had at least a day and a half a week in school hours when I was out in classrooms. I was able to get into a clear majority of the classrooms into, so that will continue to be a priority and it's something we will embed and institutionalize.

It's one thing to be dealing with policy, and making decisions and looking at budget, and all of those things that are vital to what I do, but, again, unless you're in the classroom, observing performance of teachers and students I don't think there's any way you can be effective.

**Q: You said one and a half days in the classroom?**

Yes, a week. For instance we would calendar a day in the week when I would take no interviews, no meetings, take no phone calls. On those days I could do those things before 8:30 and after 3:45 and that will continue into next year. And we hope to up that to twice a week. Before first and sixth period there will be completely uninterrupted time in the classrooms.

What we've found is that the demands on my time actually went down the more I was out because those conversations that teachers, students, staff members think require a meeting to talk to me for 15, 30 minutes are often things that can be solved in a brief five minute conversation. In the days I was out and about I was available to staff members. So there are a lot of things that can be solved in the hallways, or the classrooms or after the bell when I was sitting in the classroom. So that negates the need to take up time in my calendar – that 's a benefit as well.

**Q: Do you feel you have earned the respect and trust of the students and how important is student involvement in deciding school policy and direction?**

It's hard to say. We haven't administered any sort of customer survey at this point to gauge kids' reactions. In general I would say my interactions with students were overall very positive. I genuinely like our kids and enjoy working with them. If it was all adults here I certainly wouldn't be working here. The fact that I get to work with some pretty brilliant and exciting developing minds is part of why I'm here.

That said there are days when you have to be the adult and the educator and the teacher. You've got to draw boundaries for kids. So there are kids I've had perfect relationship the one day and that relationship was strained the next day when I had to tell them something they didn't like.

I think part of the reason I had a pretty good year in terms of student relationships was that there were many conversations where kids openly disagreed with a decision we made or a policy we tried to put in place. AND in

some cases kids were right. Someone got a consequence for a behavior that they felt was unfair and we listened to that and at the end of the day reason prevailed.

... someone got a consequence for a behavior that they felt was unfair and we listened to that and at the end of the day reason prevailed. If kids know that you are genuinely listening, there's no better way to validate that than on occasion, when it's warranted, let their reason and let their argument change your decision. There's definitely times that we've done that.

As far as formal input, we'll always look for ways to improve that. We had a really well functioning student leadership program this year and Chris Young did some great things – everything from our election convention to taking the student leadership group and making it far more a community minded body than just a social planning body. That's certainly a part of it. To use a sports cliché, Chris really elevated the game with leadership this year. That's an area where kids had considerable input.

I'm very proud of the students we had sitting on both Site Council and the B-Cep Committee. I never felt in those situations that the students were there in any sort of token way. They gave really constructive feedback and decisive input when it came to deciding on budgets and weighing in on school policy.

Other areas where kids contributed were where we had folks sitting on the Ad Hoc Safety committee. And there were some people that were pretty open about thinking that students shouldn't have a voice in that, that that was an adult decision, but I think it was the right decision to have student perspective there.

I was just speaking to our dean and one of the things we really want to pay attention to next year – and I'm not necessarily referring to the higher level discipline issues – but sort of the day to day conflicts that for some kids wind up in referral, and though they may not be violent offences or things that people think of when they think of major discipline issues. I'm talking about the way we approach the day to day discipline and the disruptive behavior and the defiant behavior that ends up with the kid getting a referral down to OCI and you put five or six of those things together and you're talking about missing a week of class time in that particular class and we want to really engage students around how to get a more constructive and effective policy on how to deal with that lower level discipline that will allow teachers to keep teaching and allow some of those kids to be in the classroom more often. That's an area that we can begin..

How do you do that?

It's about reaching out to kids that have experienced that directly. I think that sometimes you... it's a dilemma that you have in the classroom. You have the same five or six kids who always raise their hands, but how do you get the perspective of the kids who are not that willing to engage.

When you're talking about a discipline policy, what I have experienced, not just here but in other places is that the most motivated, most vocal kids who are emergent natural leaders who will step forward and weigh in on policy, but those aren't necessarily the kids who are being most impacted by that.

But we have that data. It's easy to get the kids in and say, look, you had 20 referrals for defiant behavior last year, for talking in a classroom. What can we do to get to a better place on this? Obviously we don't want to completely eliminate the possibility that you have some insight that can help us understand why you are being so defiant and disruptive. But we have got to get to a place where you can learn and a teacher can continue to teach.

