Shout out to Benjamin Franklin School

Dr. Margaret O’Donoghue, Special Assistant

Franklin School gets the Office of Student Support appreciation award this month for the work they are doing in engaging parents. Their monthly workshops, focused on different grade levels, have attendance of about 30+ parents for each grade level workshop so far. The Kindergarten workshop had over 50 parents. At their Fall Forum, Franklin hosted over 60 parents. Also, their Hispanic Heritage Celebration had over 60 plus parents. Sessions included guidance on the math curriculum and how to engage children, domestic violence prevention, arts and crafts, and cultural awareness. Another parent engagement piece was focused on sharing information on SST and on system 44. Out of the 19 parents invited to that session, 12 attended. Reading interventions were explained, system 44 was explored, parents visited classrooms and were given instructions on how to log on at home. For Thanksgiving, every classroom at Franklin arranged a Thanksgiving basket for a needy family with contributions from teachers and students. They also hold an additional raffle for Thanksgiving baskets, again with donations from staff. If you want to know how Franklin encourages such incredible parent participation, talk to Ms. Parr & Ms. Zavala, Social Workers or the Family Engagement Specialist, Ms. Brillith Ripoll.
You can’t have a conversation about the goals of school reform without hearing the term “college and career ready.” What exactly does that mean? The answer is less obvious than you might think, according to this post, by Jonathan Hasak, who writes about the need for America’s education system to adapt to a changing economy.

Many people will tell you that fixing our education system is the civil rights challenge of our time, but no consensus exists in this country on what exactly needs fixing. National education agendas are not entirely contingent on previous policies. No social contract exists between our governments and students. And departments of education, states, and local school boards all behave differently.

College and career readiness, one of the main goals of President Obama’s signature education program, Race to the Top (RTTT), was not the first attempt to bring coherence to America’s K-12 schools. Prior to this, of course, was an emphasis on federal accountability and student proficiency in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), landmark bipartisan legislation that required mandatory testing for students in grades 3-8.

Yet the result of reform on top of reform is that even college and career now is suffering from incoherence. According to a new multi-year cross state study by the Southern Regional Education Board, complexity and communication of how college and career readiness standards inform new approaches to instruction was found to be a consistent challenge for educators in the 14 states surveyed.

Moreover, while both RTTT and NCLB have drawn their share of criticism, none might sting more than the fact that neither program nor law seems particularly aligned with an economy that has shifted from prioritizing knowledge to skills. A report issued in 2014 by the Pew Research Center found that only 46 percent of employed Millennials believe their education was very useful in preparing them for a job or career.

Young people with more education earn more than those with less education. Yet the $1.2 trillion in student loan debt and the elimination of millions of high-skilled jobs over the last decade casts considerable doubt that educational attainment is still a guarantee for gainful employment. So how can we reconcile college and career as a national vision if college is not affordable for every student and if student loans are too onerous for young adults?

Technology alone cannot prove to students that skills have become the global currency of 21st century economies. So rather than introducing iPads that disrupt traditional teaching or platforms like ClassDojo that manage classroom behavior, reformers ought to focus on clarifying how academic skills are relevant to students’ futures. And while these devices can compete for student attention and facilitate classroom learning, they are often used alongside curriculum that attempts to push students towards grade-level proficiency, a metric that does not exist in any work environment.

Forced to find value in scripted curriculum or no-excuse classrooms, students cannot be faulted for becoming disengaged. Nor should we be surprised that the Organization for Economic Cooperation ranks U.S. students as the 47th happiest compared to students in 64 countries. Joy, curiosity, creativity, and imagination should not be sacrificed because principals and teachers feel compelled to use precious instructional time preparing students for tests that will determine how effective they are at their jobs.

More partnerships with industries that integrate career readiness and project-based learning opportunities in classrooms could change the perception for students that school is not something you finish but a place to acquire relevant skills needed for successful futures. Furthermore, these partnerships would enable students to do what entrepreneurs so often celebrate today - fail, something a high-performing country like Finland does once a year when its schools celebrate National Failure Day.

And indeed, students should be allowed to fail, perhaps even encouraged in a safe environment such as schools because what comes after failure - perseverance, grit, problem solving - are the same qualities that employers look for in applicants. And that agenda, which might look different across the country, will create better schools and a better future for all Americans.

Dr. Kelly Williams, Special Assistant
Sweet treats for the Holidays

Pumpkin Cookie Puffs w/ Cream Cheese Frosting
1 cup white sugar
1 egg
1 cup shortening
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup canned pumpkin

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease cookie sheets.
2. In a large bowl, cream together sugar, egg, shortening, and vanilla. Sift together flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon; stir into the creamed mixture. Stir in the pumpkin.
3. Drop dough by the teaspoon onto the prepared cookie sheets.
4. Bake 10-15 minutes in the preheated oven.

Cream Cheese Frosting
1 pkg. (8 oz.) Cream Cheese, softened
1/4 cup butter or margarine, softened
1 tsp. vanilla
1 pkg. (16 oz.) powdered sugar (about 4 cups)

1. Beat cream cheese, butter and vanilla in large bowl with mixer until blended.
2. Add sugar gradually, beating after each addition until blended.

After your cookies have cooled add the frosting on top.

Keisha Gifford, Coordinator

Dr. William H. Horton
School gives thanks to the “Parents”.

Speedway Academies Community Dinner

A note of appreciation from Atiba Buckman, Principal

I could say the event was a success because we fed over a hundred plus community members. I could say the event was a success because the food tasted delicious and was prepared and served with love or I can call a spade, a spade and simply say, that the event was a success because you are all everything good that Speedway has to offer.

Over fifty of you came and gave your time and talents to absolute strangers. You catered to individuals and families that some would judge because of their present circumstance. On Saturday when Speedway opened its doors to people who struggle with homelessness, drug abuse or financial ruins, you opened your hearts to love. As your Principal, I could motivate you to dig deeper, try harder and fail forward in the pursuit of educating our students. However, on Saturday, you were not educators, you were not getting paid, you were not servicing students, and you were planting seeds of kindness in the hearts and minds of people who haven’t always seen that side of humanity.

Life is precious and anyone can easily be one paycheck, health diagnosis or calamity away from a life altering event.

As I walked over to Ms. Washington to take her order (I never met her before and asked her name) and watched as she lamented and said, “Thank you, thank you miss, I haven't been call Ms. Washington in so long, people only see me as....” It was at that moment, I knew how grateful I am that you all allowed me to make this endeavor a reality. So on behalf of Ms. Washington and I, words cannot express my gratitude to you all and I pray you all reap from the harvest you planted into this weekend.

Thank you, to the 3 on 3 Tournament contributors:
Perez, New York Knicks, Bowers, Arroyo, Loesch, Ross & Monroe