

Bob Jankowski: Hi, everyone, and welcome to the fourth in the series of the Gladiators Soundboard Podcast, proudly presented by the Gower Foundation. If you missed any of the previous podcasts, please visit the Gower Foundation website and look for the more tab to listen to the other podcast. My name is Bob Jankowski. I'm a proud parent of a 6th grader and 4th grader. I work in the finance industry, and I was previously the Vice President and President of the Gower Foundation. Tonight's topic will be what communication looks like at Gower. And I am proud to introduce Dr. Victor Simon, Superintendent of Gower School District 62.

Dr. Victor Simon III: Thanks, Bob. Yeah, great. Great to join tonight and 4th and 6th grade. That's unbelievable to me. Yes, when you were on the Foundation, they were not in 4th and 6th grade right away. So that goes by pretty quickly, this already being the fourth episode. I love the way the Foundation has got these archived on their website. I've gotten some really good feedback since the first one launched a few months back, and I'm really happy to do it. So tonight we are talking about what the different interest groups are in the Gower School District and how communication between those groups takes place. I think it's a great topic. So I'm looking forward to it tonight. It's a great topic that our parents want to know more about.

Bob Jankowski: You often sign off your communications with the phrase, "community at its best." What does that mean to you?

Dr. Simon: That's a great question. You know, it's a little bit of a play on words here when we talk about community at its best, the district motto for the Gower school district, as you know, is Children At Their Best. So the last handful of years, there've been some challenges in and around public education. Gower is no stranger to that. And when we think about Children At Their Best, and we know all the other interest groups that are involved, we know that we all have to be at our best. So that's really where that phrase comes from, community at its best. And the Gower school community is a diverse one. It's a very strong one. It's a family feel. We just went through some recent interviews for a Gower West Assistant Principal position for the first time ever. We'll have a Gower West Assistant Principal next year. Really excited about that, and over just about 50 candidates for that position. And as it went further down the road, we got closer and closer. We met some stellar leaders, and to a person they all talked about from the outside looking in at the family feel of what they thought Gower was about, what they heard about what they read about, you know, they checked us out online, that kind of stuff. So this idea of a family feel, I think, represents any kind of community when they're at their best. So that's where it comes from our district motto and just, sort of paying homage to the fact that we have a really strong school community.

Bob Jankowski: I definitely agree. It's a great family feeling at Gower. Communication is a two-way street at Gower, emphasizing how much it values parent feedback. How does Gower use feedback to influence programming?

Dr. Simon: Yeah, the influence word there is really, really important. So the last podcast, we talked about grading learning, testing, and I know I spent a little bit of time talking about, and I've done this many times in some of our community updates as well, but I spent a lot of time talking

about continuous improvement and sometimes that gets used as a little bit of a buzzword and, and I try to make sure that doesn't happen when when we're talking about our work here in Gower. So when we think about continuous improvement, I really like to boil that down to a simple cycle of planning, do check acts and, and, and repeat. So after you have a plan and you go out, and you do that plan, you have to check on how that plan has been going, and then you take action based on the feedback you get and whatever those corrective actions are. Now, that's how you grow as an organization, or even a person, really. So check act, for me, is a cycle of improvement is what it's all about. So, feedback is this checking part. It's actually pretty easy to come up with plans. I mean, everybody's got ideas, to go out and put those ideas into action that gets a little tough, you know, to go and do what you say you're gonna do. Not every organization can make that claim. But I've seen now this is my 26th year in education, and just as a school leader in general, that's where most organizations get stuck. A lot of planning, a lot of doing, and then a lot of planning and a lot of doing, and it's back and forth.

