



Historical Overview of Clovis Unified School District

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Role of a Parent

Parental involvement in education is a cornerstone to the success or failure of an educational program. Continuous interest and involvement from parents in the operation of a school will lend credence to the school's program and will challenge portions of it that do not appear to serve the community's needs. If ever the credo "knowledge is power" were appropriate, it is so of parental understanding of how a school operates. Parents wish to be supportive of their children, teachers, school-site programs, and district policies, and they want schools to be relative to the needs of their children. When parents are actively involved in the educational process at their children's schools, their children's attitudes toward learning and the school environment improve, and academic achievement is successful.

When children begin the educational process, parents empower teachers with a mantle of authority that brings with it a solemn responsibility on the part of the teacher. In telling a child that he is going to school to learn and that he must mind his teacher, parents permit teachers to become all-important to a child during the school day. The danger of this approach is when parents decide teachers can, will and should take over parental responsibilities. By becoming involved in his child's school, though, a parent has limitless opportunities to assert his support for and to impact the success of the school's educational program.

In the Clovis Unified School District parental involvement is legion and legendary. In addition to parent-teacher clubs at all school sites and the Clovis Unified Foundation, both of which generate funds for school operations, there are booster groups which support particular activities (band, sports, cheerleading, etc.) through financial support, organization, transportation and general involvement to ensure successful participation in an activity; there are parent room helpers who assist teachers with photocopying, grading worksheets, lending an extra pair of hands during classroom projects, anything with which a teacher needs assistance; there are parents who donate their time by speaking with groups of students about their field of work; there are parents who teach a subject, voluntarily, in which they have expertise, to enrich the children's education (art docents, foreign language); there are parents who volunteer to help school nurses during vision and hearing screenings conducted at all schools; there are parents with office skills who help type newsletters each month; there are parents who coach various sport teams and academic teams, when there are not enough teachers to coach the number of students interested in a program; there are room parents who bake for and prepare parties for all elementary students at least twice a year; there are parents who donate hours of their time to help school librarians present valuable programs and skills to students; there are parents who work directly with G.A.T.E. and Special Education teachers to provide additional enrichment and challenge to students; there are parents who assist in



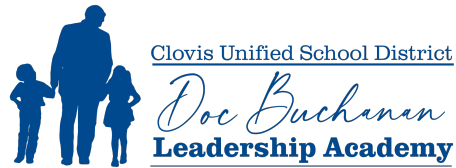
language translation for a variety of multi-cultural concerns; and there are parents who volunteer to support bond issues and work for their passage, and to serve on a variety of district-wide committees (Year-Round School Study; Inter-cultural Advisory Council; Superintendent's Advisory Committee, etc.). All these volunteers lend assistance as needed, and their efforts are recognized and coordinated through on-site administrators.

Fundamental to the success of such widespread parent involvement is good communication throughout all levels of the school district. At each school site communication is conducted through parent-teacher conferences, parent-student handbooks, teacher home visitations, monthly newsletters, teacher-parent telephone calls, teacher-parent notes, parents club meeting, and quarterly progress reports on all students. District administrators realized, though, a need for a better vehicle by which to communicate District goals and to understand community needs; consequently, in 1966, C.U.S.D. established a district-wide Systems Analysis Review Technique, or S.A.R.T., whose express purpose was to provide an open communication line between parents and district administrators.

The Clovis Unified School District S.A.R.T., whose acronym evolved to School Assessment Review Team, was formed following a grant request written jointly, in 1966, by Dr. Samuel Troll (sp?), of the University of California, and Dr. Floyd Buchanan, Superintendent of Clovis Unified. At that time bureaucrats in neither Washington, D.C. nor Sacramento believed the program was viable, so the grant request was denied. Clovis Unified administrators decided, though, to implement the program without grant funds. It should be noted, however, that, in 1974-1975, the United States Department of Education developed guidelines for what it called a "District Advisory Committee." The express purpose of this committee was to involve parents in the school community; parents in Clovis Unified were well involved by that time.

By providing an avenue for parents to be informed about what is going on in the District and for District administrators to know what parents think, parents have the responsibility and opportunity to make the school district's programs as good or as mediocre as they want. Individual school site committees blend well with Clovis Unified's philosophy of site-based management for its schools. Members of S.A.R.T. committees are to be advocates for the children of the District; they help form the opinions of the community, since they are privy to district-wide and school site curriculum programs and since they are charged to disseminate that information; and they serve as lightning rods for the community's moods and concerns. While some schools actually have S.A.R.T. "hot lines," members of all school committees are available for relaying concerns to school site administrators and/or District personnel. With monthly meetings or principals, individual school S.A.R.T. representatives, and various district administrators, a forum is provided for just such an exchange of ideas, information, and concerns.

Since monthly meetings do not always provide an opportunity for all concerned parents to participate, Clovis Unified administrators began a policy, during the 1976-1977 school year, of conducting an annual survey of all parents in the school district. This survey allows parents to



report how well a school is handling each of their children’s educational needs, since parents are asked to complete a survey for each child in the school system. In addition to specific survey questions, parents are provided the opportunity to relate what they like about their child’s school and what improvements they would like to see made. By analyzing that information district administrators are able to use the surveys as a diagnostic tool to assess needs and to revamp school programs as needed. Above all, the annual survey process is designed to let district administrators know exactly how parents view the school district, its programs, and how those programs are being implemented. Such input from parents is vital to the success of Clovis Unified, since it forms the foundation of understanding between parents and professionals that is needed to fathom the complexity of modern education.

The interaction of parents, teachers, principals and district administrators in Clovis Unified relies on basic trust in the truth that everyone has a common cause or goal: the mission of Clovis Unified School District is to educate all children to a level where they can function in society and to help all children become Sparthenians. Recognizing the role that each person has in achieving this goal leads to greater competence, focus, open communication, and respect. With responsibilities defined and delegated appropriately, each person may “buy in” to the philosophy and goals of the district. All of this helps establish trust in district ideals, in general, and in individuals, in particular.

Respect for an individual or an ideal lead to trust in the individual or ideal; it does not mean, though, that criticism cannot be made. Quite to the contrary, respect and trust rely on honesty and forthrightness. Dr. Buchanan has remarked, “There is nothing that is perfect, that can’t be improved; but we don’t want to destroy the program.” With that in mind, parents and staff need to keep a positive image of and faith in Clovis Unified’s overall program; yet, they must be honest enough with themselves and others to say how things really are and to exhibit the willingness necessary to change, when change is indicated.

“Excellence can be obtained if you care more than others think is wise; Risk more than others think is safe; Dream more than others think is practical; Expect more than others think is possible.”

Daniel Kaiser, Ed.D.
Administrator, C.U.S.D.

This is the key to the whole Clovis Unified program and the people involved in making it flourish.