

Historical Overview Clovis Unified School District

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Edited by Nancy McNeil

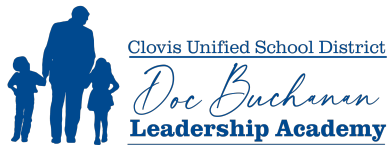
The role of an administrator in Clovis Unified School District is diverse and evolutionary, yet there is one constant: the goal of educating all children in the district is the foremost responsibility of every member of the C.U.S.D. staff. This requires administrators to set policy standards and goals, to plan for the future by reassessing programs, to adapt to the changing needs of the community and world at large. Holding to the beliefs that “a child’s right to an education is not negotiable” and that “our greatest natural resource is the mind of a child,” the staff of Clovis Unified School District must act according only to the best interests of Clovis’ children, as they perceive them to be. It is their responsibility and their duty.

Role of Teachers

The classroom teacher is charged with the most important task shouldered by any district staff member: daily contact with and instruction of the District’s students is a significant responsibility. Each teacher must work to develop goals and objectives for all students; provide a learning environment replete with academic focus; maintain standards and expectations of student behavior; use effective teaching strategies in all instructional planning; provide a well-balanced curriculum for all students; diagnose students and prescribe solutions to overcome students’ weaknesses; and maintain an on-going dialogue with parents concerning student achievement and social interaction. This is a daunting obligation, one which must be assumed with considerable dedication and enthusiasm. Clovis Unified School District administrators endeavor to assist Clovis teachers in their attention to these diverse duties.

In developing goals and objectives for the grade level at which he teaches, a teacher must work with his principal and within district guidelines to establish his general instruction plan. To encourage teachers at each grade level to work together and to share their ideas for teaching strategies, C.U.S.D. developed its “Golden Key” program. To qualify for a Golden Key award, 90% of all students in a particular grade must meet the stated objective of being on grade level. For example, if there are three second grade classes, each of the three classroom teachers must have 90% of his students on grade level academically, or none of them is recognized with a Golden Key award. This is designed to encourage teachers to share their ideas and to ensure a reasonable distribution of students among the classes, so no one teacher has an inordinately high number of below-grade level students or above-grade level students. It is in the teacher’s best interest, then, to combine forces with his fellow instructors, leading to a more balanced program for all students through better implementation of the overall curriculum. In turn, it is anticipated that teachers will feel they are truly part of the program, that they have input into the program, and they will be more enthusiastic and creative in meeting the demands of their job.

There is no doubt that teachers in Clovis Unified are under pressure to be efficient and proficient in executing their professional responsibilities. That is their job; yet their task is more



manageable when they promote an environment which is conducive to learning and which fosters the understanding that they, as teachers, should be “coordinators or learning,” rather than “dispensers of knowledge.” There is a vast difference between these two instructional techniques. A “coordinator of learning” can control various levels of instruction at one time, so a student is more likely to be able to work at an individual level of comprehension; however, a “dispenser of knowledge” must present only one level of instruction at any given time, since he is “telling” all his students the same thing. A “coordinator of learning,” then, has much greater flexibility, hence he can provide more adequately for all his students.

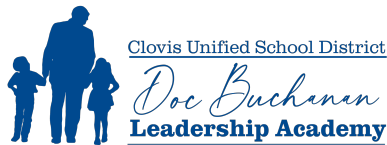
Fundamental to achieving a good learning environment with a strong academic focus is the establishment of discipline in the classroom. An unruly class, just like an unruly individual, can waste valuable minutes of instructional time. With demands on teachers to educate students in a wide variety of subjects, interruptions because a class is out of control cannot be tolerated. Consequently, it is imperative that each teacher maintain discipline which is consistent, workable, and omnipresent. This allows effective classroom management to begin.

“The human being has to learn to work in a managed or controlled environment, where everybody is working at the same time. Everybody, then, becomes self-directed, either helping or being helped.”

Floyd B. Buchanan
Superintendent, C.U.S.D.

Competent classroom management is a key element in meeting the needs of all students in a class, and effective management is in place when all students are working as close to 100% of the time as possible. This requires getting the students involved, to the point of having students help other students, if necessary. In being creative and innovative, a teacher needs to realize it is acceptable to try a program and have it fail; what the teacher must do is assess the weak points of the program and to determine if it might yet be valuable, if implemented differently. Above all, a teacher must retain flexibility in his approach: if the class as a whole is missing a point, he must stop and explain it again. It is far more important to educate students than to “cover” specified material at a pace or in a manner that loses the students. It is crucial, then, that teachers understand the scope and sequence of concepts in each of their subject areas.

