

Some Thoughts for Educational Leaders

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For most of us, the arrival of September signals the beginning of a new school year. However, for others it marks the end of the first quarter on the year-round school calendar, and for some it is merely one among twelve important months that find us engaged in our many different activities on behalf of public education in San Diego.

Is there reason for us to pause and speculate about the opportunities that we have to make a difference in the lives of children in the year ahead? I think so. It has been a very long time since public education has captured with such intensity the interest of the public and our political leaders. I cannot remember a time when the challenges for educators have been so great and success so nearly within our reach. We have every opportunity to make this a year of remarkable progress for the San Diego City Schools and the children we serve.

To begin, we must have a vision of excellence. That starts with a renewal of our commitment to the belief that every child can learn, that all children can be taught, and that we expect each child to make academic progress from the beginning of the school year to its end.

This vision is realized as we define our goals, establish specific objectives, and engage in activities to help us reach them. The board's goals and my objectives set forth the expectations that the district has for excellence. These expectations are purposely high. We will have to work hard to meet them. It will require vigor and the rigorous self-discipline of each leader and follower. Cooperation among people at all levels is a prerequisite. And there must be tolerance for some ambiguity as we search for better answers to difficult questions. However, we are equal to the task.

What is our agenda for the future? As leaders we have special responsibilities and opportunities as we translate our rhetoric into action.

First and foremost, our mission is academic. We must establish an intellectual climate in the schools. There is never an excuse for promoting anti-intellectualism in any of our endeavors. It is essential that we read more. We have a responsibility to inform ourselves about what is going on in the world around us. We must be knowledgeable about the issues that confront our society and develop our own skills in dealing with them. We cannot teach either the adults we lead or the young we educate that which we do not know. We can both teach and lead by precept and actions which convey the importance of knowing what to do when confronted with the unfamiliar.

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- ✓ Second, we have a continuing responsibility to equalize access to high quality education for all of our students. This means that education in integrated schools is better than education in segregated ones. In the years ahead, it will become increasingly difficult for any of us to isolate ourselves in our home or communities with people who represent only a single race, ethnic group, or class. By providing the children of San Diego with top quality education in integrated communities and integrated schools, we give them the equal opportunity to learn about each other and prepare themselves for a future where diversity is valued. I maintain the only way to learn to value people for what they are and rid ourselves of false stereotypes is through direct rather than vicarious experiences. Thus, each leader must cultivate the attitude and model the behavior necessary to bring about positive race and human relations.
- ✓ Third, no amount of effort can satisfy us that the base of participation by parents and community education is broad enough. For too long we educators have had adversarial relationships within our own ranks and with some parents and others in the community. A new partnership of parents, educators, and community members must be formed. We share many common goals. We must seek ways to find consensus on means. School site councils; parent, teacher, and student organizations; Adopt-a-School programs; business partnerships; volunteer programs; and such things as extended reading programs and homework plans are examples of ways we can use the human resources of our community to raise the quality of education. It will take much involvement and the positive interaction of people throughout our city if we are to restore confidence in the schools. That confidence is absolutely essential if we expect to be provided with the additional financial resources we must have to continue the improvements we have already begun.
- ✓ Fourth, as we work to help our students become enlightened, participating citizens, we must not ignore that it takes effort to stay enlightened ourselves. Politics should not frighten us, although we should be wary of the limitations of the politics of vested-interests. For example, understanding and using the political process as it impacts on important public policy issues that determine the allocation of resources for public schools is imperative. No one in a leadership position can afford to be naive about the positive potential of the political process in our democratic republic.
- ✓ Fifth, we must accept new technology and champion the solutions it provides for our vexing problems, but only if it also conforms to matters of principle that must transcend situational ethics. In our quest for quantitative solutions that technology provides, we can err and ignore qualitative analysis which depends on human judgment. In our profession there will always be a proper role for the leader to make qualitative judgments that are based on experience, intuition, and a cultivated sense of right and wrong. Thus, for each of us there is a need to stay in touch with the arts and humanities as we rush to become computer literate.
- ✓ Sixth, there is an extra burden that comes with leadership. Leaders who bemoan that burden had best become full-time followers. Most of us are

leaders by choice, and there is no excuse for us to indulge in self-pity about our burden. As human beings we can expect occasionally to have a bad day, but we must know that our followers don't expect us ever to have a bad day. If you have not done so in the past, find a way this year to set aside some time during each day to do the things you want to do. Swim, run, bike, walk, dance, read, meditate, garden--whatever works to energize you physically and intellectually is worth doing. You will be a more inspiring leader to your followers and a more satisfied follower for your leaders.

It will be an exciting year. We will improve the quality of our schools. Our children deserve no less. We must keep expectations high. We owe that to our colleagues who make up our leadership team. And we must take responsibility for our actions because that is the price of leadership. We will work to improve our planning skills. We will strive to become more effective in oral and written communication. We will try to understand that there may be some surprises and that despite our best intentions, we cannot always anticipate every consequence of our decisions. All of this presents us with enormous and exciting challenges.

I believe we are equal to these challenges as long as we remember that each day the real test will have but one question, "What did I do for children today?"