

THIRD ANNUAL STATE OF EDUCATION
PROMISES MADE, PROMISES KEPT

January 4, 2006

I have been reading a book called “Escalante, the Best Teacher in America,” by Jay Matthews. The book is about Jaime Escalante, whose life and teaching methods were the subject of a movie called “Stand and Deliver.” Escalante was a Bolivian immigrant, who motivated a large number of students in a low income Hispanic neighborhood to take advanced placement calculus, and do well enough on the advanced placement test to obtain college credit. In the year the book was published, his school was fourth highest in the country for number of students who passed the advanced placement calculus test. All 14 of the other 15 highest placing schools were in rich neighborhood schools or competitive city-wide schools. Escalante’s personal classes accounted for one out of every four Mexican-Americans taking AP Calculus in the whole country that year.

Here is what Jaime Escalante, *The Best Teacher in America*, said to his students on the first day of class:

The only thing you have to do over here, you have to work with *ganas*. [This means desire.] You don’t have to have a high IQ, not like the ones that have one twenty, one forty IQ. Myself, I have a negative IQ. So the only thing I require of you is the *ganas*. ...

My two doors are open all day long, till six or seven o’clock....You are going to make it if you follow my instructions. Remember, this is Garfield High School. This is not a bubble gum high school. We prepare kids for college....If you are going to be in chemistry, physics, biology, or electronics, the language is mathematics, so if you have the domain of the language, you are going to make it.

Now, let me read to you about one of Jaime Escalante’s students. The student’s name is Steve Robles.

Steve Robles was a lean, darkly handsome boy who spoke in rapid, infrequent bursts, like a machine gun probing an enemy's defenses. He lived near Salazar Park in a geographically and economically depressed area called "The Hole.".....[Steve was often called into his counselor’s office] for some transgression, such as truancy or failure to do homework. ...

[Steve was assigned to Escalante’s] tenth-grade Algebra class. He sat in the back and watched as the teacher with the accent threw two latecomers out of the class. This was fun, he told himself. He liked mathematics and thought a teacher like that might reduce the usual boredom. ...

[Steve] took the summer course in trigonometry and mathematical analysis. ...He then took AP calculus and received a 5 on the AP test. [A 3 gets you college credit, and 5 is the highest grade you can get.]

* * *

Escalante encouraged him to enter a \$500 essay contest for prospective young engineers. "Of course, Stevie, if you win the five hundred dollars, you will have to give me a hundred, that is the deal," he said. [Steve] solemnly agreed. When [Steve] won the essay contest, Escalante negotiated another deal. He would advance the boy money for suitable clothes for the banquet. In return, [Steve] would get a haircut.

[Steve] arrived at Escalante's office the next week, almost unrecognizable in new clothes, his ears clearly visible. He was businesslike. "I got the cash. Here's the hundred dollars.

"It's a joke, Stevie," Escalante said. "The money is yours."

The boy looked startled, then smiled, then laughed, then frowned. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know. Nobody ever did nothing for me. I have a father, but I don't see him much. Now I know you, and you know me."

Escalante's work has inspired one of my initiatives for this year. I'll be telling you about that at the end of my speech. But the success of Escalante's students illustrates some principles that I've tried to apply statewide since I took office.

There are some fads on which a lot of money is being spent in other states on things as reorganizing schools. I've avoided those because there's no scientific evidence that they actually produce more student learning. More student learning depends on three basics: first, the quality of teachers; second, rigor of the curriculum; and third, the motivation of the students.

To be sure we keep our eye on these goals, and do not become distracted, I group my initiatives each year under three headings; Better Schools, Better Teachers, Better Curriculum.

This is my third annual state of education speech. A tradition has developed whereby I review what we have achieved on the initiatives started the previous year under the theme "Promises Made, Promises Kept," and then I discuss new initiatives for this year.

Last year, I announced five initiatives, grouped as we do every year, under the categories: Better Schools, Better Teachers, Better Curriculum. The first initiative under "Better Schools" was intervention in schools that were underperforming for three years, and therefore labeled as failing to meet academic standards. Last year, there were 81 schools that had been underperforming for two years. We focused our efforts in helping those 81 schools. These efforts were through Solutions Teams, each team consisting of three outstanding Arizona teachers and administrators, a program that has been extremely successful and well received by

schools needing help. 70 of 81 schools increased student learning, and therefore student test scores, sufficiently to become performing schools. That left only 11 schools needing intervention, which is a tribute to the hardworking teachers and principals at those 70 schools, and also, to the Department of Education Solutions Teams.

In addition to intervention, we continued to work hard helping the schools improve. We are inveterate helpers. Seven months into the program, only two of the schools remain as failing schools. The other nine have raised student learning enough to become performing schools. We continue to work on this goal – never again in Arizona will there be a school that students attend and do not learn.

