

The path to greater success begins with the “Assist” – A Cal Ripken testimonial Ken Turner for Superintendent Alex Marrero, June 8, 2022

In 2004, the Staples Center in Los Angeles (now known as the Crypto.com Arena) hosted the annual AASA conference. During that meeting, AASA announced the name of the 2004 National Superintendent of the Year. To set the tone for that announcement, AASA invited Cal Ripken Jr. to provide remarks. Hard-working and humble to a fault, Ripken took the stage and spoke for 5 minutes. Nevertheless, his comments left an indelible impression on the crowd of 10,000 administrators. The 19-time All-Star and 2-time MVP of the American League, Ripken opened with a story. This is the story he told.

I don't know much about a lot of things, but I know baseball. For years, I played shortstop for the Orioles. I played next to second baseman Roberto Alomar, a 12-time All-Star and a 10-time winner of the Gold Glove Award (the most Gold Glove awards by a second baseman in history).

I've won a lot of awards in my time, but one stands out. I held the league record for most double plays in the American League. When Roberto and I first started playing together, he and I quickly became better at turning a double play than any two players in the league.

But at practice one day, I asked Roberto a question. “Roberto, when we're turning a double play, I throw the ball low and tight to the bag. Is that where you want it?” Roberto asked me to walk to the outfield with him. He whispered to me, “Don't tell anyone, but I don't like the spikes. So, throw it high and away from the bag.” I was surprised, but I agreed. And to my surprise, as good as we were at double plays, changing how I threw the ball made us better.”

I tell you this for one reason. We're here today to recognize standout superintendents. You are the best of the best. I also know you do your best to be your best every day . . . for kids.

My message is this. To take your organization to the next level, it takes doing what Roberto and I did. In sports we call it an assist. In baseball we keep track of assists. A player gets one if he touches the ball on the way to an out. Other sports count them too; basketball and hockey do.

If you and your team are focused on doing what it takes to make your teammates better, then success just takes care of itself. That's it. That's the secret. That's how an organization finds its way to greater success. Putting others' success ahead of your own is my message to you today.

Relevance to DPS:

In recent years, dissatisfaction has grown around competitive measures like SPF (that factor into school closing decisions). The reform agenda that endorses standards and greater school accountability has contributed to a competitive marketplace. School rankings on school performance frameworks have led to some schools being labeled as failing. While DPS has long called collaboration a core value and teamwork a cornerstone, the reality is that another narrative has been in play. High-stakes decisions geared toward competition involve school choice and SPF. Competitive things like that can overshadow collaboration.

Imagine the potential for improvement if incentives supported better collaboration, not more competition.