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A Messenger for Change

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A Messenger for Change

Mary Ann Whitekerⁱ

Hudson Independent School District

*Listen my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere...
And so through the night went his cry of alarm...
A cry of defiance, and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
A word that shall echo for evermore!
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear,
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight MESSAGE of Paul Revere!*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1861)

Malcolm Gladwell’s book “The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference” looks at how major changes in our society often happen due to ideas, behavior and messages spreading in a manner similar to the outbreak of an illness — hence the coining of the term, “social epidemic.”

Gladwell used Paul Revere’s famous ride to Lexington to illustrate the power of “messaging”. Following the Boston Tea Party, the American Colonists reached a point of no return. Revere became the “one man – one voice”, starting a social epidemic that eventually led to the creation of a new nation! Revere carried the message; however, those he told carried the message to others – thus the epidemic. The contagious “spreading” of the message resulted in a new beginning for America.

It is now time for all educators to embrace the power of a social epidemic. Schools across Texas are embracing a “New Vision for Texas Public Schools”. This vision embraces schools where all students are engaged in relevant, rigorous, meaningful activities and where classrooms reflect innovation, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, communication and critical thinking. In this new vision, daily standardized test preparation and boring fact-memorization skills are replaced with digital learning, curriculum standards relevant to real-world challenges, multiple assessments for student performance, and accountability that’s based on a combination of measures, not just one state mandated test. It is about creating student-centered schools and future-ready students.

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This 21st Century New Vision embraces 6 principles:

- Seizing technology's potential
- New learning standards for the 21st century
- Appropriate and varied types of assessments
- A comprehensive accountability system that creates and promotes sustained performance
- A transformation of schools from the current bureaucratic form that has been in existence since the 19th century
- Return of authority and responsibility to local communities.

This vision is a declaration for education, one that can transform classrooms into centers that promote students owning their learning rather than learning for a state mandated test!

Sadly, the 2012-2013 state tests are now on steroids! During the 82nd Legislative Session, the state assessment system, TAKS, was retired and STAAR was born for grades 3-8. STAAR is elevated to 15 End-of-Course (EOC) exams for high school students, with 15% of the test score impacting the student's course grade. These new tests are not basic knowledge skills tests. These tests are designed to measure college readiness for all students, failing to acknowledge the unique talents, interests, and abilities of our most precious resources. Ironically, colleges and universities never consider these tests as part of the admissions requirements. Colleges, as well as the business community, continue to report our students are not prepared to enter either pathway. Students are lacking work ethics, technical skills, problem solving, collaboration, inquiry skills, research, etc. Why is the state increasing the focus on this state test when the past reflects the tests were not preparing our students for the future?

Public education is approaching the "tipping point"! Public education has been the great equalizer of our nation and the strength of our economy; however, the present system is no longer meeting the needs of our students or our future. Today's students must be rescued from the over-regulated, antiquated factor model of the present educational system. Our 21st century classrooms must create environments where students are designing the tasks, raising the questions, creating the knowledge. Cross-disciplinary/workforce skills must be valued and integrated within the curriculum to insure 21st century students are prepared for multiple pathways.

It is time for all educators to embrace the power of a social epidemic. We need 21st century schools preparing students for the future. Be a "messenger for change"!

References

Longfellow, H.W. (1861, January). Paul Revere's Ride. *The Atlantic Monthly*.