

SCHOOL CLIMATE

School disruption and campus violence is my number one concern because it is inextricably intertwined with student achievement. You simply cannot expect hi-achievement in a school culture of chaos and disruption.

We hear the words 'zero tolerance' loosely thrown around but the conviction seems lacking.

With Black Diamond Middle School in the spotlight last year, when it was described by one involved parent as "out of control", and current Dallas Ranch Middle School havoc being recently featured on KRON-TV, week we really need to get serious. We can't blithely go on when also seemingly most every day we hear reports in the news of Deer Valley High mob scenes and fights after school at the Plaza.

We need a multi-pronged approach employing ALL stake-holders; administrators, teachers, parents, student leaders, the faith community and the business sector.

- We have four counselors at DVHS and staff reports we really need six.
- An approach of Restorative Justice, where discipline is more than punitive but educational and transformative, needs adoption so that misbehavior is not a revolving door.
- More recreational opportunity can never hurt our youth.
- Best practices of classroom management need be shared. Substitutes, in particular, get thrown to the wolves. Amazingly, a child spends, on average, a year of his K-12 experience with a substitute, much of that time in busy work or in outright chaos.
- Home visits (by teachers or designated staff) have proven very effective in Pittsburg and in other districts.
- We need a strong isolated on-campus suspension class where kids don't get the luxury of time off lounging at home and cavorting at the shopping mall.
- Administrators need to patrol after school and be visible like in the old golf cart days of the twin-Principals. We also need vigilant video surveillance at the Shopping Plaza so that we can better alert parents of habitually loitering kids.
- We need to find a way to hire f.t. campus resource officers. ASAP In the meantime, we at least need targeted police presence during school release times.
- We must start with the small things to turn the tide on disorder; violations of dress code, profanity, cell phone usage; food in inappropriate areas.

- Of course, there truly must be ZERO TOLERANCE for defiance and for physical threats and aggression. Order, respect and civility must return.

DEFICIT SPENDING

In the 2011-12 year school budget AUSD had a 31 million dollar surplus as the ending year balance. Entering this school year the AUSD had 12 million dollars in reserves. By the end of the 2014-2015 school year it will hold 5 million; slightly above the state-mandated 3% reserve.

26 million dollars of reserves, then, has been spent. The argument made is that AUSD chose to not cut programs. There are some points to be made in that defense, but in the final analysis, though, we could have balanced the two dueling argument. Don't go bare bones but still keep more in a rainy day fund.

Scarily, we are essentially one accounting error or law suit away from big trouble. Look at the recent history of California to see what lack of caution can do. BALANCE, then, is key. I would have argued for 5 or 6% reserves, which could have still allowed 21 million dollars in deficit spending; moderate diet but not a starvation regime.

I also question the priorities. With all the campus chaos, I would argue for six counselors at Deer Valley High, as has Pittsburg High, not our four. Campus resource officers would have been helpful, or at least an additional one or two campus security aides.

SUPERINTENDENT PAY RAISE

After essentially exhausting a 31 million dollar ending fund surplus the School Board at their September 24, 2014 meeting made a mistake, I feel, in giving four Administrators pay raises. It was a 3-2 vote, so two Trustees voted for fiscal responsibility, saying wisely that this was not a good time for raises.

If Measure O (landlord fee) was not on the ballot this November you could bet that there would be yet another Bond measure. We cry uncle against cuts in music, librarians, VP's and counselors and talk about a bond for relief, but, yet, we can afford Administrative raises. Where's the sense?

LCFF and LCAP

These two fit like a hand in a glove. They close the loop and are long overdue.

The Local Control Funding Formula makes good sense as the old system, with tons of restricted and categorical programs, was a byzantine path to navigate. This new formula is much more transparent, logical and equitable. On top of base funding, it provides supplemental and concentrated funds to districts with greater numbers of hi-need students. That makes sense as we

have long known that it takes upwards of 30% more funds to educate the economically disadvantaged, foster youth and ELL learners.

The LCAP compliments the funding formula by giving accountability. It has eight mandated areas with measureable outcomes. It also accomplishes the goal of local control.