Improving underperforming schools – A Promise Made, A Promise Kept.

The second initiative under Better Schools was to promote volunteering by adults to help students in the schools, one on one, achieve academic proficiency. As with all of our initiatives, this is not a one-year effort, but a permanent improvement program. It was therefore important that we form partnerships with a number of other organizations to create a program that would be sustained. We have achieved partnerships with the following 19 organizations:

- [AARP (American Association of Retired Persons),
- AASRA (All Arizona School Retirees Association,
- Arizona Community Foundation,
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters,
- Communities in Schools,
- HOPE Volunteers,
- Korean War Veterans,
- Maricopa Volunteer Center,
- Masons Paradise Valley Silver Trowel Lodge No. 29,
- National Service SaYES (Seniors and Youth Engaging in Service),
- OASIS (Older Adult Service and Information System),
- Reading Seeds,
- RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program),
- Senior Corp,
- SGIG in Arizona,
- The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons,
- Tuba City Volunteers,
- Volunteer Center of Southern Arizona,
- Youth Counts

One of the key components of this program is training. Three training sessions were held in Flagstaff, Phoenix, and Tucson, attended by personnel representing 28 schools districts and 20 community-based organizations from across the state.

We obtained a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. We distributed minigrants to schools, who trained almost 2,000 volunteers in this program alone, who in turn have contributed over 55,000 hours so far. Part of the continuing initiative is an online service to match volunteers with schools.

Training and placing volunteers – A Promise Made, A Promise Kept.

The third initiative came under the heading “Better Teachers.” This was the increased use of technology to help teachers. This year, we launched IDEAL, a single portal on the internet for teachers to access professional development and teaching resources. As we continue our IDEAL initiative, we will expand the technical capabilities so that teachers will be able to communicate with students and parents via the internet, and the community at large will be able to see how Arizona schools are performing. All will be open and transparent. This project was undertaken as a partnership with Arizona State University and a group related to ASU, called ASSET. The first stage was sample AIMS tests, so that anyone could take practice tests. Making this available to all citizens reduced the mysterious nature of the AIMS test under prior administrations. The second stage was to facilitate online teacher training. Teachers can complete coursework wherever and whenever they choose. Some of the course work, such as structured English Immersion training, is provided free. Through delivery of United Streaming, all teachers have access to over 3,000 titles of films of actual lessons. As IDEAL continues to develop, it will enable teachers to communicate with students and parents on what is being covered in class, how the student is doing, what homework is due, etc. It will also make important educational data available to everyone in the state.

Supporting teachers through technology – A Promise Made, A Promise Kept.

The fourth initiative, also under Better Teachers, was an initiative for training teachers in mathematics, similar to the successful initiative that we have had in training teachers in the most up-to-date methods for teaching reading.

We have formed a task force through partnerships with the Arizona Association of Teachers of Mathematics, the state universities, the Center for Research on Education in Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology, (CRESMET), the Rodel Foundation, National Board Certified Teachers, the K-12 Center and the Arizona Education Association.

Throughout the year, state sponsored professional development opportunities were provided for K-12 teachers. In the past year, 30 one and two-day sessions were offered in various locations around the state, training a total of 2,784 educators.

Better mathematics training for teachers – A Promise Made, A Promise Kept.

Our fifth initiative, under the heading of Better Curriculum, was to expand our career and technical education programs especially in three areas.

First in automotive technology, we promised to increase the number of programs certified by the highly demanding National Automotive Technology Education Foundation by

two programs. Four programs have completed the requirements and are awaiting their certification.

Second, we promised to increase the number of nursing services and allied health programs by three. Six programs, double the amount, have received site visits and will be approved programs.

Third, we promised to increase the number of instructors certified by the American Design Drafting Association by two, and delivered seven.

More and better career and technical education programs – A Promise Made, A Promise Kept.

In all areas, we exceeded our promises. This is a good summary for all five initiatives. As in previous years: Promises Made, Promises Kept.

That brings us to the initiatives for this year.

Initiative No. 1: To do everything possible to help students who need it, so they can acquire the skills needed to pass the AIMS test and acquire the basic skills they will need in today's economy.

Under Better Schools, we must make sure that every high school senior has received the opportunity to learn what is necessary to pass the AIMS test and graduate. Last year, we provided a free tutoring program for all students who needed to pass an AIMS test to graduate. For those who participated, the program was wildly successful. Over 90 percent of the students either became proficient, or moved from "falls far below" to "approaches."

But the problem was that only 6,000 students, out of the 20,000 who needed the tutoring, actually took advantage of the opportunity. My job is to make the tutoring more attractive so more students will take advantage of the free opportunity we are providing to them.

