Superintendent's Report

June 23rd, 2011

LEARNING UPDATE

- **The Three Questions Every Teacher Should Ask Themselves** – We have learned a lot this year via our collective learning efforts (i.e. Lab Classroom Project teams, "Old Dog" teams, etc.). The district learning model developed to meet the boards Ends of developing lifelong learners for the 21st Century is the key driver in this work. As a result, our staff have developed tools that have shaped our lens of how we see the learning environment away from "delivering the content" towards shaping the conditions for learning (Cognitive Demand, Flow of Information and Learning Trust) to harness each learners' energy behind their innate need to learn.

  To make this work even more powerful, we are beginning to see that as teachers each and every day we need to ask ourselves three questions that can guide our work to create the type of learning environment that is necessary. The three questions are: 1) "Am I asking my students to think?" (Cognitive Demand); 2) "Who is doing the work?" (Flow of Information); and 3) "What am I learning from my students about my own practice?" (Learning Trust).

  COGNITIVE DEMAND – We shouldn't be surprised if our students as a whole are not great thinkers if we as teachers fail to intentionally ask them to think. Designing our lessons where students simply must know the "what the teacher or textbook wants them to know" does not build independent lifelong learners. In fact, it will cause most students to become more dependent on others to think for them. Intentionally putting students in learning environments that have them analyze, evaluate and create (Bloom's Taxonomy) will maximize their potential for becoming independent lifelong learners. Our learning model focuses on *asking our students to think* with intentional strategies and acceptable evidences to assess whether students are actually achieving this objective.

  FLOW OF INFORMATION – Imagine expecting a young teenager to learn how to drive an automobile, but never letting him/her get behind the steering wheel. We just expect the learner to watch the teacher and then take a test. Sounds kind of odd, right? Well if the majority of the work being done in a learning environment is by the teacher, then we shouldn't be surprised when students who are "good at school" figure out how to play the game to get a grade and those who are "not good at school" to tune out. We believe that the students need to do the work and the teacher is a "Guide on the Side" rather than the "Sage on the Stage". Our learning model focuses on the *students doing the work* as measured by the Flow of Information within a learning environment and thereby teaching them to be non-dependent on others to tell them what they need to know.

  LEARNING TRUST – If you had the choice within a business partnership of owning either 49% of all the company stock or 51%, which would you choose? Clearly the leverage goes to the owner of the 51% stake in the company and therefore the need for the other owner diminishes as a result of this enhanced leverage. All of this is predicated on the notion of

ownership as equated to a total percentage of 100%. Learning Trust is about the need for others to assist you in your own learning and not about leverage over the other person to do what you want them to do. We believe that strong relationships are built on the notion that all parties need the other person(s) far more than they need you. So if the teacher needs his/her students to learn about their own practice as a learning environment leader more than the students need them to learn about the content, then strong Learning Trust develops. Our learning model breaks the mental model of content delivery (I taught it and it is not my fault if they didn't learn it – a.k.a. leverage) mindset and replaces it with the belief that we are using the content to help students become independent lifelong learners. And if this "lifelong learner" notion is such as great idea, then we as teachers should be *learning from our students about our practice* as lifelong learners ourselves as measured by what we identify as Learning Trust.

At our summer institutes in August, our work will begin from these three questions that teachers need to ask themselves ("Am I asking my students to think?", "Who is doing the work?" and "What am I learning from my students about my practice?"). Participants will then learn how to utilize the tools we have developed to create learning environments that intentionally answer these questions so as to maximize the opportunities for students to become stronger thinkers, do the work that is meaningful to them and become engaged in shaping the learning environments they learn within (created by their teachers). The result will be learning environments that support students in their work to achieve the Board's Ends policies and become independent lifelong learners for the 21st Century.

BOARD UPDATE

- **State Budget Update** – We are in the final stages of creating our 2011/12 school budget for your review at the June Board meeting. Both Brett and I are confident that we will be very close to building a balanced budget. With that in mind and given the latest forecast for June shows that the state is projected to have $500 million less in revenue than what they expected when they passed their current budget, I am concerned that we may once again be facing another mid-year cut from the state like we did this past spring. In anticipation of this possibility, we are working to develop strategies to stay ahead of this situation and still maintain student services. Having as close to a balanced budget as possible will help us with this scenario, by it is important to remember that we build our budgets from conservative assumptions and do our best to not run too close to the "red line" so we can adjust and handle to handle any fluctuations in revenues. Just know that our focus is to build a budget that gets as close as we can to our "New Normal" in state funding as quickly as possible.

- **Summer Maintenance** – As usual, we have lots of summer work to do to ready our facilities for the next school year. Beyond the normal cleaning, painting, mowing, floor prepping, and shrub trimming that our crew does every summer, we continue to work on the idea of connecting the K-8 parking lot from behind the middle school gym to Ivy Street to assist in easing traffic flow on that campus. I don't know if we will be able to pull this project off, but I hope to have more information for you at the summer retreat meeting.

- **Upgrading the Board's Access to Online Board Books –** As you know, we have been using the laptops from the library for your online board book access for the past couple of

years. With at least thirty teachers moving toward using iPads in their classrooms this next year, I have decided that the board too needs an upgrade to your portal. So, *knock on wood* we will have iPads for your use at the July retreat. We are also looking at providing training for each of you on Google Docs and Google Apps just as our staff is beginning to learn. I believe it is important for the board to also be leading the way in this work so you can have a much better sense of what a more technological supported learning environment might be like. More on this as we move forward.

Please give me a call if you have any questions. Talk with you later.

Mark