

PARTNERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROP 49 GRANT PROPOSAL

“Now don’t go running off to school and come back some kind of informed idiot”. Becoming informed regarding the academic progress of Fairfield’s students and the power of after school programs brought warm reminiscences of my depression era Dad’s timeless quip.

On Oct 17th, the city council unanimously approved Community Services’ pursuit of Proposition 49 funds which will provide after school education for hundreds of Fairfield students for three years.

Healthy communities guard us against individuals ‘schooled’ in wrong choices. They incubate dreams and destinies anchored in good values. Wise communities change consumers of resources into producers and change destroyers of social harmony into creators of families and businesses.

Research shows \$2.29-\$4.03 saved for every dollar invested in after school programs with positive effects on remedial education, smoking, alcohol abuse, teen sex, enforcement, litigation and incarceration. Cultivated ignorance is costly. We must break the vicious cycle of sadness embodied by empty homes leading to empty heads.

Impassioned parents’ testimonials and insightful commentary resounded at that council meeting. Most deafening was the silence from our school administration. They were not there and are not on board, yet.

A common battle cry is ‘academic proficiency’. If you’re pretty savvy about statistics and data, you’ll learn proficiency is defined as scoring about a 60%-a low “D” on standardized tests, both state and the high school exit exam. Furthermore, the national target for high school graduation rate is only 82%. Aiming low is becoming a sickening and ominous habit for this nation and it spells disaster.

About 16,000 of our 23,000 students “struggle academically”. The gene pool has not changed; individual excellence certainly exists and the potential for mass excellence is there. Visionary cartoonist Walt Kelly of Pogo fame nailed it, “We have met the enemy and it is us!” It is not our talented, committed and hardworking educators, per se.

Mediocrity is pervasive and this nation is turning to mush. California’s fitness standards are modest. We stop checking past 9th grade yet only 25% of 9th graders pass all 6 basic criteria. Consistently setting low standards and failing to meet even them puts us at risk of becoming intellectually bankrupt and out of our depth in a rain puddle.

Education must also polish skills in creative thinking, problem solving, working on diverse teams, media and technology literacy, arts, music, drama and self direction. After school foundries must forge strong bodies, future leaders, and positive relationships with peers, adults, communities and authority figures.

Perhaps they can eliminate adulation of rump wiggling, excrement spewing, bed hopping bozos armed with technological tinkers toys, a tea cup Chihuahua and a cell phone. We must teach our children social responsibility and set them afire as life long learners while respecting diversity of races, families, cultures, wealth and the reality of multiple learning styles.

That 60% “D” is a modern “D” Day of equally cataclysmic proportions. Occupying armies of ignorance and apathy both conquer and are vanquished from within. Average nations can not compete. If you do not give the fuel of education in its many octane’s and embers to the growing child, the American dream will burn out.

After school program accountability is also crucial. Relevant outcome data must be collected, tracked and analyzed. This program must be the beginning of long term private, philanthropic, non profit, corporate, parental, law enforcement and governmental collaboration. Perhaps that’s item 1 of our Youth Summit-build the program-together.

It is time to build bridges; bridges to cross the chasm of mediocrity threatening to swallow our children. Bridges to ferry our future, embodied in Fairfield’s sons and daughters, out of the hinterlands of “good enough” and charging into fields of excellence.

I implore all stakeholders; build the right grant proposal—every jot and tittle, with community services and with the community. We need you.

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