I don't think getting input from kids who aren't as willing historically to give us input is as difficult as we have made it. I think it's a matter of slowing down and saying, look we have data that can point to exactly who these kids are. Let's reach out to them personally. Survey them, discuss this with them. I think there's a lot of perspective out there that's not as difficult to get as people may think.

Q: How do you feel that you've dealt with safety issues at the school, given this year's gun incidents?

I don't know that we'll ever say we are absolutely confident in what's going on. What's happened this year is that we've had to deal with some very eye-opening incidents that I think are reflective of a larger societal problem. And I don't say that to dilute our responsibility in protecting our kids. That's always going to be number one. Am I pleased with how we handled the incidents in question? The answer is yes. I think I had a bunch of people on campus behave as they should in very responsible and professional ways to prevent kids getting heard.

The adjustments we've made in the aftermath of some of those incidents leave me with some confidence that we can continuously get better in terms of preserving student safety and preventing other incidents of that type.

I didn't want to say this earlier in the school year, but I think the fact that the incidents dropped off in what is traditionally the most chaotic time of the year – the end of the school year – we didn't have any incidents even remotely similar to those things. I can tell you with confidence that I don't think that happened purely by accident. I think the adjustments we made and a renewed intensity we brought to that, particularly in terms of supervision, led to some really good outcomes.

I'm confident that we're going to maintain that type of intensity when it comes to that issue.

We are always going to have to play defense, we're always going to have to be aware, and we're never going to be able to get complacent about it. We're a very big campus in a fairly populous environment that's very accessible to public transportation.

Q: You mention public transport and that brings up an issue that is brought up again and again by our readers – out-of-district students. Is this an issue at the school in terms of the number of students who are not eligible to be at BHS? Is it something that you track very closely?

I know that most of the students we have are, at least on paper, supposed to be here. Our database has Berkeley addresses. Now there are always questions about the legitimacy of those addresses. I couldn't tell you what percentage of our kids are actually not in district.

There's an amount of inter-district permits that are granted. But I think your question about kids who don't have a permit and don't live in district.

One of the things I'm really going to focus on next year is attendance and in the work that we're planning on doing and the type of documentation and workflow that we're going to do on attendance I think some of those things are going to come to light sooner rather than later. When we start talking about really implementing a formal attendance policy that's in line with the state ed code, you're going to see a lot more kids from Berkeley High being referred to the district for FARB meetings and that's going to include – require more home visits and more home address verifications.

So I think some of the efforts we're going to make on attendance next year will give some clarity on what size that problem is. And I'm not trying to be evasive on the question but that really is a policy question, and to some extent a student services question. We push whatever relevant information we have in that direction. But we're really running a school here, we're not necessarily setting district policy. I educate the kids that I get until I'm told the kid's not going to go to school here anymore. We make that decision when it comes to an expellable offence.

Q: On another question another big issue is the achievement gap. What measures are being taken on this?

I'm going to go back to attendance because, if I may, because it's one of the four major areas I want to focus on next year. And when you look at our attendance, whether it's kids with a high number of unexcused absences or students that have 3+ absences in the first month of school, anyway that I look at my attendance data it's pretty co-relative with our performance gaps. So right off the bat that's something that's got to change. So if my attendance rates for African American students are not as good as they are for white students or Asian students, I have a problem right off the bat in that whatever I do programmatically or in terms of classroom instruction, if a kid's not there to be impacted by those adjustments or those creative ideas, obviously that's not going to yield any performance

improvement. So again, attendance right off the bat I've got to get the kids who are struggling in class more often.

That's not to say that white kids aren't cutting class as well, but there is sufficient data to say that the attendance problem disproportionately affects the kids who are also most affected by the proverbial achievement gap.

In terms of the whole school and instructionally we've really got to get better about assessment. Right now the information we are relying on is two tests. We're relying on the CST – and I'm not here to bash CST but we know that the higher that you get in terms of grade level, by the time I get to my juniors, getting those kids to participate, and participate in a very authentic way, has been a challenge.

We made some efforts to make that happen and we're really thinking that we've positioned ourselves to get an academic performance index, but if we really want to get better in terms of education you can't just rely on two annual measures: your exit exam data and your CST. We've got to be looking at far more consistent measures that are really rooted in the classrooms.