Comprehending scope and sequence of a particular subject allows a teacher to recognize if something is being skipped or if there is a gap in the educational process necessary to render a thorough and logical understanding of a specific subject. Criterion reference testing, which indicates mastery of a subject, allows a teacher to know what his students have learned and what points may have been missed. At that moment the teacher should and must reteach areas which are misunderstood, because their comprehension is vital to future steps of learning within that subject. Because of time constraints, however, this practice of reteaching is rarely carried out in a systematic way; rather, all too often, a student merely received his grade for a course and is passed along to the next level. Few make the effort to review areas of weakness and to reteach them. A goal in Clovis Unified is to change this practice, to tell a student with an

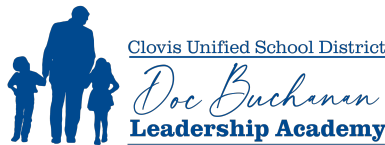


“F,” “You don’t get a chance for another ‘F’ until you go back and clean up this last one!” Teachers will need more assistance to meet this goal, and it will need to come from cross-age tutoring, peer-group tutoring, and parents assisting in the classroom. Effective management of various human resources will benefit students directly, as long as the teacher takes into consideration the levels of ability, rates of learning, individualization, enrichment, and the ability to teach to subskill weaknesses that are evident among the students.

One area of classroom curriculum management which requires additional development, but which would have a major impact on the overall quality of education within C.U.S.D., is the formation of an exemplary vocabulary program. Realizing that “critical words of understanding are concepts which are represented by nouns, and they are the indigenous key to everything” done academically, it is crucial that students understand the meaning of the nouns used in each course of study. Treated in a manner similar to learning a foreign language, a program of exemplary vocabulary – for every subject – would greatly assist students in learning their course work. Such a program would also allow flexibility in providing a well-balanced curriculum for all students, since students could work through these basic elements at their own levels. All of this must, however, be coordinated within district curriculum guidelines, which are established in the Desired Exit Skills (D.E.S.) and G.L.O. are reviewed in an on-going manner throughout the school year. Representatives from each school in the district, at each grade level, work together to assess and review all aspects of the curriculum they teach, evaluating its effectiveness and continued desirability. Such district-wide cooperation and analysis allows for smooth and coordinated course work evolution and a comparison of successful instructional strategies.

A further component of good classroom management is maintaining standards and expectations of student behavior, while doing so in a warm, caring atmosphere. Teachers need to be concerned with their own character and values. In an effort to minimize the number of personal concerns which might affect a teacher’s classroom performance, Clovis Unified’s administrators have made a conscientious effort to provide Clovis teachers with a health benefits package which removes the worry of financial upheaval, should the teacher or a member of his family have a sudden, severe illness or accident. With fewer personal anxieties affecting his performance, a teacher can devote more energy to his teaching and his students, and the students benefit. Once students are secure in their learning environment and understand the parameters of their behavior, the job of teaching becomes almost secondary.

Clovis Unified School District takes aggressive action in dealing with curricular needs and levels of its students through an innovative program analyzing all students in the district for grade level strengths and weaknesses. Assessing each student in an “Achievement Prognosis Profile,” teachers rank all students in order of their math and reading achievement, from the highest to the lowest score in the class. While actual placement and achievement growth is computed at the District, teachers must assess all below-grade level students and commit to a Teacher Grade Level Estimate (TGLE) and a Principal Grade Level Estimate (PGLE), for each student. These TGLE’s and PGLE’s are their plans of action to move these below-grade level students to being “at” or above grade level by the end of the school year, and they include the



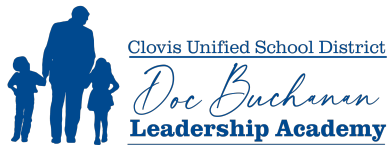
specific steps the teacher plans to utilize to enable the student to achieve grade level performance. Dr. Buchanan has noted that, “We are probably the only district I know anywhere in the United States that demands that, if a child is below grade level, the teacher must diagnose why and tell us what they are going to do about it.”

If, though, it is anticipated that a student may not make grade level by year-end, a Specialist Grade Level Expectancy (SGLE) is completed by specialized personnel (counselors, psychologists). By identifying such “at-risk” students, analyzing why they are having trouble, and what corrective measures need to be undertaken to help the student, the teacher’s job becomes easier, in the long run. Such analysis also sets a teacher’s budget, since it determines the teacher’s requisition needs for his students.

Crucial to the task of analyzing and understanding student needs is good communication between parents and teachers. An on-going dialogue with parents concerning student achievement academically and a student’s interaction socially assists the teacher to anticipate his students’ needs and to address them. Clovis Unified endorses an active program of parent-teacher communication through face-to-face conferences, weekly reports (if necessary), and mid-quarter progress reports of a student’s academic record. By encouraging active intercourse between teacher and parents, students benefit dramatically.

