

Public Education is a birthright in the USA, but it is our job to ensure that education happens!
“Let us put our minds together and see what light we can give our children.” (Sitting Bull)

The conference was an action-packed conference with so many excellent sectionals that it was often difficult to decide which session to attend. It was a fabulous conference, and I gained incredible insight from the individual sessions and from the keynote speakers. To top off the conference, I was in awe of the high school music groups - The Singing Brothers of Stilwell from Georgia and Vocal Synergy group from New Jersey. I missed the Mariachi Juvenil Azteca from Texas as I was attending the AIAN Business meeting. Music really does make the world go round! I enjoyed the sessions listed below!

Keynote: Sir Ken Robinson – “We must create schools where kids learn and love to learn. The whole thing is about relationships between teachers and students! We cannot improve schools unless we improve our relationships, empower our students, and include resources to support those relationships. Not only are school boards doing one of the most important jobs today, but they are also positively influencing students each day and preparing them for the future. Our relationships and our embrace to students shows how we embrace our jobs.”

AIAN luncheon: Gene Tagaban – “This room is standing room only because our ancestors are standing with us. They knew they were bringing awesome into the world, and they are expecting us to bring awesome into this world! Our students, should not be forgotten by our actions or by our misdirected action. We need to remember that we are more than what we do. Show people who we are.

Succeeding in Academics and Ethics in a Culturally Diverse School District – Keys to their success include developing measurable goals; differentiating instruction; strategizing to eliminate gates to quality instruction; incorporating interventions for struggling students, developing portals of communication between parents, teachers, students, and administration; and more.

Wellbeing and Resiliency for Educators and the Classroom – Increase resiliency in educators and staff by providing them support and reviewing coping skills that help them bounce back from everyday situations and stressful situations. Mindfulness is very important! Climate can support or deter physical and mental health. Provide supports through talk space, portals, employee assistance/service options.

Art of Good Governance (BoardDocs) PAFA Museum – An evening of art, music, food, & conversation.

AIAN Business Meeting – Discussed the equity symposium, increasing membership in the AIAN Council, and voted in new governing members. There was a lengthy discussion about what the council can do to help students. “I cannot just say, I am a board member. I must say, “What can I do to help you as a student, a teacher, a principal, or a parent?” A board member cannot just state a problem without stating and working on a solution.

NatCon Focus Group by Invitation - Social Sentinel - The aim of the group was to build a positive connection and a positive environment in schools. The focus group discussed the importance of ‘real time awareness’ of critical issues and incidents and how to respond to these issues and incidents. Also, the discussion focused on taking a close look at the climate and behavioral culture within a school and how this can help in the response to incidents. School partnerships with safety personnel, a monitoring service, and potentially the inclusion of a School Resource Officer (SRO) can be a benefit.

How Smart Is Your Board? Build EQ (Emotional Intelligence) & Avoid the “Glue” of a Sticky Situation
Emotional Intelligence – A person should be aware of comments he/she makes and how those comments may potentially affect others! An individual should also be cognizant of his/her self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and personal social skills while also learning how to tamp down negative emotions. EQ can improve as one matures. Oftentimes, a person can have a high IQ and a low EQ. Learning how to maintain a positive, productive communicative atmosphere is vital to the success of a school board as it can minimize and/or resolve conflicts. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is more predictive of an organization’s success than cognitive ability and technical skill.

Redesigning Schools for Innovation & Equity through the 7 C’s – “Success is deeply personal; and if we know students’ goals and dreams for both in and out of the classroom, and help them work towards achieving them, our impact will last long after their time under our care.” George Couros, author.
Justice? Equality? Fairness? Equity? How do school boards model and lead for innovation & equity? Boards should have training in restorative practices, bias understanding, and constructive behavior. Implementation of Restorative circles can be successful. The 7 C’s of this practice include collaboration, civil engagement, communication, cultural competency, character development, creativity, and critical thinking. The 7 C’s are coupled with 3 pillars of Innovation Readiness: people + process + place. Park City school district has implemented a CAPS Program (Center for Advanced Professional Studies) at the high school level that connects students to businesses and mentors. It is an amazing program!

Building a Strong Foundation and The Importance of Early Learning (5 Star Step Up Quality Program)
Social foundation – Emersion vital and relationships with students/parents/teachers paramount;
Academic foundation – Exposure to open-ended curriculum, reading, journaling, teacher input;
Behavioral foundation – Positive feedback essential, clearly stated expectations, encouragement;
Curriculum – AEPS is not scripted, provides an idea and gives educators ten+ ways to proceed;
Resources - Early Language Assessment (state test) Every state has Fed grants provided by governor.

How to Respond to Cyberbullying, Online Threats, and Social Media Challenges – Law enforcement (Safe Schools for All) To consider – stop zero tolerance approach because not all students equally culpable, listen to students, praise students and ask them how you can help, gain and maintain trust, include parents and put them to work. Other areas discussed included snapchat, google images, creation of accounts, and reporting options.

Keynote: Michele Gay – Co-founder of Safe & Sound Schools: A Sandy Hook Initiative – Prevention should be proactive not reactive! First check out each school’s ‘sign in’ procedure! Have a plan: Prepare, Practice, Prepare again, Response, Practice...recovery begins with a response to the situation! We MUST have mental health protection/practice in place...the ‘communication’ piece. We must re-think school safety and put practices in place.

As stated by Sir Ken Robinson, “If you are in education, you are in the miracle business.” I totally agree! Thank you to the KPBSD for making this professional development possible. It was amazing!

Respectfully,

Penny Vadla