

# April Fool's prank was not too cool for school

On occasion I've been known as a jokester. There isn't a better day of the year to enhance my reputation than April Fool's Day.

Early in my career as an April Fool's prankster I would hone my skills by waking my children and telling them that there was no school because of a snowstorm or frantically telling my wife in the morning that all our car's tires were flat.

These early successes emboldened me to what I envisioned early in the morning on April 1, 1993, would be my biggest gag of all time. It's fair to say the joke was on me.

At the time of my April Fool's Day disaster, I was principal of two schools in South Buffalo - Lorraine Academy and Red Jacket Academy. On this Thursday, the first day of April I start-

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ed the school day at Red Jacket. It occurred to me that the wonderful students and adults in the school needed a little levity to begin their day. With the wisdom of hindsight, I realize that my thought process was flawed.

Each morning we would start out the day with the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by announcements. Such was the case for this day as well. About two minutes after the morning routines were completed, I went back on the PA system to announce in an excited tone that we had just gotten a phone call and that Gov. Mario Cuomo was coming to our school for a brief tour later in the morning.

My assumption was that some of the students would accept the announcement as true, but their teachers and other students would remind them immediately that it was just Mr. Weiss making a lame attempt at an April Fool's joke. Surprisingly (from my point of view), no one took a minute to think about the



*Joel Weiss, of Clarence, asks that no one take him too seriously on April 1.*

date and the likelihood that it was just a joke.

Oh, what a mistake I made! Teachers, some of the finest in Buffalo, stopped teaching and began tidying, straightening and reorganizing their classrooms. Custodians began cleaning, waxing and buffing the corridors. Two students asked to call home to let their parents know the governor was coming to school.

A teacher aide came to my office and asked for permission to go home to change her clothes, so she'd be more presentable when Gov. Cuomo arrived.

All these things happened in a matter of minutes. How could something that I viewed as a harmless prank get out of control so quickly? Didn't anyone even remember what day it was?

I realized I had to pull the plug on my April Fool's Day joke. Getting back on the PA, I announced that the governor was not going to be coming to school. I thanked everyone for trying to put their best foot forward and making sure that our school was seen in a good light. I closed the announcement by reminding everyone what the date was - April 1.

People "got it." Some teachers and students thought it was a good prank and that I had executed it well. Others were less complimentary. One teacher reminded me that my job description did not include conning students and that she had wasted instructional time that morning trying to make sure the classroom looked neat and clean.

Did I learn a valuable lesson 28 years ago? I think I did but if you hear from me today and I tell you to call Mr. L. E. Fant at the Buffalo Zoo, you would be wise to ignore me.