

Educationally Speaking
October 2010

Yes, I am angry. Most recently, it is in response to National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) "Education Nation" conference that includes as part of its mission statement the following commentary: "Our workforce is largely unprepared for today's rapidly changing marketplace, and we face stiff competition from abroad. Forty years ago, our students were first. As other countries have gained ground in educating their students, America's public schools have stalled. Among 30 developed nations, we rank 24th in Math, 17th in Science and 10th in Literacy." NBC is not the first, nor will it be the last to criticize public education.

In pursuit of their personal agenda, parents, employers, and politicians are bashing public education while ignoring inconvenient truths. What are those inconvenient truths? The United States continues to be the most economically competitive country in the world. The U.S. is the most innovative, as measured by patents issued. The U.S. is the most democratic.

There is negative or no correlation between performance on international test measures and economic output, hourly productivity, quality of life, democracy, creativity, and livability. China is trying to emulate our educational system and Singapore is emphasizing the explicit teaching of critical and creative thinking skills. So, why are the state and federal governments placing such an emphasis on standardized learning and assessment?

If our country is successful at ensuring that there is a greater number of engineers with high levels of mastery of mathematics and science, why will businesses in our country or overseas pay \$45,000 per year for work that an Indian engineer will do for \$7,500 per year? No amount of education will change this economic reality. Our students need skills that are not easily and more cheaply duplicated in other countries.

I do not disagree that there is room for improvement in our schools. The following truths also exist. Each of us is familiar with students who earn high school diplomas and still lack basic skills, ineffective teachers and administrators who interfere with learning, and schools where students are not safe.

I am committed to improving the quality of education our students receive and increasing the effectiveness of all employees. Our district needs to improve the productivity of all our resources in meeting student needs. I believe the evidence exists that we are making progress, recognizing more improvements need to be implemented.

Dale J. Mitchell, Ed.D.
Superintendent