

EDITORIAL

“Changing Live, Changing Communities”

March 31, 2011

In our society, we like to brag about our achievers and showcase their awards. We love to honor our kids with perfect attendance, outstanding community service, and excellent grades. We have grown accustomed to cheering our students on athletic fields and performance stages. But what about the 1 in 4 students who don't graduate in 4 years? What about the young people with high absentee rates who begin to lag behind long before the 9th grade. What about the quiet boys and girls who somehow slip away mentioning personal and family problems? The unruly boys who sleep in class and don't fit in or don't finish school?

I have often heard that students feel school seems pointless to them. Only 1 in 3 dropout students believes that our community treats young people like they are important to the future. I am a product of the Harlandale School District and I say that proudly. I understand what it is like to grow up in the inner city and live with little financial means. Neither of my parents where college educated but that never stopped them from instilling in me at an early age the value and importance of staying in school and having goals.

A couple of weeks ago, I worked with our local leaders to put a 1st annual SWISD “Changing Lives, Changing Communities” community event together because I wanted to discuss the importance our children are to all of us. I wanted to discuss our kids and emphasize the relevance for them to stay in school. I also wanted to stress that there are expectations for everyone; parents, children, and the community.

Everyone in Bexar County plays a role in a child's educational career and we all have a vested interest in students staying in school. Every child has a positive role to play in our community and it is our job as we come together to help them realize that and provide the tools they may need to develop those skills and interests. I believe that everyone in our community will agree on the fundamental value and importance of an education.

In Bexar County, we are extremely lucky because we have a combination of more than 5 public school districts and dozens of private educational institutions. In other regions, 1 in 5 children can not attend school because there are no schools in their area or their parents can not afford clothing and school supplies for the children. Bexar County and the City of San Antonio provide funding and resources to many programs that can address the daily issues that can sometimes put the strain on families that affect our children. As local leaders, we collectively host clothing drives and back pack drives to show parents and children that we do care about the needs of all families. We will come together to do what is necessary to ensure parents have help and kids have what they need for school.

As a community, we also care if you can not afford to pay your utility bill or are struggling to identify which bills are more important and what is not getting provided to the family.

Through the Community Service Development Block Grant that Bexar County receives on an annual basis for non-profit organizations who qualify to receive funding, Bexar County

Department of Community Resources sets aside more than \$140,000 annually for our Utility Assistance Program. Bexar County also provides funding for rental assistance programs, academic and life skills programs, education horizons, child care services, after school programs, prescription assistance, dental assistance, and food programs. Bexar County also provides funding for mental health and substance abuse assistance.

We as a community care about everything that may contribute to a child not going to school or staying there. Mom or dad may have lost their job. There may be a medical situation requiring additional bills that takes the already limited income. There are so many daily situations that as parents we deal with that also affect our kids. Having information on services or organizations is extremely important and that is the main reason why we came together for our event.

We were extremely lucky to have participated in our event, San Antonio's Mayor Julian Castro who has taken a great leadership role in reaching out to our community and our youth to inform them of the importance of college preparation. Whether our kids choose a 2 year college career path or a four year degree program with the possibility of graduate education work, preparedness is key to success. We also heard from Judge Monica Caballero who is one of our JP judges and oversees many truancy cases for many schools throughout Bexar County and the City of San Antonio. Judge Caballero has garnered a huge success rate with her hands on approach and implementation of programs. Our JP Courts are producing dynamic change in our community and producing real results.

Bexar County Sheriff Amadeo Ortiz also joined us in our event. The Sheriff works with our community service programs to make sure our youth receive outreach when instrumental. I was also extremely excited when we heard that Mario Lozoya from Toyota was coming out to participate in the event. Mario shared with us some of the vocational program initiatives Toyota is participating in and showcased the wonderful opportunities after high school graduation.

Sometimes local government can be a little limited on how involved we can get with the daily functions of how the school districts and their schools work to decrease the truancy rate and increase school retention. There are other ways we can become involved. The bottom line is that a high school diploma does not limit opportunities for our youth but instead provides a pathway to limitless opportunities. Bexar County has always been committed to produce the best workforce in this region. A high school diploma enables our children the ability to take their place as well-informed, engaged citizens in the years ahead.

Our community event at SWISD was a part of a larger continuing effort for the entire community to strive to boost educational attainment across the board. A high school diploma is the key starting point and you can not achieve that without school retention. The bottom line is that our kids must stay in school, work the best they can, and graduate. We have big corporations who are local like Rackspace, Medtronic, Toyota Texas, Allstate, and Khols just waiting to hire our newly graduated youth.

I have always been fond of the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child". As a leader in this village, I commit to making one of the first steps to meet this challenge. Let's all step up!



Principal Casper, Commissioner Chico Rodriguez, Mayor Julian Castro, Judge Monica Caballero, Sheriff Amadeo Ortiz, Mario Lozoya, Lloyd Verstuf, and Loretta Herrera at the 1st Annual SWISD "Changing Lives, Changing Communities" event.