

The Apple Core

Superintendent's Message

Superintendent
Mark Dockins

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A good teacher is like a candle — it consumes itself to light the way for others.

Author Unknown

April Fools! You probably thought you weren't going to get to read an April issue of the Apple Core. Well, I was just trying to pull an April fool's joke on you. That's what I tried to explain to my wife when I forgot our anniversary too—it didn't go over as well as I had hoped. On another example of my lapse of memory, I tried telling her that we should celebrate Valentine's Day a week later because everyone celebrates it on the same day—why should we be like sheep and follow the herd? That went over as well as the April fool's joke. She's a smart one who seems to have an extremely long memory about things like forgotten birthdays and missed anniversary dates.

However, I keep hoping that someone from the Utah State Legislature will come on TV sometime soon and say, "April Fools!" in reference to the last legislative general session. In the end, when all budgets are put on the table, the bottom line for education is that the WPU was reduced

by twenty-three dollars from last year. Along with the budgeting issue of the legislative session, there was a considerable amount of legislation that has an impact on public education. Everything from grading schools to the makeup of school community councils has been changed in recent legislation—some with unintended negative consequences to public education. One thing is certain, children will come through the school house doors, and we will have the job of educating them, no matter what crazy new law we may have to deal with. I am also certain that the professionals in education will educate our children with the best skills and practices that are in their repertoire.

I have talked a great deal in past issues about collaboration on curriculum (What do we want students to know?), on assessment (How will we know when they know it?), and on intervention/enrichment (What do we do with students who don't know it or who already understand it?).

There is one more element that isn't clearly addressed by these questions, but is essential to student achievement—teaching.

Learning is driven by what teachers and students do in classrooms. Teaching with best practices is the most important element of instruction for all stu-



dents. If students receive poor initial instruction, all the interventions we do in the process of education will have little hope of helping all the students achieve at high levels. Overall student achievement can only be raised if teachers can manage the task of teaching more effectively. A focus on curriculum and assessment that ignores the process of teaching with research-based best practices in classrooms will not provide the direction teachers need to improve. This is why it is so important that we are able to collaborate

Superintendent's Message (Continued)

on student learning. Our professional development is embedded in every collaborative meeting we hold as a team. We are experts in what we do and we have the ability to discuss best practices every time we collaborate on student learning. Through the collaborative process we are able to fine-tune our teaching skills and practices. When a

team is truly collaborative—without ego, paranoia and fear of judgment—then the team can grow in their individual teaching skills. Teachers involved in this level of teamwork have come to understand the power and impact of improving their instructional skills, strategies, and tactics and the resulting benefits to student achievement.

Professional Learning Communities allow collaborative teams of teachers the opportunity to develop their instructional best practices, provided they use the results of common formative assessment to inform their classroom teaching.

*Teaching without learning
isn't teaching at all – it's
just presenting.*

Rebecca DeFour

Public Educators Will Make it Work – We Always Do

Kevin Dickson, Student Services Director

I don't really know when or why it happened, but I think it is official, after the 2011 Utah state legislative session, public educators are now an enemy of the state. Career educators appear to be the group standing in the way of educating our youth in the way the legislative leadership view as real education reform. Over a hundred new laws directed at public education were brought to the session. Now don't get me wrong, almost two of these laws actually make a positive impact on students.

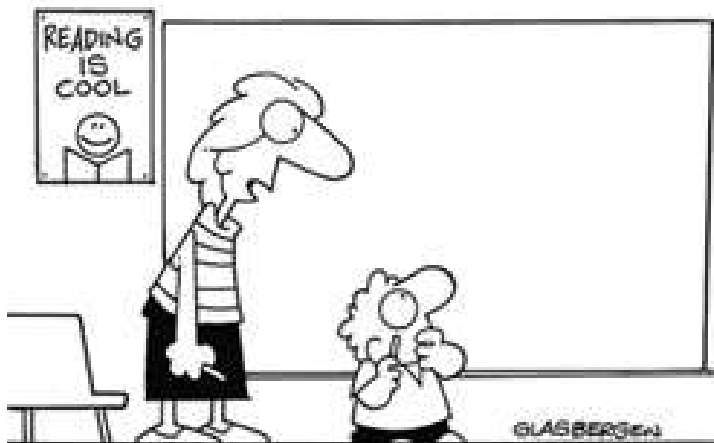
When I sort through the bills that became law, I am thankful the people writing and voting for these

bills were not the people that were in the classroom with my children. Although Wisconsin received all the headlines stripping educator's rights this year, Utah deserved much more recognition than they received.

I believe the flagship bill that villainizes educators is S.B. 59. We will now have another grading system that will grade all schools with a letter grade. For some reason I don't think the intention of the legislature was to allow schools to hang their "A" on the front window of the school. This was an idea brought to our state from the sunshine state. The state of Florida decided to make an effort to increase the quality of education in

their state. A commitment (one that contained additional funds) to lower class size and increase professional development in schools. A report card was part of the process to evaluate the growth schools obtained with the new push to improve education. Schools that did not achieve at an acceptable level were given additional resources to make changes necessary to improve student learning. The public schools in Florida were able to show improvement, and at the rate they are improving, they may catch the beehive state in student performance in a couple of decades. Our state leaders fell in love with the idea of being able to label schools, the lowering class size and committing funds to help struggling schools were not viewed as an important aspect of the Florida school reform plan. I will agree the grading is the cheapest and easiest part of the plan; but I don't have a lot of confidence grading schools alone will have a real impact on the quality of our schools.

I guess it is safe to announce, once again, Utah educators will be expected to do more with less. Thank you ahead of time. Because I know somehow, someday public educators will make it work. We always do.



"There aren't any icons to click. It's a chalk board."