We've got people in the math department now who are trying to put the finishing touches on us having a common mid-term and a common file in all three of our beginning subjects: algebra, algebra 2 and geometry and that type of formative assessment really needs to be made available.

We're talking in Academic Choice about giving every ninth grader a standard space skills inventory so that right off the bat, so that if you're a ninth grade teacher in that program – and there are other people who are considering adopting this type of program anyway – you get a pretty good indication of where your kids are strong and where they're weak. And that stuff can be disaggregated by racial groups so that people can really focus on where there are gaps.

I don't think we've done as good a job as we could in terms of actually defining the problem. What skills are in that gap consisting of? I want to be able to have every ninth grade English teacher start off the year saying that I know that the kids sitting in front of me particularly the black and brown kids are struggling with this type of writing convention, or struggling with literary response and analysis.

And you can do the same thing across the board and across the subjects. The science department has done a good job of putting together a common biology mid term and final and also considering doing the same kind of pre-test if you will.

So I think assessment is really, really a huge part of it – and assessment that is not just the state-mandated annual kind, but assessment that teachers can use in their own classrooms. Because if they use that in their own classrooms they're able to assign value to it that kids may not see in some of those other measures.

In other words if a formative assessment I give you counts for your weekly grade, you're more likely to put an effort into that because it's going to affect your grade. So not only do I get the benefit of getting really good information about what you know and don't know that informs my teaching, but I can also make this have value to you and it's harder to deal with these big-ticket annual exams.

Q: You mentioned you have four goals for next year and you've discussed attendance and assessment. Are those two of them, and what are the four?

We're more comfortable calling them focus areas than goals because being in the WAS process right now we're going to have some formal goals that are going to come out in our self-study and our school-wide action plan. But rather than wait until march of next year when that action plan is put before the Site Council and then put before the School Board, and subsequently adopted, we need some sort of proxy vision to work with.

So in addition to assessment and attendance, we're also looking at instruction in general, and I go back to what I was talking about and the need to have people in the classroom.

I want myself and my administrative teams to be very much cognizant of research-based classroom strategies. Are there clear lesson outcomes and objectives put on the board? It sounds like such a simple thing. And I'm not trying to standardize the school or zap people of their autonomy. But there are some things that I think should be consistent tools. Kids should be able to walk into any classroom and have some expectation of where to look and understand what it is that they are going to be expected to learn that day.

As a whole we need to get better at saying what our learning goals are for kids. I think sometimes educators get confused with writing what you're going to do on a board with a learning goal. Saying read chapter five on the Vietnam War is not a learning goal, that's an activity. Having kids know that by the time they leave a classroom they will be expected to comment and reflect on what US policy was in Cambodia during the Vietnam War – that's a learning objective, that's a goal. I think we need to see a little more sophistication.

There are plenty of teachers on campus that do this very well. What I'm advocating is that we see that on a more consistent basis.

I talked about using some pre-assessments to get an idea of where things are going. I think that if administrators have in their hands these sort of general learning profiles that let them as well as teachers know ahead of time what students are strong at in terms of skills and concepts and where they are lacking that's a very powerful tool for an administrator to walk in with. Because, again, if writing conventions are something you know throughout the ninth grade in a particular learning community kids are struggling with you, you're going to need to know why

you're not seeing kids writing a lot or getting explicit instructions on writing in those classrooms. That's something they can have going in.

Supervision and evaluation are very important. We want to get to a place where evaluation is used to deal with teachers who are not performing well. We have so many tremendous people on staff where I think the supervision and evaluation component can become a very genuine conversation about what's working and how to get that information out to other teachers who need additional strategies.

We need to know what things are working and how people are being successful in classrooms. Really having administrators out in the classroom and demystifying the fact that someone walks in the classroom with a pad is not synonymous with a cold or clinical audit but it's the beginning of a really genuine productive conversation about teaching and learning – bringing coaching into that supervision and evaluation process.

Q: By my count that's three areas. Is that right?

Three areas. I'll go into the fourth even though I'm trying to hold back. It's summer and I'm still drinking like five cups of tea a day – that's what this place does to you.

The last area that we've outlined is what we're calling program development. And program development is for us just really looking at how we support students. We're talking about not only developing our curriculum, which is critical – and that's obviously tied to instruction and development – but I think having some coherence around our curriculum, from program to program and from department to department is really critical.

