

January/February 2011



NMACD Ensures that Successful Teaching and Learning are a Priority for All New Mexicans

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Check out the NMACD Healthy Child/Healthy Teacher Blog found on the NMACD website <http://nmascd.org>. Click on *Whole Teacher, Whole Child Blog* (see above) and follow and contribute to the conversation! This month's topic is **Challenged Teacher/Challenged Child**.

Supporting Each Other Toward Wholeness!

Dr. Ladona Clayton, NMACD President
Clovis Christian Schools

*I recently presented at the NMACD Fall Conference where my focus was on the wholeness that comes from having a healthy body, mind, and spirit. My presentation was based upon Mike Anderson's book *The Well Balanced Teacher: How to Work Smarter and Stay Sane Inside the Classroom and Out* (ASCD, 2010). In addition, it reflected years of experience in my own personal walk, as well as some important concepts I learned while completing my doctoral studies at Oral Roberts University (ORU). It was there that I learned the importance of balance. It was the first time I can remember being required to meet not only academic goals, but spiritual and physical goals as well. The physical wellness objectives required me to complete a series of courses that were solely focused on my personal fitness—nutrition, exercise, and renewal. I still remember that my final exam was the completion of a 3-mile walk in a highly challenging time limit reflective of my age bracket. It really stretched me!*

As my physical stamina grew, so did my spiritual strength. Each day we

were required to spend time in personal reflection, prayer, and Bible study. In addition, we attended chapel each week at the university. These practices fed my spirit, lessened daily stresses, and resulted in greater balance. Although Mike Anderson does not endorse a single religion, he does highlight the importance of participating in an organized religion. Here, people can get connected and build networks of support through common values and beliefs. They can seek guidance and experience personal growth.

Rest and renewal are also key elements of wholeness. Spending time outdoors, getting adequate sleep on a consistent basis, and surrounding yourself with the elements of nature in your classroom and at home are three ways you can attain a healthier, happier you.

My experiences at ORU set into motion a commitment to lifelong fitness and well-being. However, it was Mike Anderson's book that inspired me to share the knowledge gathered about balance and well being with my school faculty and staff. This January, as we all returned from our Christmas break, we spent time in professional development creating a plan for experiencing a healthy body, mind, and spirit to support each other toward wholeness. I have outlined below the series of steps we took, as we committed to hold each other up to meet our personal wellness goals:

1. Assess your wellness by completing a health inventory such as, "My Basic Health Inventory" (located on the NMACSD website, click on the "Resources" tab, then click on "2010 Fall Conference." Scroll down to "Click here for presentations").
2. Identify your greatest challenges and your strengths by answering each question candidly.
3. Locate a Whole-Teacher Teammate—Be sure this is someone who can walk this journey with you. Share your need areas with him/her and begin identifying some reasonable goals together. Commit to holding each other accountable.
4. Complete your personalized wellness plans and agree upon your established goals. Implement your plan and track your progress. Care for one another. Encourage each other by celebrating your successes and doing consistent checkpoints to identify improvement areas where the plan may need adjusting.

In regards to your health goals, if you would like to connect with an online community or to avail yourself of some great tracking tools, I would highly recommend that you visit Dr. Oz's website. Recently, Dr. Oz launched his "11 Weeks to Move It or Lose It," which is centered upon building a community of support to ensure that you succeed. Here, at www.DoctorOz.com, you can find a five-step plan complete with essential accountability tools AND a network of experts to support your efforts. Talk about supported! You should check this out! And, everything is FREE!

There is also a plethora of fitness applications to load on your cell phone,

iPod, iPad, and other personal electronic devices. Tools like these can equip you with a variety of useful measures and methods for reaching your goals.

Now is the time to get connected! By being supported, you will achieve greater balance and live life to the fullest!

The Educator's Challenge

*Dr. Judith Tanner, NMASCD Executive Director
Las Cruces Public Schools*

As educators, we must set high expectations for our students. We must challenge every student each day they are in our classrooms. We must assure that our students become critical thinkers and problem solvers. In their article, "Conditions for Challenging Learner's Performance", Peter Smith and Linda Spoelman suggest that we must create a 'quality learning environment'. Smith and Poelman's ten steps for establishing quality learning environments are as follows:

- 1. Establish initial respect by recognizing each learner as an individual*
- 2. Start the process with no-prejudging by ignoring the history of baggage that some children bring with them to new situations;*
- 3. Obtain shared commitment by having both the teacher and students on the same page with respect to their commitment to working together to achieve high results;*
- 4. Foster and support risk-taking so the learner is unafraid of making mistakes;*
- 5. Permit the learner to fail so students understand that their demands for affirmation, validation and answers to every question will not always be met;*
- 6. Set high expectations because students typically perform to the level of teacher expectations;*
- 7. Establish clear performance criteria which are stated rather than assumed;*
- 8. Implement a quality assessment system which gives students feedback on how to improve, especially when their performance does not meet the established standard;*
- 9. Document performance so students will see evidence that they are making progress; and*
- 10. Continuously challenge performance so students will display higher levels of performance.*

Creating a quality learning environment can be challenging, but also extremely rewarding to both teacher and student. We must challenge our students to be the best that they can be!

Educating Our Gifted: A Continuing Challenge

*Lori Comallie-Caplan
Las Cruces Public Schools*

With much of the state's attention currently focused on raising non-proficient students performance to meet proficiency standards, it is

difficult to create a sense of urgency for the needs of gifted students because many of them score well on standardized tests. But some gifted students are falling through the cracks. The myth that gifted students can get a good education on their own, still persists. While gifted students may have extraordinary potential, without instruction that meets their individual academic and social needs, their potential may be squandered. It is often quoted that 18 to 22% of high school dropouts are gifted students.

Most gifted students in New Mexico receive the majority of their instruction in a regular classroom with teachers who have not been trained to teach gifted students. Teaching the gifted student in the regular classroom can be challenging, but also rewarding for teachers who are open minded and willing to learn about the needs of gifted students. Having a gifted child in your class can be exciting because they are hungry for knowledge, but at the same time exhausting because of their emotional intensities. It is not enough to give them “more of the same”. We cannot succeed with our gifted students if we use a “one size fits all” approach. With careful planning combined with creativity and a commitment to appropriately educating the gifted child, most school districts can meet this challenge by offering a mix of clustering, differentiation, acceleration and coaching.

Clustering gifted students allows them time with “like minded peers”. Gifted students will choose more challenging tasks when other gifted students are participating in activities designed on their passions and learning interests. Differentiation is essential for the gifted students to move forward. Differentiation strategies are based on regular pre-assessments to adjust the lessons to give the gifted student advanced areas of knowledge, rather than sitting through something they already know. Acceleration steps-up the curriculum finding the best match between the level of curriculum and students’ abilities and readiness. Coaching/Counseling strategies provide a gifted student with opportunities to explore and adjust to their unique social and emotional characteristics as well as teach self-advocacy. Early college and career counseling is essential to gifted students who often struggle with multipotentiality.

Gifted students in New Mexico have the potential to be our future scientists, engineers, teachers, business and political leaders. This state must commit to educating and developing the talents of its best and brightest students and to foster their growth. If we fail to meet this challenge, we are risking the survival of our state’s unique combination of multicultural arts and progress in the sciences. We risk the very institutions that have come to define our state: Intel, Los Alamos Sandia Labs, NASA, and our Universities. Meeting the challenge of educating the gifted may preserve the future of our state, even our nation.

Lori Comallie-Caplan is the President Elect of SENG (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) and a Counselor, Evaluator and Advocate for the Gifted in Las Cruces

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