

Sustaining Exemplary Educational Programs

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Dr. White talked about four aspects of sustaining exemplary educational programs: finding the right personnel, giving them the support that they need, establishing a system to maintain the success, and sharing the successes of the program with others. What follows are the main points he gave for each idea. As he spoke, he expanded on many of these with comments, details, and examples.

The essential key to building exemplary educational programs is selecting and training the right people. The “right” people have the following characteristics:

- They care about children.
- They want to teach children the subject.
- They know that the child is more important than the subject.
- They have a comprehensive knowledge of the subject they teach.
- They know and understand theory, but they excel at understanding people and getting people to understand what they are teaching.
- They understand the value of preparation, evaluation, and feedback.
- They can teach from part to whole and whole to part; they can teach from the knowledge level to the evaluation level and make it relevant and understandable to all learners.
- They can teach using a child’s lack of understanding as a starting point, instead of always beginning with the same routine.
- They can teach any lesson in two or more effective modes.
- They collaborate, share, and work well with other colleagues to improve ways of teaching children.
- They understand that assessment informs and directs improvement. It is an essential part of improving instruction and student learning.
- They have the courage to change and to expand their knowledge level by seeking new ways of imparting knowledge to children.
- They are inquisitive and frequently seek out experts in their area of expertise for information.

- They know what they know! This allows them to avoid the fads and “new best answers” or “silver bullets.”
- They demonstrate a passion and commitment to teaching at a high level.

Once you have the right people, you must “feed the champions.” Passionate, dedicated, committed, and talented teachers are unique and hard to find. The administration must work to keep them, and this includes:

- Keep an open and clear line of communication between the administration and the teacher. This is year-round communication, not just in contest or test season.
- Enhance the teachers’ knowledge and preparation through professional development and specialized training.
- Seek ways to challenge teachers and to expand their efforts and performance. Mentors can be helpful for some.
- Make sure to find ways to satisfy their program needs as often as possible.
- Incorporate incentives, merits, and recognitions for the teachers whenever possible.
- Use knowledgeable observations, evaluation, feedback, and resources.
- It’s Always the People!

To establish an Exemplary Education Program, an effective system for success has to be developed. Teachers and administrators must:

- Create a culture or environment for excellence built on high expectations, clear communication, performance, assessment, feedback, corrections and performance. Seek ways to effectively work with students, parents, patrons, colleagues, and others in the program. Celebrate the victories and learn from the defeats or poor performances.
- Research and seek out the very best practices. There are many successful ways to do it; and there are just as many effective ways to do it. Make sure you understand the difference in the two. (Remember that good is the enemy of great! However, greatness is built on effectiveness and repetition.)
- When creating a system to support an exemplary educational program be sure to define the goals or expected outcomes first. These should guide or direct your efforts.
- “Start with the end in mind” (from Stephen Covey). You could call this your vision.
- Find the best way! That way will have the fewest variations and compromises. It is the way to pursue.
- Incorporate professional development and learning at the core of the system. Seek continuous improvement in order to maintain and elevate its excellence.
- Build in assessment and performance benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and the progress being made toward achieving the program’s goals.

- Always look to the people and the system before you blame the students. Seventy-five percent or more of program excellence resides in the adults working with children.
- Define what works most effectively, codify it, and build on this knowledge. Define the things that are least successful and eliminate them. This is a working model of “best” practice in action.
- Create means of eliminating excuses and blame. Find ways for students and staff to take ownership of all aspects of the program, the bitter and the sweet.

An exemplary program needs good public relations. There are many ways to inform others about the program, including:

- Share program information with students and parents.
- Share program successes with the students, teachers, and others in the school community, and then share them with the public community.
- Find ways to make feeder schools a part of the program. Share information, put on demonstrations, performances, etc.
- Seek to create feeder programs or programs at lower levels.
- Label your program as exemplary, outstanding, or excellent by constantly performing at a high level. Always choose quality over quantity.

Remember, the greatest danger to building an exemplary educational program is variations in the form of fads, mindless changes, and a lack of knowledge in the subject area. Know what you know!



Professor Maynard Thompson, Dr. Eugene White, and Steve Stults have breakfast, prior to Dr. White’s keynote speech, Thursday, June 28.