So when you go out and check and get some progress and get some feedback, you know, progress monitoring and get some feedback from the people that are impacted the most, you know, in this case, students and parents, of course, we get feedback from our staff as well, but that's critical. So just to make a point to say why we even talk about feedback and why even say it's so important. In fact, this year, 2022-23, we set a record in the Gower school district, our own personal record for parent participation in the Five Essential Surveys. And there are so many reminders to anyone hearing this like, yep, you, you know, you got plenty of reminders to do that since it opened in late January and just closed in late March. But that's just one form of feedback that we collect. You know, how, how are we doing? And is it going well for you? Is it going to plan, so to speak? And without that information, we don't know how to, I don't think we would know how to get better. I think we'd make some guesses, but, you know, I work with lots of other leaders in different places as well, and sometimes it sort of strikes me as maybe even a bit arrogant to think that we can come up with a plan in a community, go about doing that plan and just, you know, tinkering with it and making sure it's the best we can make it as school leaders. But, you know, without that parent voice part of it, then I think we're just sort of, you know, guessing and speculating a bit. So, so, of course, yeah, we get that feedback in multiple ways.

And now you talked about influence. You have to use it. It's not just collecting feedback. So we're excited to get this information from the five essentials. It'll all get summarized for us by late May or early June from the University of Chicago and Illinois State Board of Ed. You know, we'll get that back. That'll be a big help for us, and it helps us fine-tune the plans we have in place and make those the next iteration to get better. So, so that's, that's how it all works. A big believer in impact over intent. You know we have our intentions as a school district. We know what we'd like to accomplish, but what's the impact it's having? You know, so, so we wouldn't know that unless we asked Bob, right? Like so, so podcasts like this, this happened because the foundation reached out to say what sort of format you want to get information about the school in podcast emerges, you know, what questions do you have as parents and, and a focus group came together to say, yeah, these are basically the things we'd like to hear about. And here we are in the fourth episode talking about communication. This wasn't something that I

listed or a board member specifically listed or anything. This comes directly from what parents wanted to hear about. And I think that was in your opening remarks too. It was like this. This topic is something parents want to know about.

Bob Jankowski: And well, as a parent, I do see that Gower does listen to the public at large. So, thank you. Thank you. On the flip side, how does Gower ensure that it's communicating with parents effectively and consistently? How are we effective as communicators? And how are we consistent? You?

Dr. Simon: I'll start with the easier part. Consistency is when we think a lot about how we communicate. We want this, and it's overwhelming the amount of information that comes out to parents. It's absolutely overwhelming. So we try to make sure that the cadence or the rhythm in which parents get information is highly predictable. I think that that helps. It's a sign of good communication, in fact. You know, here's the weekly newsletter from, from Ms. Rodewald and, and Ms. Murphy, here's the weekly newsletter and a lot of information in there. You said your kids are in 4th and 6th grade. So you're, you're getting a double dose, right? You're getting both of these newsletters. And so it's a lot you scroll through, and we try to do our best, you know, I mean, they're not, no, none of the members of the admin team are journalism majors.

You know, like we're, we're, we're school leaders. So we do our best to communicate, and we do reach out, you know, when we talk to families, a lot of this is informal, but it's just, you know, asking questions like, how, how's it going? You know, anything? Like I always like to ask this question if I talk to parents just randomly at an event or something to say, you know, hey, how are things going? You're on a scale of 1 to 10, with ten being the best, you know, how are things going? And yeah, it puts people on the spot in a moment, and it's some behind it. But it's more like, you know, if it's an 8, 9 or 10, I'm feeling pretty good about that response, and it's, everybody's got their own scale in mind. But, but I, even if they say it's a 10 out of 10 or 20 out of 10 and they're smiling when they say it, I'd say, you know, is there anything we could do better? And that includes communication. So we've gotten feedback about our website, for instance, over the last, you know, year, year and a half in particular when, when things were more remote and highly dependent on our website and other places for information.

Digitally, it's like our website currently is not the most mobile-friendly site that you'll find, and it needs to become that. And we're looking to make that adjustment this summer, and that comes from parent feedback. And I mean, we're happy with our website. All the information we want to share is there, but it's not landing in a way that is as accessible to parents as it can be. So, you know, so that's how we're consistent. We do that, we do that weekly, and we get feedback, and then, you know, of course, we have a board meeting every month, and then my newsletter will come out monthly, that's on a Thursday night. Importantly, and purposefully not on Friday, you know, the same too, to not step on what the principals have going out and then emergency communications. And we've had many of those over the years. But emergency communications, you know, those come from the district office signed by me, and you know, when those come out, that's meant to grab attention. So I'm not sending out all kinds of blurbs about all kinds of

things because I know that there are times where I need to reserve that kind of a blast of communication for something that's super timely and important, like an emergency.

