

Nevada Public Education News



Community – Credit Deficient

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It's way past time to give credit where credit is due. I attended the LV Chamber Luncheon featuring Elaine Wynn last week. The Governor named her to the State Board of Education, she was subsequently elected president by the group. Elaine got it wrong when she lamented that some high profile educators have left the state – suggesting improvement might come to a halt. Many business and community leaders often parrot half truths and nonsense when discussing education, but Elaine no longer has the luxury about talking about education without knowing the facts. She will be held to much, much higher standard and will be challenged if she can not back up her dialogue with facts.

So, let's examine some facts – not the hype – and recognize the Nevadans who were often indirectly criticized and derided by the recently departed and their supporters.

Facts often fly in the face of the “spin”. From 2003 to 2011, Nevada students were improving at a faster rate than the national average in reading, our NAEP scores (nation's report card) were going up steadily, and the number of students taking Advanced Placement classes and their scores went from the bottom nationally to the national average. Those are the facts AND that **PREDATES** the arrival of Dwight and Pedro Follies in Clark County.

The Career & Technical Centers (CTA) have received national acclaim, receive a great deal of praise and have been nationally recognized again this year for having some of the highest graduation rates and test scores from around the country were started – oh yes, before Dwight's arrival. The first magnet and CTA was put in place by former superintendent Brian Cram. So, if you don't mind me saying so. Thank you Brian Cram. Thank you Carlos Garcia, and Thank you Walt Rulffes.

Now, when business leaders and school trustees are talking about continuing the “momentum”, are they talking about the momentum that these former CCSD superintendents began and carried on which resulted in increased student achievement?? Or are they talking about the last year and a half where BS and PR reigned supreme?

We won't get into the now defunct and nationally discredited School Performance Framework, Growth Model, and Elementary Report Card fiascos, let's just chat about integrity and resume building. The trustees, community and business leaders have ***confused activity with achievement***. Under Dwight, Pedro and the gang, they spent huge sums of money and threw a lot of stuff against the wall, hoping that something would stick. They regularly they took credit for

things that did not rightly belong to them and indirectly blamed former superintendents as not being as smart as them. To be honest, Ken Turner, Dwight's "special" assistant is still here, earning over **\$20,000 per MONTH**, using school district offices and personnel, he can't be too stupid if the trustees are continuing this relationship – but what does that say about the trustees?

This year, secondary principals were asked to slash their school budgets by \$6.5 million to make up for Dwight's former deputy overspending his budget allotment last year. So to build their reputations last year, the district mortgaged this year.

In a nutshell, it appears that district leadership last year spent a great deal of time "partnering" in the community so they would be recognized, went to the awards ceremony, picked up fraudulent awards, and not only left us with paying for the dinner, but also paying for the mortgage they took out without our knowledge.

So, how's this come about? The superintendent created a million dollar PR department that continually claimed that he was great, suggested that they were the only ones in the country that had the knowledge and skills to save Nevada.

When anyone questioned the former superintendent on policies, he made it clear to "his" followers that those people were either *whiners* or people who did not support high standards.

Yes, the insinuation was educators in Nevada support *low* standards. It is very troublesome the trustees let comments like that go unchallenged. The Chamber types did not bother to look at facts either, they did not realize the gains that were being touted as the fastest improving in the nation came before the arrival of the great prophet. Shame on the trustees, shame on the business and community leaders for not doing their homework, their due diligence for failing to recognize the momentum, the real gains are documented nationally between 2003 and 2011. The chamber members just have to read P26 of their own May edition of the Business Voice magazine to pick up this tidbit.

So when trustees speak about maintaining the momentum, are they talking about the self promotion, the spending that is unsustainable with current budgets, confusing activity with achievement OR are they talking about the work that goes into the classroom that really impacts student knowledge, understanding and application of what they learning?

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but ***what works is work!*** Walt knew that, he increased rigor in the curriculum, assessed student performance (semester exams), provided professional assistance based on data, and continued to assess instructional practices and achievement that led to the school district improving faster than the national average with low income students improving at nearly twice as fast. And, he did this without all the self-promotion. Thank you Walt.

Why is the community credit deficient? Why aren't they recognizing the true gains and the people responsible for those gains?