On July 22, 2010 I had the pleasure of interviewing Ms. Cynthia Best-Goring principal for the past four years at Oxon Hill Elementary in Oxon Hill in Prince George’s County. I decided to go work for her because I believed in her mission statement:

**As Principal, I am proud of my teachers and staff members who continually demonstrate through words and actions their commitment to establishing and maintaining a caring, learning community of positive results for all of our students.**

**We believe that all students can and will achieve high educational standards when they are:**

* **Made to feel important,**
* **Expected to do well,**
* **Engaged in challenging and meaningful work, and**
* **Supported by a unified community of teachers, parents, and other concerned and involved adults.**

**We enthusiastically embrace and implement with high expectations the premise –**

* **Children are our business and therefore come first.**
* **Victory is in the classroom.**
* **All children can successfully learn with mastery level results  
  NO Exceptions Allowed!**

To me this vision was very powerful. Education is my second career choice and after my interview I thought about what this vision statement meant to me. Parents entrust us with their kids five days a week for seven and a half hours, and if we do not make them feel important then you have classroom management problems. The work has to be challenging for the students especially in today’s data driven society were everything seems to rest on test scores.

The interview was conducted at Earnest B. Just Middle School. Ms. Best-Goring had just come out of a meeting for training about our new initiative for teacher evaluation process, FIRST, so she was a bit harried. But the interview went well. One question that I asked her was:

**How do you make sure that all needs of the students are met, especially those of special needs?**

**Continuous Professional Development, Building teacher capacity and effectively using data to increase student’s achievement for all subgroups. This means being part of collaborate meetings, identifying safety nets students, students who are right on the cusp of scoring proficient or advanced, and providing data driven interventions and frequent monitoring to ensure their success. This is seen in the weekly student assessments and monthly data inquires all aimed at answering the four critical questions:**

1. **What do we want our students to learn and be able to do?**
2. **How do we know our students are learning?**
3. **What do we do about it when we know our students are not learning**
4. **What do we do when our students are hitting benchmarks earlier than expected?**

This question was important to me because the majority of my school is made up of special education students, even though I teach Regular Ed. As you can see from her response, she has a lot of mechanisms in place to make sure that these students do their best. The four critical questions are always in the back of my mind when I teach because I want my students to be prepared to learn and at the same time not be bored during lesson time. It is important to me that students are learning all the time including outside the classroom.

I think Ms. Best-Goring can be classified as a servant leader. I write this because Sergiovanni writes: “servant leadership provides legitimacy partly because one of the responsibilities of leadership is to give a sense of direction, to establish an overachieving purpose.” (Sergiovanni, 2007) I can see this as she guides the school to achieving her goal of every student learning by collaborative planning sessions, teacher feedback, and weekly newsletters to the teachers and monthly to the community around us. A servant leader also, “must listen to verbal and non-verbal signals and interpret what the others are saying. In addition, the servant leader must listen to their inner thoughts and feelings and interpret them. (Spears, p.2). Ms. Best-Goring does this very well. At the end of last year the teachers were asked what they wanted to do with their hour of collaborative planning on Fridays, the staff told her that we would like to spend it catching up on paper work. She listened, took it into consideration and agreed to it. This is one way that a servant leader listens to her staff. Building community is another important aspect of being a servant leader. A servant-leader should "seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution" (Spears, p.4).” This is done in my school every day. Ms. Best-Goring makes sure that every voice is heard and in that way a working community is built. The listening of her staff also build teacher capacity which is another very important aspect of having a great working community.

I also see Ms. Best-Goring as an authentic leader. Evans writes; “leaders who are followed are authentic; that is they are distinguished not by their techniques or styles but by their integrity and their savvy.” (Evans, 2007) In The Transformational Leadership Report one of characteristics of being a transformational leader is to “Have a vision and communicate it with passion and purpose. Allow you emotion to speak to others in a way that transcends the mind, and speaks to the heart.”(p. 10) Ms. Best-Goring definitely fits in that role. During our staff meetings, leading up to our yearly MSA exams, she constantly, with passion repeats her vision for the school and the teachers. This gets the teachers and the rest of the staff motivated to have the students “do their best on the tests.”

Even though we have a strong leader, “people need a great deal from their leaders. They need information, access to one another, resources, trust, and follow-through.”(Wheatley, 1997)

References:

Best-Goring, C. (2010 July). (M. LaGamma, Intervier)

Wheatley, Margaret , Leader to Leader, (1997).

Evans, Robert. (2007). The Authentic Leader. The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership, 135-158 San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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**Appendix 1**

**Interview Questions and Responses to Ms. Best-Goring July 22, 2010**

1. At what point in your career did you decide that you wanted to become an administrator? Why?

**Since I was four I knew what I definitely wanted to be a teacher or a doctor.**

**I chose teaching because I could be the instrumental person in training all other professions. I wanted to be a master teacher. My first I year got my masters which built my competencies. I went back to get my Masters in Reading. UMD- had a summer practicum which helped students with reading skills. I became a reading specialist. Reading Instruction is something I believe in. The County had a yearlong program and I went from -Phase 1 to Phase 2. Maryland development Academy to becoming an assistant principal. . I was hesitant at first. Upon reflection as an administrator my key role was modeling leadership, building teacher capacity and building community.**

1. How do you make sure that all needs of the students are met, especially those of special needs?

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1. **What do we want our students to learn and be able to do?**
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4. **What do we do when our students are hitting benchmarks earlier than expected?**
5. How has data become an important part in our society?

**Data is everywhere. Key Question: Do the members of society realize how data is impacting their daily lives and what is their response to that data (Example: home life, news on all fronts, home, violence local etc.)Are we able to discern what is important and not and use that data?**

1. What other criteria, other than test scores, do you use to show that the school is successful?

**School Climate Survey, Swiss data, student discipline information, parent surveys, evaluation sheets from teachers from every PD, comments from central office, parents, and students.**

1. How has the school improvement plan helped or not helped in making the school more successful?

**It drives our success. It is a blueprint compiled by the team.**

1. How often do you delegate work to other administrators?

**I strategically build teacher capacity. Delegation is done strategically, based on teacher capacity and leadership skills. Delegation is not a onetime thing, monitoring and feedback occurs on a frequent basis to ensure excellence and keeping the delegated person on track.**

1. What is one of your greatest successes and why.

**Teachers who have moved up into different positions. Student s who have become assistant principals. Assistant principals who have moved up to principal. One has become Director of human resources**

1. What professional development opportunities are available to your staff to improve their technology fluency, as well as the integration of technology in their curricula?

**We have a computer lab instructor who shares her expertise with teachers and assisting teachers with technology. Often times providing websites that teachers can use in their lesson plans.**

1. What is your time management plan for the daily tasks that must get instruction done?

**It is a constant challenge. Instruction is always first. When you provide that focus you are satisfying the most ardent objectives of putting children first and holding teachers accountable for delivering rigorous instruction with the expectation of mastery level results for all students.**