Bob Jankowski: Very good communication is built on relationships. Two core volunteer groups at Gower focus on connecting families with opportunities to get involved at the schools, which are the Gower Foundation, and the Gower PTO. What are some ways that these parent groups work with the district to support what is being offered at the schools?

Dr. Simon: Yeah. So you got the Foundation and the PTO. They, yes, they're different organizations. Lots of overlap in terms of the people involved. Certainly, the Gower parents and lots of overlap in terms of what their intent is, which is to support Gower schools and programs and try to bring new things to Gower that we would normally do or don't currently do so they can, you know, put out some, some test balloons, so to speak for programs and things like that.

A good example is, and this goes back a handful of years, but the Gower Foundation would put some of these sorts of programs out and say, hey, you know, if a teacher has an idea, we'll sponsor it. You know, we've raised some money, we've done some fundraising for things just like this. And if it sort of sticks as a good program or an effective program, well-liked all the rest, we then work as a school district to embed it permanently or at least as long as we can foresee into the future here. And the Foundation, and I think of them similarly in this regard as well. This is a group of engaged, motivated parents that get together on a regular basis to meet and discuss programming options, fundraising options, whatever it is, and the activity at hand. That's like us, we had trivia night recently for the PTO. We have an Art Symposium coming up for the Foundation, this podcast, for instance, Foundation.

So when that parent group gets together to talk about the thing they're doing, the effort, certainly they're talking about other things as well. Right. Like school, their kids, their families, neighbors, you know, how things are going and all those conversations sort of boiled up in organized ways, generally lend some support to the school as well because there are things that might be happening in the community or in a particular neighborhood or a particular parent group or what have you, that parent groups are plugged into directly and then come right back to the school to, to work with, to say, hey, were you aware this was happening or did you know this was coming up or might be a scheduled conflict with some big event in a neighboring district or something that parent groups were talking about?

Bob Jankowski: What do you think parents gain from being involved with these groups?

Dr. Simon: It's so personal of a question, and I guess it just depends on, on, on the individual, you know, certainly. But, but generally what I, what I've seen so, you know, I've been a superintendent for ten years. All 10 of them had been in the Gower school district, and the Board of Education is made up of seven parents, essentially seven community members elected by their peers. There's one, our board President, Ryan Asmus, is the, the remaining original board member after this most recent election. He is the last of the Board members that,

that brought me on 10 years ago, that hired me essentially. So that idea of coherence over time, that's, that's pretty special to have like a connection, you know, over a long period of time. The reason I bring that up is to say that all of the other Board members that we have have direct links or lineage, so to speak, to an experience with either the PTO or the Foundation or, in some cases, both. So I think that when parents are part of something, and then having these conversations about improving a school and working with school officials, myself, principals, teachers, of course, volunteering their time, selflessly, really selflessly. And that's important because it's like all this planning goes on, all this doing goes into an event. So I think they gain this example of community leadership that they gain experience in and around school programs and activities and the fact that they have an impact on the public school experience in their own community. And that's, that's, that's pretty special.

Bob Jankowski: I like how you brought up the personal. That was great. Thank you. You spent some time walking us through standardized testing and what that means for students individually. The state produces school report cards that are published annually. What are the state report cards based on?

Dr. Simon: Yeah. Well, yeah, I mean, so I'm, I'm the reason I'm sort of chuckling and hesitating just a bit is I'm an accountability fan. Sure. Not a huge state report card fan only because these are annual report cards where the state and I will give credit to the Illinois State Board of Education, where it's due comparatively to other state report cards. Illinois comes out favorably among the top in terms of the formatting and the amount of information that's provided in Illinois State's annual state report card. So I'll, I'll give credit words.

