

Enrichment News

Wenatchee School District Enrichment Program

Mission: To find and nurture talent in students by providing and supporting opportunities for them to pursue their interests at an appropriate pace and level of complexity and regular opportunities to work with students of similar abilities

Kari DeMarco, Editor, 662-9047 ~ demarco.k@mail.wsd.wednet.edu ~ February 2009



Adequacy or Excellence?

Recently I was lucky enough to attend the NAGC (National Association for Gifted Children) conference. There were many amazing speakers, some quite well known in my field, and I tried to see as many of them as I could. But perhaps I was the most impressed by the one bearing the title “Demanding Excellence Amidst a National Environment of Adequacy” by a man I had never heard of.

The speaker was raised in a cattle ranching family, eventually entered and succeeded in the business world, and later became an educator. He is currently given the honorary title National Administrator of the Year by NAGC. Well, I’m hard to impress, so the title alone didn’t do much for me. Nor did his fashionable outfit, good looks, or aw-shucks charm. Big deal. But upon listening to the speaker, Will Schofield, he really struck a chord with me, and perhaps with you. Read on.

Schofield is calling for a “counter-cultural, radical shift in focus from ‘adequacy’ to ‘excellence’ in education.” He states that the unintended consequence of *A Nation at Risk* and *No Child Left Behind* is an era of accountability. That would be fine, except that the accountability is for mere adequacy, basic competency. He says that the focus is on remediation, a narrow focus on *only* the “most fragile” to the frustration of our “most able.” He points out that people will spend time on that which is measured, and educators know they will be labeled “good teacher” or bad, “good school” or bad, based on getting the struggling students to adequacy. But what about those able to go beyond mere adequacy? Do they not also deserve our time and attention?

Schofield contends that it is not only moral to also serve the needs of the “most able,” but a necessary shift if our country is to regain its competitive edge, resurrect its failing economy. “There are a billion Indians in the world market, China is 1.2 billion strong. The world is changing. Our competition is elsewhere in the world,” he points out. Due to the “digitization” of work—meaning work that can travel over the worldwide web—70% of our jobs could go elsewhere. The average hourly pay in the Silicon Valley is \$156. In India they will do the same work for \$15 an hour. As Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, says, we need to help our young people not only master the basics, but do what Americans do best: invent, create, and think outside the box.

In Schofield’s words, “Shouldn’t we switch to a culture of excellence, enrichment, creativity, inquiry, celebration, calculated risk, high support, focus on unlimited potential of *all* (including the most able)?” He contends our new president should avoid “tinkering” in favor of “a seismic shift” in education. He suggests we start with standards, but then go beyond the standardized test. Have students grapple with important concepts and engage in sustained inquiry, relevant thinking. Emphasize application of knowledge to produce something new and useful. “Character, competency, and rigor for all—pull them all up from the top,” he said, demonstrating with his hands. “Focus on excellence, and be confident that everything else will take care of itself.”

Schofield also referred us to the movie *Two Million Minutes* by Robert Compton. It is about how gifted kids in three countries—India, China, and the U.S.—spend their four years (or two million

minutes) in high school. For example, China has a nine hour school day and goes a full month longer. That adds up to a lot more time spent in class, and the students in the video claimed that even after the school day is through, studying is their first priority. India is a similar story.

Now perhaps, like me, you wouldn't advocate spending quite so much more time in school, nor on endless studying after school. But perhaps you can see why we simply must not squander the precious time we do have with our students. Every minute should be spent helping kids live up to their own individual potential, no matter what that is. Every student, parent, teacher, and administrator should help students achieve not mere adequacy, but their own personal version of excellence.

Important Enrichment Dates

Tuesday, March 3, 7 pm, Academic Challenge orientation, WHS commons, for 9th graders with a 3.0 or higher GPA
Tuesday, March 17, 7 pm, Advanced Placement info night, WHS commons, for any interested students
Friday, March 20, Academic Challenge forms due for 9th graders and deadline to pay for AP exams (\$86 per exam at ASB office)
Monday, March 23, 6:30 pm, Culminating Event (Debate) at FMS for 4th and 5th gr. Newsroom students
Monday, May 4 through Friday, May 17, Advanced Placement exams
Tuesday, May 19, 7th grade Challenge Trip to University of Washington/Woodland Park Zoo
Thursday, May 21, 6:30 pm, Visionscape at WHS (for Directed Study students)
Friday, May 29, 6th grade Challenge Trip to CWU/Chimposium
Tuesday, June 2, 8th grade Challenge Trip to Marine Science Center in Seattle

Worthy Quotes

"All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent." – John F. Kennedy, Civil Rights Address

"Creativity is like life insurance. If you are creative, you are never afraid, because you can design yourself out of any situation." – Li Edelkoort

"Closing the achievement gap by pushing down the top is like fostering fitness by outlawing marathons." – Helen Schinske

"All that we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." -- Gandalf the Grey

"Justice is what love looks like in public." -- Cornel West

The Wenatchee School District complies with all federal and state rules and regulations and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, sexual orientation, including gender identity, disability, familial status, marital status or age. This holds true for all staff and for students who are interested in participating in educational programs and/or extracurricular school activities. Inquiries regarding compliance and/or grievance procedures may be directed to RCW Officer and ADA Coordinator Mr. Steve Cole. Issues related to 504 should be directed to Mr. Chet Harum, Administrator for Student and Support Services.