Such dialogue results in greater accountability of the teacher. While receiving credit more often for everything they do to help students, parents become more aware, too, of teachers whose programs may not be working as well as they could. As a result of receiving additional credit, teachers must assume the responsibility of “failed” programs and or reassessing the weaknesses. This is healthy, though, for students, teachers, and parents: a different approach to teaching can instill renewed interest in a subject that may have waned through the boredom of repetition.

To assist classroom teachers in educating students at all levels, Clovis Unified administrators have encouraged school sites to utilize the talents of District Resource Teachers. Throughout the District, among parents and teachers alike, there has been misunderstanding of the work these resource teachers are expected to initiate. Rather than being a primary source teacher, who goes from class-to-class teaching in his area of expertise, C.U.S.D. encourages these teachers to be resources available to classroom teachers, not to usurp the role of a classroom teacher. Part of this philosophy is borne of financial necessity: district resource teachers are paid out of Title I funds, which are limited, and which limit, in turn, the number of resource teachers who can be hired; however, the other rationale for limiting the number and classroom responsibilities of district resource teachers is the belief that classroom teachers should seek to obtain whatever information and skills a resource teacher has to offer, and then the classroom teacher should implement this knowledge as best meets his own particular classroom needs. In utilizing resource teachers in this manner, classroom teachers are taught and enriched, and they learn additional skills which, because they have mastered them themselves, will assist them in the teaching of future classes.



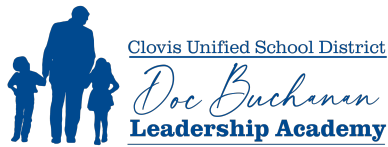
District resource teachers have district-wide responsibilities to coordinate programs for Clovis Unified in their areas of specialty. There are resource teachers in art and music. All programs conducted in the district concerning these areas are organized through these resource teachers. Consequently, time available for school-site visits must be limited. It is, though, the responsibility of on-site administrators to request district resource teachers to help at their site, when needed, since the primary responsibility of district resource teachers is to assist on-site administrators and classroom teachers. Through in-service programs and helping teachers learn how to teach a subject, both classroom teachers and students benefit.

Clovis Unified is actively involved in the Mentor Teacher Program, which is a master teacher program mandated by the State of California that started in the 1980's. The concept of this plan is to have "master" teachers at each school site, who conduct workshops and help give other teachers ideas about how best to improve and to implement particular areas of the educational program. Where many schools try to choose the "best" teacher on staff to be mentor teacher, with resulting personnel problems incumbent upon such a singular selection, Clovis Unified has encouraged a selection process at individual school sites that is exemplary.

The staff at each Clovis school meets to decide what particular area of education it would like to explore and study; teachers write programs outlining that particular subject or discipline; then a district-wide committee reviews the subject to be studied and the faculty members most experienced in that field at that school site, and they select a mentor teacher best suited to meet the school staff's stated goals. This procedure allows teachers to review school programs and to assess areas in which they feel they are weak or in which they could use more assistance. By allowing the entire staff of teachers, per site, to determine the field they wish to study, teachers have been more receptive to the entire mentor teacher program. At the high schools, generally there is a mentor teacher for each department, and that teacher also is selected based on expertise in the area selected for review and study.

The job of mentor teacher is one for which the State of California pays an additional stipend, primarily because of the additional responsibilities this position entails. Not only does a teacher continue his regular teaching duties, but he also must attend workshops, give workshops on his own school site and others, and assist fellow teachers who seek his assistance for specific problems. While Clovis Unified administrators have witnessed improvements in the district's educational programs as a result of involvement in the mentor teacher program, its implementation has not been without drawbacks.

The very teachers who have been identified as being exceptional are the ones who must leave their classroom students most and help other teachers or attend workshop sessions. Their own students, then, lose the constant daily benefits of contact, control, and innovation which they should be receiving. The district needs to discover if the good these teachers do while away from their primary job of classroom teacher is proportional to what their students miss, while they are gone. Additionally, the district suffers financially trying to cope with the expense of substitute teachers when mentor teachers are not with their classes. Although the State of California does provide a small amount for just this situation, it in no way covers the



outlay made by the district. So, as a state-mandated program, C.U.S.D. continues to participate in a program that is both beneficial academically, but detrimental financially.

Every action a teacher employs to educate students is aimed at increasing the growth of students. Children go to school because it is a law; they must attend. A teacher's task, though, is to instruct each child to become a member of society who can function well in groups and who can understand, preserve, and perpetuate the customs of society. This is the true objective of teachers. Consequently, Clovis administrators search diligently for teachers whose character and values will be good models for Clovis' students, and they strive to support and enrich teachers to help them maintain a level of excellence which benefits everyone.