There's a lot of information on how it's used in schools, and all the rest is where I start to lose some of my faith. And again, remember, remember I said earlier, impact over intent. I understand the intent of the report card. The impact that it has sometimes is, doesn't quite match that. So that's where I started to become a bit more critical about it. But to answer directly, like what's it made out of, what's great about it is that it's available on the World wide web, right? So on the internet, you go to illinoisreportcard.com, and you're there, you know, in fact, it is illinoisreportcard.com, and you'll be able to see all the elements that it's made up of. So I'll type that in here briefly, and looking at it, I know there's the testing and the accountability piece, but there are other parts too. It's the academic progress and the district environment which are described by the Five Essentials. There are descriptions of the students in terms of demographics and population. So on all the accountability metrics, in terms of all the assessment that goes on from the state. And that was talked about in the last episode of it, some descriptions about our teacher's experience of having a master's degree, things like that. Administrators, the turnover of principals, which we have, you know, make sure people hear I'm knocking on wood here. That's, you know, we don't have a lot of leadership turnover. That's important, so important that it's actually coded on a state report card and then just the general overall demographics of the school I mentioned and then some of the finances that go behind what happens in and around our school district.

Additionally, there's a newer component called the Equity Journey Continuum, which is really talking about gaps that may or may not exist across various student groups in our school district. So those are all the components and got you. You know, if I was to take a quiz on the components, I'm sure I'd pass the quiz, but I don't know if I'd be 100% on it because oftentimes the report card adds new elements, takes other elements away, some are testing or, or sort of like preliminary elements that might not make it permanently and all that kind of stuff. So that's essentially the bottom line.

How the school is ultimately doing on a scale of like essentially 1 to 4 is to help put state funding and direct state funding towards schools that are struggling academically is not one of them. So that's where I get to the other part of the answer, where it's maybe not the biggest help for us. We focus on other growth metrics and individualized planning and all the rest and outputs for our students. But of course, it has its place as a state report card. It's an accountability metric. that's required for states to have. And that's what it's made up of. Great. We kind of led it to the next question: how does the state use them? Have you covered that already? I did. Yeah, I think, I mean, generally it's used to, it's interesting to me, it's like, you know, you get the, the, the bottom percent like the bottom quartile of, of, of schools, let's say, and bottom 20% I think it might be as exactly the cuts 2025%. No, no, nowhere near that line. But that line is drawn at the bottom group to, to as I said earlier, funnel funding from the state there, and that's, you know, and that's all well and good, and I think at the other end of the spectr the line is cut arbitrarily at, at the top 10%. I've argued about this with the state for some time now. And it's not because we're not in the top 10% of all schools in the state. We're very, very close. I think I think we're like, in the 11th or 12th percentile, or that top 10%, and we're like the top 12%. So certainly if I'm gonna be critical of it, you know, that it, it, it gets a little bit of a sideways look to say, oh, well, you know, if you were in the top 10% maybe you wouldn't, wouldn't complain about it victor, you know, it's what I might hear. But the reason I bring it up is because it's just arbitrary. You know, who says the top 10% means anything? I mean, there's nothing substantive about 10% other than it's just sort of a neat, cleanly drawn line. But if there's a bottom quartile of, of, of schools that receive funding from the state, you know, my argument be the top quartile is pretty special and, and, you know, worth worthy of, of pointing out. So we'll see where that goes. You know, so what I try to tell people is they get really deep into some of these comparatives of, you know, hey, this is the percentile the school's at, and this school is at a level one, and Gowers at a level two and, oh, my gosh. And, you know, I, I, I understand it all, but I just, I, I really try to hold the break just to touch, to say, you know, how's your child doing? You know, like, not, not any, you know, paternalistic way, but it's just, just really curious on the humanistic side, like how, how's it going on a personal side? You know, how, how, how's it going, and if it's going well, then I don't, I don't know that people necessarily use these for that purpose all the time. So I think education in public schools is just so personal, family to family. Not every student has the best experience every single day, and that's what we work toward.

Bob Jankowski: Ok, makes me feel proud as a guy or parent that you're worried about the child themselves and not the report card. So thank you.

Dr. Simon: You're welcome. Easy to say, right? Like, but I, I really do and listen, I hope, I hope Board Members hear this too and board members hear me say this all the time, you know, it's like, and this is I, am a, a School Superintendent so I understand my role, but I say this often it's, it's not about reading, writing, and arithmetic, and that's oftentimes what's on state report cards, right? The measures, it's relationships, relationships, relationships, if they're effective positive, meaningful, long-lasting kind of relationships, person, to person, right, student, to student, student, to a teacher, teacher, to a student, all right, all directions, all this trust, playing out all this relational capacity growing and playing out. That's what that's if there are ways to measure that, and there are, and that's the five essentials. That's why I'm a big fan of the Five Essentials. Those measures to me matter a lot more than the others.

