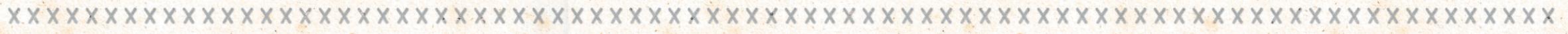


**CLASSROOM CHRONICLES**

**SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

A Lifelong Principal's Commitment to His School and Community



s school systems across Louisiana head back to school, be it in person, through distance learning or a combination of both, **Wayne Warner – principal of Chalmette High School (CHS) in St. Bernard Parish – is beginning year 54 in education.** Recognized as the National Association of Secondary School

Principal's (NASPP) **longest-serving member**, Warner has experienced more than most throughout his extensive career. Through multiple natural disasters and the recent pandemic, time and time again Warner has displayed unwavering strength, selflessness and commitment to his school and community. We recently sat down with Warner as he reflected on his career and shared advice to school leadership for a Strong Start to 2020.

Warner began his career as a librarian before moving into a school leadership role in Chalmette 54 years ago. He chose education because he enjoyed his high school experience so much so that he admittedly didn't want to leave. Desiring to duplicate that experience for the students of today and tomorrow, he still hasn't left, continuing to celebrate a long-lasting and fulfilling career in education.

**"Over the years, I've gotten into a habit of being there for the kids. I want to support them in every way I can,"** said Warner. **"I reflect on my high school experience and try to understand the students' point of view at all times. This, I feel, is my calling and is what I'm meant to do with my life."**

Students at CHS know Warner is a constant in their lives. He attends every possible event, offering them support and cheering on their accomplishments. Described as a man of patience and authenticity, he leads by example and doesn't ask more of anyone than he's willing to give.

"You have to really like kids and have a desire to be part of their lives. I've had a great life. I've met people that have truly become part of my life," said Warner. "That's the big thing: We want to be part of their lives."

**"THE GREATEST THRILL OF MY LIFE IS WHEN STUDENTS WALK ACROSS THE STAGE AT GRADUATION."**

"At that time, I reflect back on the growth they've experienced throughout their high school years and the maturity they've gained. It's truly remarkable."

In a time where principals, on average, remain in that role for seven years or less, Warner has set a precedent. Through his steady leadership, CHS has earned an "A" school rating for as many years as the Department has given letter grades. He has been featured in a number of publications, his school frequented by prestigious visitors; yet, when asked to share the secret to his success, Warner simply states, **'that's what school people do.'**

"I came from an era where teachers and administrators have always been part of the community and where the community has very much been a part of the school," said Warner. "I was accepted into the community and knew it was a two-way street. I am not only a principal of a school. I am also a servant to my community. That's really what (I hope) school people do. They help their community and do what it takes to make it."

School leaders are put in a position where they are tasked with making a difference in the lives of their students and supporting their educators. Since the beginning of his career, Warner has done this by fostering relationships with those around him, recognizing these things take time to develop and grow. He is known for treating everyone he meets with respect and valuing the opinions of others. He works hard to make sure his teachers, staff and students have what they need to succeed.

**"I've always felt as though I am a teacher's aide. Whatever they need, I have always tried to get it for them,"** said Warner. **"This is why people trust me. They trust that, through experience, if I say it, it's going to happen."**

Warner led his school through multiple natural disasters and is currently leading through the pandemic. Through it all, he attributes the ability to come back better than before to the people around him.

"I am surrounded by wonderful, talented people," said Warner. "When I look back and think of the people I've had as mentors, assistants, staff...I realize I've gotten my energy and inspiration from them."

**"I FEEL PRIVILEGED TO WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE GIFTED; PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS PUT STUDENTS FIRST."**

Although the start of this school year varies greatly from years past in many ways, Warner is ready to get back to the business of education. There are new obstacles to overcome, yet he knows one important thing remains the same: There are students, families and communities relying on schools and school systems to make a difference and to value and develop people.

"We are doers. The start of any school year takes a lot of preparation. This year especially, we have to establish the best possible plan to make people feel comfortable and trust us. We want our parents, our community, all stakeholders to have a voice and become part of the decision-making process," said Warner. "There are so many people with so many ideas. To have a successful start to a new school year, we have to do as we would if we were going to teach a good lesson, for example. We need good preparation and good knowledge. We need to treat the students and their families well. We want to make sure they realize we care about every student."

**WARNER'S ADVICE TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR A STRONG START TO 2020**

- ★ Prepare yourself well
- ★ Consider yourself a teacher's aide; do the best to prepare and provide for your teachers
- ★ Be visible to your students
- ★ Enjoy your students
- ★ Put yourself into a parent's situation; respect them, work with them
- ★ Enjoy your job



**WAYNE WARNER**  
CHALMETTE HIGH SCHOOL  
ST. BERNARD PARISH

*"Wayne Warner has been a mentor, teacher and friend to me over the past 50 years,"* said Doris Voitier, Superintendent of St. Bernard Parish Schools. *"He has influenced the dreams and guided the lives of thousands of our St. Bernard Parish students and community members. He is the most child-centered educator that I have had the privilege of knowing."*



Warner is well known for a phrase he repeats to the students at CHS daily; words that continue to impact students, former students and staff, even today. As schools reopen and face unprecedented challenges in the days and weeks ahead, Warner shares: **The choices you make today shape your world tomorrow.** Even in adversity, he will continue to make choices that shape his school and students for the better.

**Interested in learning more about Wayne Warner? Watch as CHS celebrated Warner's 50 years in education (2016).**