

Fall Op Ed---2010

Do we focus on what we don't have? Or, instead, do we choose to focus on what we are doing with what we do have and what we have control over?

Yes, we could cite the sobering statistics that reflect our reality. We could point out that since 2008 we have lost 383 students and our revenue allocation from the state has dropped by \$871 per student. We could illustrate the significant cuts to programs already implemented (layoffs of teachers and support staff, reduction in administration, elimination and reduction of some music and sports programs) and rail against the relative injustice of the cuts we are looking at having to make over the next couple of years (more staff layoffs, further cuts to sports/music programs, reduction in employee contracts). We could cry out in frustration as our class sizes increase, our workload increases as our work force decreases and our access to basic resources necessary to provide the strongest education possible to our kids becomes increasingly limited. All of this is painfully true and real and carries a significant impact on our staff and students.

Or, we could illustrate and celebrate the stunning work being done by staff and students despite the woeful lack of adequate funding and resources from the state. We could highlight that, of the Class of 2010, 22% were going to attend a four-year university, 61% were set to attend a two-year college and 5% were planning to proudly serve our country in the military. With great pride we could show that three of our schools have surpassed the state target of an 800 API (Academic Performance Index) and that three other schools scored between 789 and 792. We can shout to anyone who will listen that over 90% of our 10th grade students passed the High School Exit Exam last year while taking it for the first time and that by graduation time, 99%-100% of our applicable Seniors pass these exams that are necessary to earn a high school diploma.

We could proudly proclaim that, in a fiscal climate where many schools are eliminating Career Technical Education classes, we continue to sustain a viable and varied program that allows students to access Automotive, Agriculture, Computer-Aided Drafting, Police Science, Cosmetology and Medical programs. Additionally, we could share that, in an era in education where arts programs are being gutted, we continue to offer students valuable opportunities in Choir, Band, Photography, Ceramics and Art. Overall, we can unequivocally state that we offer a strong and varied academic program, from Pre-School through 12th grade, that continues to evolve and improve. This is due to the fact that our staff shows up every day focused and dedicated to creating the most positive educational environment for their students that will effectively facilitate high-quality learning experiences as well as continuously working to improve their craft through ongoing professional development.

True to form, our state legislators have drafted a budget that is based on a deadly mix of hope and faulty assumptions. By crafting a budget that relies on inflated expectations of federal financial assistance, misguided anticipation of increased tax revenue and damaging deferrals of actual allocation of funds to school districts our elected officials continue to engage in legislative malpractice. The rhetoric out of Sacramento screams the promise of increased funding to schools which elevates the hopes and expectations of all stakeholders. However, when you look past the voter-enticing sound bytes, you realize that this budget is resting on a shaky foundation that is likely to crumble and result in even further cuts to education, possibly as soon as January.

In the end, we must choose to focus our energy on what we have control over and react productively to the external factors we do not have control over. While we do not willingly accept the continuing attack on public education through political ineptitude and the myopically uninformed perspective of many legislators, and will continue to fight and advocate for what is right, we also realize that we only have anywhere from six to nine hours a day with our students and we must use that time wisely in order to effectively and efficiently create opportunities for well-rounded growth and achievement. In this capacity, the Calaveras Unified School District staff consistently shines bright.