I will tell you and anyone listening, I said the exact same thing serving in school districts that didn't have the sort of academic prowess and outcomes that we have in gower now, which are outstanding and amazing. So the same tune was sung when schools were struggling in that bottom 10% group, saying loudly and proudly, this is about relationships first, and I would say the same thing in any school environment.

Bob Jankowski: What does the guy or school report card communicate about our school's performance in various categories?

Dr. Simon: Yeah, I mean, I, I think some of it's been covered, certainly. But for one example, I just mentioned Five Essentials. So, you know, we can get into some of the details, right? Like much academic progress and accountability, you know, how are we doing? Generally speaking, our English Language Arts and in that measure overall, there's been growth from 2021 to 2022 in terms of the number of students that have either met or exceeded the standards in reading, essentially ELA English Language Arts or what we would as parents generally call the reading test. So there's some growth therefrom, from 21 to up to 22. And we're, and we're happy about that. mathematics is a little bit of a decline from 21 to 22. But generally speaking, well above the state average in terms of the students that meet or exceed on that state test. The IAR test talked about that in, in the last episode. So that's what it communicates is that our students are doing well. That's for sure. The other part that it communicates is the district environment, and this is what I said earlier, if there are ways to measure trust and relational capacity, if there is a way to measure it, well, there is, and that's the Five Essentials and that gets reported on our state report card. And ultimately, you're looking to have enough positive measures on those five essential surveys as a school to be considered well organized for improvement. And we've been well organized for improvement and a leader in this area on the Five Essentials for a number of years. 10, in fact.

So when we think about the Five Essentials, a supportive environment is one of those essentials, and it speaks very clearly to the fact that students feel and report that they feel cared for at our school. It's a supportive environment, so, so happy to hear that and really, really glad again giving, you know, shining some positive light on the school locally for us, but also on the state to be courageous enough to use some of the real estate of the state report card, which is traditionally about, you know, numbers only to say here's a school or all kinds of schools that get

measured, all of them do 800 some odd districts in our, in our state. That'll take the five essentials and get reported on their supportive environment and that comes from students and get reported on what collaborative teachers look like. What does that, what does that look like in a school? What does involving families look like in our school? That's three of the Five Essentials in the last two are instruction and then leadership, and this comes from staff, and it comes from our students. And I just love that. I mean,

I think that speaks to this title overall is communication tonight, and it's just we, on an annual basis, have staff and students as well as parents communicating how all of those groups felt during the year about the school year and gives us the school a chance to retool where we need to improve or get stronger or areas where we need to keep going and, and exactly stay in the lane that we're in because we're providing something that's effective. So I think that's what it communicates. It does both, or it probably does the academic side, but it also talks about some of these things that are more difficult to measure. But I'll give credit to the state for utilizing a tool, the Five Essentials, too, to go out there and ask those questions to get that important data about how we're doing overall.

Bob Jankowski: You talked a lot about the Five Essentials. Is there anything else you could talk about? How does Gower use these report cards to affect its approach to teaching and learning?

Dr. Simon: Yeah. Sure. Yeah. So the report card itself, when I was sort of on my rant about being critical of it, you know, like so the state report card is not a document that I will, you know, walk in with or print it out or pull it up on a screen and say, you know, point and wag my finger saying, you know, we need to get better here without knowing on our own, some of the other measures that we've taken. As I said, the five essentials are more important to us because it's coming from staff and student experiences. So, it's not that the state report card will necessarily have us make a left turn where we're going straight on some issue, make a left or a right turn somewhere. Instead, it just sort of validates the programs that we do have in place and gives us another data point to reflect on because it's public, and we, we, we know that people compare these things and they have questions about these things. So, we're mindful of them.