Program development is something we're looking at in terms of really tightening up and making more effective the programs that we have on campus to do with kids who are struggling. We want to get better at dealing with English language learners. We want to see math scores improve for all kids, but in particular for our African American and Latino kids. We're talking about ways of supporting achievement in either progression of math.

And also we want to be very, very conscious of not just adopting an intervention or a support program because someone says its intent is to help kids. I've started trying to bring this into our consciousness a little more. When someone says they've got a great idea that's going to help black or brown kids succeed better academically, the first question I'm going to ask them is the same question I would ask my curriculum teachers – which is “how am I going to know when your program has made an impact?”.

We've seen some quantifiable success, albeit mild success in areas like our summer bridge program which I think was pretty effective where we took a group of bubble students – kids that could have gone either way, kids that were maybe not

completely chronic truants or struggling students, but maybe C, C- students who could go either way – and supported them in a summer session prior to the ninth grade year. And then had an after-school class that provided direct study skills support, a space for them to do their homework... almost a case management model.

And we saw some improvement in GPA in those kids compared to kids who could have been selected for that program but didn't get that intervention. So that's the type of thing that we want to keep exploring.

We have a new person going into our academic support coordinator position. I want to see our tutoring programs get a lot more connected to what's actually happening in the classroom. We want to tighten that up.

We realized that we were spending a disproportionate amount of money on administering... another way to say it is when you look at a charity, our administrative costs were too high on administering the amount of tutoring services we were putting out there. The B-Cep committee had decided to roll back that position a little and I think it's now proportionate with what they are going to be administering. So again, getting real clear and really clearly articulation where our tutoring resources are on campus and better ways to connect...

You know, we have kids who may have been in OCI two or three times, not for high-level offences, but also bad attendance, and they're talking to their counselor and they're talking to someone down in OCI. But in looking at those records and then looking at attendance records for tutorials, it seems there's a whole slew of those kids who never had contact with an academic support coordinator. So we've just got to bring some more systemic coherence to how the services we have get to the kids.

So I think it's going to be the academic support coordinator working with the student activities person working with the OCI intervention people also working with counselors.

And again, not to keep coming back to this, but one way our development programs are thinking a little tighter, what we're looking for in terms of attendance is having a workflow that's actually a web-based spreadsheet where any kid who's getting into trouble with attendance – which is usually a pretty good indicator that there's going to be some other issues – a counselor, the intervention teams and an administrator will all get to look at this spreadsheet and hopefully steer the kids to the services they need a little better.

We're going to look to have all our newcomer English language learners and our long term English language learners with one counselor this year and also have someone have someone do some little case management with those kids and hopefully see some improvement with the kids that are getting reclassified to full English proficient.

So not only tying together the resources we have on campus but taking a really hard look at these things we've carried at no small expense for a long time and asking whether or not they are effective. I would rather have fewer programs that have a genuine, positive impact on the most struggling kids than just sort of flood the market with anything that says it's supposed to be a positive for those kids. That's a sort of complacency thing. We have all these programs but if they're not having an impact they're just perpetuating the problem.

So it may be taking a few steps back in terms of program development to ultimately to go forward. Or whatever that cliché is I'm looking for...

Q: What is the budget looking like going into next year?

We were planning for the worst. Our already crazy math schedule – we had three versions of that in our staffing in anticipation of the worst. So we really couldn't have got better news in terms of the budget. We're still looking to be right within right within our class sizes that are dictated by the local parcel tax measures. The school board has been very generous in giving me a half-time dean of attendance position. I made a recommendation this afternoon on an individual to fill that position. An administrator to really supervise this renewed and formalized effort to deal with attendance.

So we've got some resources. I could always ask for more but I'm grateful with how generous the board and district staff have been in setting us up for next year. At a place this big with all the challenges we could always use more but we should be able to make a pretty good run with what we have.

Q: That may be a good place to end. But one further question: are you ever going to get a vacation?

I will eke out five or six days in July but it's definitely not... there certainly are people in my life would wish I had more time off, but I didn't sign up for a job that was going to give me these long leisurely breaks. But I'm trying to find some time. The one thing this first year has taught me is that if you don't find some space – it sounds cliché – but if you don't find some space to take care of yourself, there's absolutely no way you can take care of other people. And there's absolutely no way you can take care of 3,200 teenagers. So I do plan on trying to find some rest.

Q: Well I hope you achieve that, and have a good summer. Thank you so much for talking to us.

I hope we get to talk about a ton more positive things next year.

Q: I agree. Thanks a lot.

