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## Lessons from Martin Luther King

In 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke to a group of students at Barrot Junior High School in Philadelphia. As he often did when speaking to such an audience, he addressed the principles that should be included in the plan or blueprint they would develop for their lives. First on the list for the blueprint was the deep belief in your own dignity, something Dr. King referred to as “somebodiness.” He echoed the sentiments of Eleanor Roosevelt who stated that “no one can make you feel inferior without your consent” and he challenged his audience of students to feel they mattered and they had a life of significance. Next, he believed everyone’s plan should include the determination to achieve excellence. He stressed the importance of being outstanding in whatever endeavor you chose noting that “if you can’t be the sun, be a star – for it isn’t by size that you win or you fail, be the best at whatever you are.” Finally, he told the students that their plans or blueprints for life must include a commitment to the principles of beauty, love and justice. He referenced a need for all people to be involved in the struggle and responsibility to make life better and he challenged the audience and all of us as well to use that blueprint to progress – “if you can’t fly, run; if you can’t run, walk; if you can’t walk, crawl, but keep moving.”

Fifty-two years later, Dr. King’s blueprint for success remains relevant. His ideals for a young man’s or young woman’s plan for a beneficial future speak to the values of self-worth, perseverance, and excellence. We must all keep moving and keep moving forward in a direction that honors our significance, our determination to achieve excellence, and our commitment to beauty, love and justice. Perpetual motion is not easy, but it is necessary. Failures occur and roadblocks are encountered, but the way through and the way over these obstacles is to keep momentum and progress. These lessons and ideals are especially important for our students. So often, barriers and struggles set our students back. If they can’t fly, they choose to sit out rather than to run. If they can’t run, they alienate the runner and poke fun at the walker, rather than participate and grow. Many times they are so caught up in the “can’t” that seeing the “can” becomes difficult and so they stop moving. As teachers, as parents, and as investors in our students, all of us must help all of our students find the “can” and not allow them to be brought down and handicapped by the “can’t”. That blueprint, anchored in the pillars expressed by Dr. King to the students he spoke to in Philadelphia in 1967, is a plan for a life that will stand the test of time, just as his words and actions have for more than 50 years.

Catherine R. Gentry, EdD  
Superintendent  
Thomasville City Schools