How it affects our overall approach to teaching and learning. Well, here's what's great about the position you are in as a parent. 4th and 6th graders, in particular, fourth graders, had the opportunity to offer their voice during Five Essential survey seasons this past year. So your fourth grader had an opportunity to do it this year for the first time because fourth graders in the state of Illinois are able to take that survey, and the sixth year, the sixth grader is able to do the same thing. Now, for the third year; that data point gets put into the same bucket with other fourth graders, fifth graders, sixth graders, 7th and 8th graders, and we're able to actually go all the way to the grade level and say, how's it going for that grade level? So it's one of these, like casually speaking, like, hey, you best believe, right? Like if students are telling us this is happening a certain way, principals are seeing this. They're giving this back to the teacher teams. As the superintendent, set principal and school goals around what we can do better from

one year to the next. And that's all coming from the experience of our actual students in front of us. And, and I think that's, you know, that's, that's the connection.

I think the biggest flex for over the last ten years has been that our impact on the Five Essentials being used as a tool for school improvement has been recognized in ways that have been impacted all the way up to the Illinois school report card. So the way that the Five Essentials are even communicated as part of it has a lot to do with who's included and which students are included, starting with 4th and 5th graders. These are efforts that happened in the Gower school district. They said there are over 850 school districts in the state, and one of those school districts, and it's Gower, and that's why I said it's a flex. It's a humble one, but it's the sense that 4th and 5th graders in the state of Illinois would not be asked their opinion about the school year and how things are going. Had it not been for a pilot that happened years ago, started in Gower, stretched beyond Gower by our effort, and then was wrapped up. Statewide. Students are having an impact on their own experience. I mean, imagine that, that's awesome.

Bob Jankowski: It is awesome, especially at the 4th, and 5th grade levels. I mean, so many times, I'm sure the kids feel like they don't, they don't listen to me, they don't hear me, and you're giving them the platform or the voice to communicate what they're thinking.

Dr. Simon: That's right. You nailed it.

Bob Jankowski: Yeah, our communication, our community extends beyond the classrooms in our buildings. The school report cards impact rankings that we see through real estate sites. Like Great Schools, Niche, and School Digger. How are rankings on these types of sites determined?

Dr. Simon: It's a real estate tool. It's neat for families that are not familiar with our area to search us out and say they're looking for a home if they have the privilege to sort of move where they like. You know, they may come across some great areas in DuPage County that have many of them, Willowbrook and Burr Ridge being one of them for sure. And you end up being sort of classified out there in the world as what is commonly called sort of a destination district. So Gower is one of these destination districts. People seek us out and move here.

Every year, you know, so, so Great Schools drive clicks and attention and in, in traffic toward schools. There are some issues. There are articles out there that talk about some of the issues but I won't go into a lot of the great detail here, but I think it all stems from the fact that they're not really official accountability rankings of any kind and, and, and they're not owned in any way by the school or the state that has the accountability as we do publicly and officially.

So, yeah, they take information from the state report card, and they make it public in a way. So parents from outside looking in can get information and parents from inside can make all this comparison, you know, they could, they could say the Great Schools ranking of your school, you know, to a family member across somewhere else. They can make some comparisons eight out of 10, 9 out of 10, 10 out of 10 less than that, you know. So yeah, that's what they do.

Bob Jankowski: You've mentioned that Gower's ranking has gone up recently, but there's a lot of talk nationally about learning loss during the loss recently due to the challenges of the COVID pandemic. Are you seeing the same in the Gower school district? If so, what should parents know in order to help close any gaps?

Dr. Simon: Yeah, I mean, yeah, it's been a challenge, right? I mean, and, certainly, a noticeable one. I did say that we have gone up over the last year and have maintained our high level of academic excellence as measured by these tests and whatnot. I think what's more important than that, and maybe not for everyone, more importantly, but certainly why I talk about this, it's more important to know that our school climate environment has not suffered in any way. Students still feel very much cared for at the school and supported by their teachers and peers, and that's remained steady and very high throughout the challenge of the pandemic and into this year. So really happy to see that we didn't see a loss there.

