

Our City

Last Monday, July 1, found me in Twin Falls on the CSI campus at our second Our Kids – Our Future Public Education Task Force meeting. The focus of this meeting was accountability. Since the early years of the George W. Bush presidency and the No Child Left Behind enactment into public education most folks would equate a school's accountability to its students' scores on a variety of standardized tests. In Idaho that would mean the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) typically given to 3rd, 8th and 10th graders, the Standard Assessment Tests (SAT) given to all high school juniors in Idaho to see if they are ready for college or the American College Test (ACT) which is supposed to also test college readiness.

Years ago when I was coaching track with Roger Thomas our team t-shirts had as a good humored joke on the back, "The beatings will continue until morale improves." In education standardized test scores have been used to beat or disparage teachers, schools and whole school districts, but have done little in the way of improving actual student outcomes or school accountability. I can tell you first-hand that the beatings do not improve student or teacher morale, teacher retention or a student's career readiness. I knew a kid 41 years ago who was told because of his ACT score he probably should not go to college because he wasn't smart enough. If you were to know that kid today most would say the predictive test was wrong. In all my years of education I can tell you that scenario is not an uncommon one. Predictive tests are a tool, nothing more; they do little to measure a student's determination or work ethic.

Similar sentiments were shared by educators and legislators throughout the meeting last Monday. And, while I know schools have to be accountable to those they serve, based on that initial discussion, I am not sure that standardized assessments will be the sole measure as to the committee's recommendation for accountability. I believe accountability will focus more on student literacy growth and career readiness. I say that because we spent the second half of the meeting learning from Angie Brulotte (our own Bill Brulotte's wife), an elementary principal in Jerome, about what is possible in Pre-K through 3rd grade literacy in a demographically diverse school district; we also heard from Trent Clark and Wendi Secrist of the Workforce Development Council who spoke to us about the need for more early career placement opportunities, experiential learning, and apprenticeships in order to meet Idaho's labor market demands. I am encouraged by these conversations and by the new possibilities that education in Idaho could actually provide a viable future for all of our students not just those who score well on standardized tests.

On July 9th I travel back to Boise where the Task Force's Subcommittee on Budget Stabilization will meet for the second time. During that meeting historical and current State education funding and budgeting practices will be reviewed; there is a particular interest in the amount of money many school districts are having to raise through supplemental and plant facility levies. We will also be reviewing education initiatives that are in place to see if they are actually creating a return on investment. My involvement in the Task Force has required a lot of travel and additional work; again I remain optimistic that it will not be in vain.

Likewise, on a more local note the time spent this past month in the City's budget process has been extensive. I believe that solutions to difficult situations are being found and applauded the

superintendents, department heads and City Council for their efforts and accountability to those they serve.

Until next week...