Antioch, though, got off to a rocky start by apparently not involving parents as much as they could in the planning and implementation process. There is some disconnect here. The Administration claims they did such but parent groups like CCISCO take issue.

When the funding was due for a vote there were also legitimate grievances that the budget had not been posted on the District web site and that no particulars were available. This was not consistent with the way other area districts had executed the process.

The Administration claimed that they were only told by the County Board of Education two hours before the scheduled board meeting that they could affix targeted numbers. It was all very strange and, frankly, hard to fathom. The County Board later insisted AUSD provide numbers.

Progress has since been made with specifics and the District has given up its argument that supplemental and concentration funds can be used for general budgeting because of our student ratio of hi need being 67%. The District has also backpedaled on its' plan to use 5.7 million dollars of LCFF grants to pay for a teacher salary raise, admitting that such a plan would be highly controversial and divisive.

The positive news, then, is that we are all on a better footing with the needed (and mandated) community partnership. Hopefully, dialogue and collaboration will prevail.

MANDATED REPORTING

It seems that one law suit follows another for special education abuse. Something is amiss in our training of teachers and instruction of mandated reporting.

In the case of the eight million settlement to the families of eight 5 to 7 year old autistic children there was a seeming culture of silence where, allegedly, administrators bragged about silencing parents. The abuse was not reported for four months. This is inexcusable.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

We need more parental involvement as mom and dad are a crucial leg of the stool. As an example, the PIQUE Program (Parental Involvement for Quality Education) has brought great results.

Interventions, like the high school transition summer program offered by the African American Male Achievement Initiative, are positives.

Continued efforts for tutoring are needed. Tellingly, if a child is behind in reading at the third grade it is an 85% likelihood that they will never catch up and they will have a four-fold chance of not graduating high school.

Concurrent college classes are also a boon. We need develop greater bonds with the community college.

Studies show that if a child has six college credits they are far likelier to continue on to college because they are vested and because they have had a confidence-building exposure to the college environment.

LINKED PATHWAYS

In many ways, this is the proverbial best thing to happen to high schools since sliced bread.

Relevance, rigor and relationship have been the mantras for some time but they needed a vehicle to carry them. Career-themed schools, where the courses have some common, every-day-life thread, have mounted evidence suggesting better student attendance, higher graduation rates and improved test scores.

Overall, the linked pathways have been a success in Antioch.

In a sense Linked Learning had a genesis with project-based learning working, which works with problems and attendant solutions in an evolution of analysis and trial and error. This real life approach was first tried locally at the Deer Valley Earth, Space and Astronomy Academy, which then evolved into the Science Research Academy and has now incorporated humanities as well into the research/project based approach

SCHOOL CHOICE

School choice and diversity of approach are good things. There should be a good mix Traditional public schools, alternative schools, independent study, career-themed academies, magnet schools, charter schools, project-based learning, private schools parochial schools, remote learning schools and home study should all have a seat at the table.

One size does not fit all. Some students thrive in certain environments and wither in others.

DOZIER-LIBBEY

I love Dozier-Libbey and felt sick at the prospect of separation. I am not for or against any side and am sure neither side is pure as the driven snow. Excesses were invariably made on both ends.

I am, though, not in favor of administrative incompetence and disconnect. What we had here is a monstrously shameful failure to communicate. The School District has the parental role and should lead by example. Had ongoing dialogue and compromise been sought, so much bad blood would not, presumably, have built up. It could have been different.

This fissure had to be in the works for years. The teachers claim they were rebuffed time and time again by a distant and aloof Administration. Putting that argument aside, since I was not there to see, certainly the District, at the least, suspected something? Was no pulse taken? Where was the dialogue and the bridge to downtown?

After the petition was filed things, actually went from bad to worse.

