Superintendents’ Luncheon on School Finance

“‘It’s half-time, we’re in the locker room and we’re ahead,’” said David Thompson, attorney, “but we need to come out ready to play in the second half.”

David Thompson along with panelists Dr. Albert Cortez-IDRA, David Dunn—Texas Charter School Association, Dr. Joe Bernal—former House of Representatives and Texas Senator and Dr. Belinda Pustka—Education Policy Staffer for Representative Jimmie Don Aycock, addressed thirty-seven superintendents and guests on March 6, 2013, at the Superintendents’ Luncheon sponsored by the Center for Accelerated Schools and the Center for Educational Leadership, Policy and Professional Development—COEHD UTSA.

Moderated by Dr. John Folks, panelists agreed education has emerged as a dominant issue this legislative session. However, major debates continue on the future of standardized and EOC testing in Texas, charter schools and support for building facilities, as well as whether lawmakers will reverse any of the $5.4 billion in classroom cuts.

“We have a system that is struggling to meet the needs of our growing at-risk population that is now 60 percent of our kids in Texas,” said attorney David Thompson. “As the percentage of at-risk students increases in a district, the revenue per student goes down. It’s almost an inverse relationship. Districts with the highest populations of needy kids actually receive less money.”

It comes down to a “crisis in belief for public education” said Dr. Belinda Pustka.

College and Career Readiness: Are We Really Ready?

“College and Career Ready are not the same thing,” said Anthony Carnevale, director of Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce. “If they were, why would somebody go to college or why would someone go to graduate school?”

There has been much debate on the preparation of students for college AND career. According to the Feb. 16th article in the Austin American Statesman: Worker shortages drive calls for high school curriculum changes. Much of manufacturing today is advanced machinery producing precision products. A computer monitor at virtually every workstation and a workforce with an increasing advanced set of technical skills. The difficulty is finding workers with these skills,” says Kate Alexander and Dan Zehr, Statesman staff.

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On December 5, 2012 the College of Education & Human Development’s Center for Accelerated Schools (CAS) along with the Center for Educational Leadership, Policy and Professional Development (EDLPPD) held the first of a series of collaborative networking luncheons for area school district superintendents. The program was attended by over 35 guests who enjoyed lunch at the beautiful Westin River Walk hotel in downtown San Antonio. The EDLPPD acknowledged the successes of Michelle Carroll Smith, Lytle ISD; Dr. Brian Woods, NISD and Dr. Vangie Aguilera SAISD.

The CAS Director, Joan Vasbinder gave a brief history and introduced Claudette Yarbrough, Superintendent of Higgs, Carter, King charter school who talked of her success with the program. Founder and former Director, Bonnie Hamill, also gave a short presentation of the Center, outlining the many successes that National Center for Accelerated Schools has achieved nation-wide. She spoke of the importance of partnerships and how the accelerated school model can create “the dream school that you would want for your own children.”

Highlighted Accelerated Schools

**Higgs, Carter, King Gifted and Talented Charter Academy:** The school community kicked off the Accelerated Schools process with a Setting Priorities activity at the beginning of the school year after their taking stock reports were analyzed and gaps were determined by stakeholders. After disaggregation and collaboration, it was determined that gaps under Curriculum ignited the strongest sense of urgency. ASP and TTIPS internal and external facilitators worked together to streamline an inquiry process that was aligned to the school needs and ultimately resulted in positive changes for learners. CARTs (Cadre Action Research Teams) were formed with parents, teachers, and staff. Bi-weekly meetings empowered teams to launch a research, inquiry process in an effort to understand school challenges. A steering committee was formed, consisting of CART facilitators. Through consistent communication, this advisory board provided direction and ensured that each team utilized the Accelerated Schools process with fidelity. CARTs are currently in the hypothesis testing phase of the process, and will soon unveil action plan proposals.

**Shekinah Live Oaks:** The teachers on the campus have been working diligently to make changes this 2012-2013 school year. A new team of teachers embraced the idea of Accelerated Schools and began the year by taking stock and analyzing data that was gathered the prior year. The team collaborated and determined that their area of focus would be Instruction. They have collaborated together and created a shared vision for their campus. They are currently working on the hypothesis development portion of the inquiry process and are enthusiastic about creating changes that benefit their students.

**Shekinah West Columbia:** We started off slow but the momentum is building as we analyzed our taking stock data and benchmarks to formulate our Strategic Action Teams. Our teams will be utilizing the inquiry process and consistent communication with all the committees to determine our hypotheses. We are dedicated to making our school the best learning center for our children.

**EEP campuses:** Empowering students and creating classrooms that cultivate inquiry and problem solving has been a focus for the EEP schools this 2013 school year. The campuses have been focused on raising rigor and relevance in the classrooms, creating differentiated lessons, and fostering a climate of inquiry and critical thinking. This can be seen in the trainings that the campuses have been attending and facilitating. The hard work is paying off. Some of the examples one might see in various school classrooms are: physics students creating their own mini vehicles to demonstrate their knowledge about motion and energy, while in a history class students are engaged in a discussion about world religions and how it relates to their personal lives, while in another class, a group of students creates a video that showcases their knowledge about a certain topic. Teachers are working hard to ensure their students get individualized instruction so that they can earn graduation credits. There are many teachers who are also helping parents become active participants in their child’s learning by sharing how literacy can be incorporated into everyday activities.

College and Career Readiness (continued)

“Today’s advanced manufacturing requires that a skilled tradesperson knows multiple skills in this space,” said Mario Lozoya, director of government relations for Toyota Motor Manufacturing in San Antonio, where Tundra and Tacoma pickups are assembled. “This kind of skilled person is not found in San Antonio...We have to go outside of Texas to find them. For decades there hasn’t been a direct pipeline of younger workers coming out of Texas high schools ready for the jobs in manufacturing.” This is just one argument for more career training, which is very different from the “vo-tech “of yester-years.

The other side of the issue, College Readiness has just as many advocates. “A four year degree or better is still the best insurance policy against unemployment. The data is very clear about that,” says Kelsey. “The 4X4 graduation plan was designed as a well-rounded course of study that would prepare you to shift in different areas as the economy shifts.”

“Is this a question of formal education or the capacity to continue to learn as you go through your career?” said Jon Hockenyos, principal of TXP, an economic consulting firm. “That’s the key question, and there are a lot of paths to get there.”

So what do YOU think is the answer for our schools and how will we know if we’ve got it right?

Curriculum and Instruction topic May 22, 2013 Superintendents’ Luncheon

Kate Alexander covers K-12 education issues at the Texas Legislature and Dan Zehr covers the Central Texas economy. (See full article at www.statesman.com)