In fact, we saw gains there. So I'm really happy about that, but I think there have been some learning gains to be had. Students in many places might not have performed as highly on a reading or math test as they did before the COVID pandemic disruption and whatnot. But there have been other skills that have been pushed and out of necessity, you know, some, some when we think about grit and perseverance, you know, things like this become not just words but, you know, requirements almost in many cases, depending on how the school handled COVID. I think opening our doors and making sure that we maintain that continuity throughout, I think, was really helpful for many reasons, not just on the social-emotional side of the equation but certainly on the academic side. So we do not see the same level of academic learning loss as measured by some of these tests. As I said in math, a little bit of a dip on the state test, not as much on our benchmark testing and, you know, but so, so we've held our own there throughout where we're seeing it though is on some of this, like the best way to describe it in the terms we use here is like self-regulation and sort of time on task, particularly in our, our younger grades.

So, you know, 4th and 6th grade are not our younger grades, but like, so you're, you're sort of clear of this right now, you know, and not to say that what you have ahead of you for two middle schoolers next year, for next couple of years, then high school and middle school, like what you got ahead is still, you know, you're still on that click, click, click a part of the roller coaster and it's about to really, you know, you know, hang on here. So you, you, you're not clear of it all yet, but then, the K to two species and, and K one even with a little bit more asbestos. But, we have called our early grades like K-2, just a lot of self-regulation time on tasks like that. That is where I think the impact of the pandemic challenges for the last number of years. That's where it's showing up the most. I, I don't know that anyone really has the answers on the full impact of all those kinds of disruptions yet. But, certainly, when we talk with our social workers, our school psychologist, and in particular, our principal, I'll specifically call out Gina Rodewald, Ms. Gina Rodewald at West knows this specifically. We're seeing it in K-1, you know. So what parents can do is really if they see anything that is a struggle for their child to keep that line of communication with the teacher open. I can point to the handbook and say that, you know,

whenever there's a challenge that parents are asked and encouraged to reach out to teachers and if that doesn't work, you know, and we're not getting a lot of progress, then you bring in the Principal.

School is a big part of the day, you know, many, many hours. So if there is something that's disjointed between the experience in school and the experience at home in any way, I think it's really helpful for the student's development over time to make some of those, like avail ourselves of some of those challenges that we're seeing. So for parents to really stretch a bit on the sense of the trust that they have in the school. I think it's strong. I do, I do think it's strong, but to really utilize it and reach out to the staff and, and get those questions and concerns out there in the space and time so that they can be addressed because it has been a challenge the last couple of years for our, for our K and 1 grades and that's where I think we've been filling in the most gaps due to the pandemic.

So, you know, with the theme tonight about communication, I mean, that we begin with that kind of ending with that here too. It's like, you know, you gotta reach out, our staff do, and we know parents do. You hang in there the best you can with that communication because, you know, it's worth it. Right? Like that, you're here for, we have graduation coming up for eighth grade here just in a, you know, a matter of a couple of few weeks.

You know, when I look at the calendar, it's not too far away. And, you know, I, I recognize these eighth graders as kindergartners, you know, not that long ago, many of our students are here the entire time, not just K to eight, not just the nine grades of K through eight, but also sometimes the 10th year in, in many cases, 11, if they were here for two years for pre-K. So, you know, Gower has been involved with our families for over a decade. And that communication upfront, Pre-K is small class sizes and more of an optional program, so there is a lot of communication there naturally, but really that K-1 grade means that they have to be super strong, and our staff are amazing.

The families are wanting to be here and, and always want the best for their children. And I think that partnership and that communication between school and home, I mean, it just, they say it takes a village, right? Like, so that's, that's, that's part of, I think, what's meant there. And so I would just encourage anyone that's struggling in any way, and it's not just limited to K and 1; I am just answering the question. That's where I'm drawn to because I see the challenges there. We want children at their best. That's, that's what the motto is, and to make sure that that's happening, takes open communication, right? Both directions, as you had said a couple of times tonight.

Bob Jankowski: Thank you, Dr. Simon, for spending the time with us and going over, talking about communication. I often, I think parents feel that they're not being heard, but not at Gower. You, and the staff at Gower, Gower West, Gower Middle, the administrative staff has always been open. So, thank you for the hard work.

Dr. Simon: You are welcome. A pleasure to serve here.

Bob Jankowski: Thank you. Good night.

Dr. Simon: Good night.