

***Because things are the way they are things will not stay the same. - Bertoldt Brecht***

Vol. 2 No. 13

The "Road Not Taken" Issue

Feb. 15, 2010

## School Calendar Online

Now when you check your district email (which I am sure everyone does at least weekly, right?) you will see a folder that says "SAS Events Calendar." Open this and you will see a current version of all that is happening at SAS.

### Calendar

**Feb. 20—All District Parent Conference**  
**March 4—School Leadership Team Meeting**  
**March 8—CCAE Legislation Day,**  
**Sacramento**  
**March 8-12—Adult Education Week**  
**March 9—Community Advisory Council**  
**March 13—Literacy Conference, Hartnell**  
**March 19—Prof Dev Day**  
**March 22—24—ESL Awards**  
**March 29—April 5—Spring Break**  
**April 30—Harper's last day**

## State of the School, February, 2010

*(in which Harper shares the timeline of his leaving SAS, and talks a little about the future)*

### ***Reinvention, Resilience***

Two weeks ago at the Parent University I was talking to a woman who told me she had come to several of our parent university Saturdays in the last few years. She shared how the workshops at the P.U. helped her understand her role as parent, and in essence she said "this is the only place where I can get this." I was struck again of first, the uniqueness of what public adult education has become over the years and second, the critical loss to a community like ours should the California fiscal crisis continue to erode our funding and take away the spaces

where adult education happens. **While we have necessarily down-sized (our enrollments from July – Aug 2008 were a little over 14,000; our enrollments for July – Aug this year were a little over 7,000, and we project to end the year much smaller than at any point in the last 25 years),** we still serve our students well in full classes in the classrooms built for them. Yet as we have adjusted to our reductions with creativity and equanimity, we still need both to be resilient to change and to be able to manage that change and reinvent ourselves.

### ***Challenging times***

The other day I heard someone, perhaps wistful for a simpler time, comment that "Corinne used to shelter us from the bad news...." Like in so many areas of our economy and the public sphere, our changes in the last eighteen months have been rapid and pervasive. In a hundred years we haven't had a challenge even remotely like this to public adult education; adult schools around the state have seen a portion or all of their funds taken by their local school districts who are all struggling to maintain the classes for elementary and secondary students. **Last year the changes putting adult ed in "Tier III" presented all school districts in the state with the unfortunate choice between using our funds for "kids" or "adults." Adults are not going to fare well in that deliberation.** So far our district has been reticent about sweeping any of our money, knowing that we have adjusted well to our reduced funding. But it is probably not realistic to think that we won't be called upon, as all the other adult schools have in our region, to lose more of our funds to mitigate more cuts in the larger district.

It's been my practice to be as transparent as possible with you about what's happening at the state and local level. My intent was not to spread negativity, but rather to **provide information so that, as much as possible, we manage the change forced upon us, and not be only reactive.** It's also been my goal since I came in July, 2008, to share what I see as the connections between what's happening at SAS and in the state as a whole. It was my observation that our four departments operated too distinct from each other, that our instructional goals and their support services were in silos. I have encouraged us to think

about what is possible beyond the things we have always done. It's been my belief that this is good thinking independent of our reduced resources; we will stay engaged more when we question how we can improve, not merely rest on our considerable laurels. **We can defend our services, and advocate for their importance, when we also display our ability to change.**

### *Harper leaves by May 1*

And my goal is that when I leave in May, there will be tangible evidence in our classes and practices that we have moved beyond some of our traditional constructs. I think these recent months have asked us to be more connected to the initiatives and arguments around adult education at the federal and state levels. The times demand that we understand how our expertise is exactly what's needed by the communities of Salinas and that we push beyond our usual practices to serve them in ever more effective ways. And without question we need to welcome our increasing collaborations within the school district that governs us. It is exactly this deeper understanding of the importance of adult education as seen from other perspectives that will be foundational to our reinvention and resilience. **We will continue to exist as a delivery system after 2013 only if we continue to exhibit this ability to move beyond our past, no matter how comfortable it may have seemed. Adult education, not just the adult school, is too important to accept less than total advocacy.** The adult school may be a pleasant place to work, but adult education is fundamental to healthy and productive communities. **A principal reason I leave SAS is to be in a situation where I can continue to advocate wholeheartedly, without caution or reservation, for adult education.**

### *The Importance of Adult Ed*

Because few things have the capacity to impact educational equity, access to health, and economic productivity of a community as does literacy. And we in public adult education are always the largest provider of literacy services in a community. Whether basic development in the adult's first language or acquiring literacy in a second language, or whether we focus on health or financial literacy or critical thinking and numeracy, adult education serves groups of learners at numbers and degrees of success that no one else does. But as good as we have been providing classes that raise literacy from true pre-literacy to secondary education levels, **we haven't connected as well as we might with other community partners and the private business sector. I believe our future will rest on our thinking how to articulate with these potential partners more.**

### *The Future of Salinas Adult School*

Our partnerships with community initiatives will expand and deepen. We should focus on the most pressing needs of our community, literacy first and foremost, unemployment and underemployment, economic stagnation, families and parents under pressure and marginalized by language, economics, culture, younger students leaving school or not achieving what they can, and the conditions in the community that impede health and safety. And nothing can have as immediate and measureable impact on the well being of our community as what we do for parents. We know the benefits on children because we help parents. But how do we document it? **We need to identify, aggregate and use data about learner outcomes in all our programs both to improve what we do for them, but also to use this data to demonstrate (and defend) our importance.** Building partnerships can help us focus on these outcomes. Building partnerships can leverage funds and buttress the strong support we have from our community.

And let's acknowledge the great work that has happened this year. So much has been done under the

cloud of drastic cuts. We won't have a summer school, so instead a committed small group of teachers will design and deliver distance learning classes so we increase this capacity that will be so important in the next decade. We have cut "overflow" ESL classes but we have reinvigorated the Vocational English as a Second Language program to align with possible career ladders in the county. We have revamped our assessments in adult basic education and are enhancing basic skills classes with curricular threads of financial, workplace, and family literacy. We are building workplace competency (WorkKeys) as central to our secondary education program, and thinking how systemically we can align to the valley's employment needs and energize economic development. We are rethinking how "post-secondary" training may be a goal for most of our students, and we need to help them prepare. Although we've cut many of our classes for older adults (and what's happening on a statewide level may ask us to cut more) we are moving forward with plans to serve more special needs young adults as they transition from fulltime students to a productive adult life.

### *The Next Director*

**I apologize to those in the school who may be unhappy with my decision to move on to another adult school. I certainly wouldn't have scripted this 18 months ago. I promise that my work before May 1 will be to assure a seamless transition.** The next two months will be important to position us for next year... and beyond. Although our cutting programs have led us to operate within our current revenue, and I project that we will not run at a deficit this year, there is an assumption that our district may need us to adapt more. "Adapt" may mean to continue to reduce our calendar and programs, and it may also ask us to think about how to articulate with other district functions more closely. The next Director may have responsibilities beyond just the adult school, and what is also certain is that the administrative structure of our school will be different and embedded more in the district as one of the several alternative ed programs. But by the end of April we will know much more about next year, and I believe that a level of stability will enable us to pursue new ideas and partnerships, and demonstrate, and advocate, even more strongly for the importance of adult education. Immediately our Adult Education Week is an opportunity to advocate for our services and connect with the sources of our support. So, lots to do in the next couple months.