1. There was no need to demonize the teachers as selfish, elitist and racist. They feel the school is going downhill and that centralized bureaucracy is stifling. We should address that.
2. There was no need to cloud the issue by piling on arguments just for the seeming sake of running up legal bills. Many of those arguments nobody really believed.... Take, for one, the argument that the new charter school would not favor Antioch residents. This was ludicrous. Projections show that a mere three students would have come from teacher families outside the District.
3. As to picking the cream of the crop, charter schools are public schools with public monies . They cannot discriminate on entry.
4. As to the argument as to “why can Dozier, a good and not failing school, be allowed go charter”; well, like it or not, the truth is that there is no provision in the Charter law that says a school can’t go from good to great. The law underscores innovation and the teachers’ right to seek their own model if they so choose and can get 51% approval. It’s the law and we should change the law if we don’t like it.

Granted there is emphasis on failing schools but the law is not exclusive and limited to failing schools. Plain and simple, the law says that the only grounds for denial is the finding of an unsound education program, as defined by sixteen criteria in the Charter Act.... Again, I am not arguing for Dozier being charter, I am merely saying that the AUSD went off cockeyed and should have stuck to a reasonable line of arguing; or, better yet, tried to mediate this out sooner.

5. There was certainly no need to bully teachers with threats and by demoting their Principal after first putting a banner on the side of the school building at night announcing that there was a new chief. What kind of P.R. is that?
6. There was no need in bullying parents by threatening them that sports would be denied. All the bullying just stiffened the collective spine.

7. There was also no need for, again, running up the legal costs with diversionary suits. AUSD's dueling petition argument has been thrown out of court after court and seems, I'm afraid, to be a tactic to run the petitioners into the ground.

It could have all been handled so much differently, so much more collaboratively, It became holy war with take no hostages. There was, sadly, untold waste of energy, good will, time and hundreds of thousands in legal fees.

I can only conclude that the District has a disconnect somewhere..

TRANSPARENCY

Years ago I proposed televised meetings but could not get a majority vote. Let's try again.

The citizens deserve full transparency. We must remember that we, the officials, are the servants; the public are the masters. Many work late or are too tired to come downtown. They deserve to know what is happening.

I would also like an occasional meeting outside the small confines of the School Board room. We could do sessions on community issues like campus violence, bullying, gang prevention, etc. and on parental tips such as navigating the pathway into college.

I would suggest at least one a year held at an elementary school, one at a middle school and one at a high school.

The Board has to always be vigilant about strict compliance with the Brown Act. It is imperative that items to be discussed at special meetings and closed session are posted in the Agenda with proper public notification. Any discussions are limited to the stated topics and any actions must be reported out.

WHY VOTE FOR ME?

I stand on my record having served on the School Board from 2004-2102. I came into office when the AUSD was reeling from poor public trust and financial woes.

In one year I and my colleagues oversaw the exit from the County Fiscal Watchlist. When I left in 2012 we carried a 31million dollar reserve; had implemented the Linked Pathways career-themed program; had opened an innovative K-8 school (Orchard Park); and had, in seven of my eight years, progressed on our District-wide API scores (from 702 to 742).

Today we project a state-mandated minimum 5 million dollar ending fund balance at school year end. We had a bloodletting to keep Dozier Libbey from bolting the District. We are rocked by daily incidents of fighting at Dallas Ranch and Deer Valley. We are beset by law suits, like the eight million dollar settlement to the families of eight autistic children for an alleged cover up of

slapping and verbal abuse. Our STAR testing shows us at ten or more points below state averages in English, math, and science literacy.

I feel compelled to come back and help turn the tide back. I think I did a good job the last time around but sometimes distance and returning to something brings even wiser perspective..

I promise three qualities.

- I tell it like it is; the good the bad and the ugly. You'll get the straight skinny from me.
- I am extremely inclusive with no agenda or blinding ideology. I get things done because I consider all viewpoints and work well with all kinds of temperaments, backgrounds, races, ethnic groups and philosophical persuasions.
- I am also known for stirring the pot. I have no problem in respectfully asking tough questions. Today, I see a culture of non-questioning. The adage that you don't have to go along to get along seems lost.

I do not subscribe to being in-your-face confrontational but the Board can't be buddy-buddy with the Superintendent and Staff. We can't swallow things undigested. We need professional distance and can't forget who the Boss is. If we need poke and prod, then so be it.

I will be that gadfly.