To help us design a program, we held focus groups of students. First, all those who took the tutoring found it very helpful. Some of the students needed tutoring but did not sign up for it. They told us in the focus groups that they had been asked in class to raise their hands if they wanted tutoring and were embarrassed to raise their hands in front of their peers. We will therefore communicate to the schools that there needs to be a way for students to sign up for tutoring that respects their privacy. Another group of students said it was hard to come to school before or after normal school hours. We are therefore also communicating to the schools that tutoring can take place at lunch time or other times during normal school hours, as along as the tutoring supplements, and does not displace, the regular program.

And because one of the biggest apparent obstacles to students getting needed tutoring is the fact that many of them don't even know it's available, I'm implementing two new strategies to help achieve this vital goal.

Beginning today, the state Department of Education will open the “AIMS Hotline.” This toll-free hotline will be staffed during normal business hours with customer assistance professionals who can answer questions from students and parents who want to know more about the AIMS test and the tutoring services available from the state, districts and charter schools.

The toll free statewide AIMS hotline number is: 866-688-AIMS. That is 866-688-2467. In addition to that, we’ve established a web address at WWW – dot – AZAIMS – dot – GOV.

Our first initiative this year, then, will be to do everything possible to get help to the students who need it, so they can acquire the skills needed to pass the AIMS test, and more importantly, acquire the basic skills they will need in today’s economy.

In the meantime, the requirement that students pass the AIMS test has freed the state from the grips of a social promotion ideology that sometimes enabled students to go from grade to grade whether they learned anything or not, and graduate from high school whether or not they had the skills necessary to succeed in today’s economy. For the first time, we will be able to say that a student with a diploma has demonstrated, on a reasonable, objective test, that the student has the skills that we expect of a high school graduate.

Initiative No. 2: Higher compensation for our teachers.

The second initiative comes under the heading “Better Teachers.” The initiative for this coming year is to work hard to achieve higher compensation for our teachers. Nothing is more important than the quality of our teachers. We have worked hard on the accountability side. We are holding our schools and our teachers accountable for results.

But none of this can succeed unless we do a better job of retaining the highly qualified teachers that we have, and attracting a much greater number of talented people into teaching. The time has come to increase teacher compensation. I proposed a \$2,500 tax credit which, in after tax dollars, would be the equivalent of a \$3,500 raise in gross pay. This would close two-thirds of the gap between the average teacher salary in Arizona and the national average, and set the stage for us to close the remainder of the gap in future years. If the legislature prefers to increase compensation by budgeting more money to the districts, so they can give a raise in the pretax salary, that is all right with me. What ultimately matters is that we increase teacher compensation, so that we can do a better job of retaining our highly qualified teachers, and attracting more new highly qualified teachers.

Initiative No. 3: Increase the number of students taking a rigorous curriculum.

The third and final initiative for next year comes under “Better Curriculum.” This is to increase the number of students taking a rigorous curriculum. Recent research shows that the best factor in predicting a student’s success in college is not the SAT or the ACT, or even school grades, but rather how rigorous a curriculum the student takes. I’ll use advanced placement as a shorthand for rigorous programs, which include programs such as International Baccalaureate and honors classes.

Without taking an advanced placement class in high school, the likelihood of finishing college in four years or less is 29 percent. With just one advanced placement class that percentage jumps up to 45 percent. With two or more advanced placement classes that percentage raises to 61 percent. Advanced Placement courses are now available across the curriculum – from calculus to American history to art history and music theory.

This is where the example of Escalante has been an inspiration. Some schools use advanced placement as a reward for high grades in previous courses, or on a qualifying test. But Escalante grabbed every student who was motivated and willing to do the work. Every student who had *ganas*. If they lacked prerequisites in algebra or trigonometry, he had them pick it up in summer schools. If they had *ganas*, they could succeed. We will work hard to encourage advanced placement availability in all high schools and to encourage the schools to follow Escalante's example: first, eliminate requirements for entry into advanced placement courses (other than content requirements); then, encourage as many students as possible to undertake the hard work of entry to the courses – as a result, substantially increase the percentage of Arizona high school students who obtain a passing score on the advanced placement tests.

Arizona has many Escalantes. I'm sure there are many at this school. I'd like to ask the teachers present to stand up so we can pay tribute to you. The Department of Education is identifying our most successful teachers and principals to showcase the strategies and programs that have worked for them. Through the Arizona High School Renewal Initiative Summits, these Arizona "stars" are provided a forum for sharing their successes. The "best of the best" are recognized at our Spotlight on Success Awards Banquet. Our Benchmark Best Practices Conference on January 11th and 12th will showcase successful program models from the elementary and middle schools. By working hard, using our most successful teachers and principals as models to improve Arizona's schools, teachers and curriculum, I believe we can ultimately bring success to every Arizona student.

Next year I will again report on "Promises Made, Promises Kept! It is my continuing pledge to you.