

2004 CESE Annual Meeting Minutes

The 2004 annual meeting of the Coalition for Excellence in Science and Math Education (CESE) was held on Saturday afternoon, June 13, at the University of New Mexico Law School, room 2402. Dr. Marshall Berman opened the meeting by welcoming all. Bill MacPherson, a past CESE president, presented Marshall with a new presidential gavel with CESE's initials on it, to be used by future presidents.

Marshall began with an introduction of CESE's history. In 1996, creationists on New Mexico's State Board of Education (SBE) convinced the rest of the board that evolution and the ancient age of the Earth were controversial theories. Most religions don't have a problem accepting these theories, although similar beliefs are held by about half of the U.S. population. Such misconceptions can, in part, be attributed to faulty science education and the failure to understand data.

At her invitation, about six of our people met over lunch with Virginia Trujillo, a pro science, SBE member, to discuss our concerns with NM's science standards. Since then, our membership has expanded to about 300 people, and we have now included support of all education in our mission. Some of our current concerns are accountability and assessment, and the achievement differences of Asians and Anglos as compared to other minorities.

Marshall brought some written material from the National Academy of Sciences on evolution that will soon be web-based only.

Marshall then asked individuals in the audience to introduce themselves. One of the attendees was Dr. Steven Sanchez, formerly with NM's State Department of Education (SDE). He said he is working closely with state Senator Cynthia Nava, and he could relay our concerns to her.

After the introductions, Marshall said CESE has partnered in the past with the New Mexico Academy of Science (NMAS), New Mexicans for Science and Reason (NMSR), and the Albuquerque Partnership.

There was a special state election last year to approve two constitutional amendments. The first was to abolish the SBE's policy-making authority, replacing it with a cabinet level, governor appointed secretary of education, and the second was to increase the amount of money that could be withdrawn from NM's permanent fund that would be applied towards education. CESE opposed the former, as data have shown that there is no increase in student achievement with governance changes and such changes can be detrimental in the short term. CESE took no stand on the latter amendment. CESE will, however, work with any governance in place.

CESE has long been involved in NM's science standards, first by correcting the problems in 1997-1998. In 2003, many CESE members were on the writing and reviewing committees of the new science standards, suggesting revisions and soliciting support from many science, religious, business and teacher organizations throughout the state and nation. Steven Sanchez and Sharon Dogruel played major roles.

The Intelligent Design Network of New Mexico (NM IDnet) used the same strategy in NM as in the rest of the country with their usual objections to evolution and some concepts in geology and astronomy. NM IDnet consisted of only a very few people, but they managed to get many others to protest on their behalf to the SBE. Many opinions were sought from scientists around the country, and they also wrote the SBE advocating quality science standards. Reverend Dr.

Barbara Dua, director of the New Mexico Conference of Churches, also spoke to the SBE, advocating the adoption of NM's science standards. It was a long effort, Marshall recalled, but NM's science standards are now superb. Dr. Larry Lerner of the Fordham Foundation said they were among the best in the country.

The history of this effort was published in the National Center of Science Education's (NCSE) *Reports*, Volume 23, Numbers 5-6, September-December 2003, p.p. 9-12, authored by Marshall, Dave Thomas and Kim Johnson.

CESE and NMSR conducted a teacher's workshop on how to teach the new science standards in the classroom. Lisa Durkin, science teacher and CESE board member, gave a dynamic presentation of the challenges she faces in her classroom.

NM IDnet also held a teacher's workshop, and 12 people attended, 3 of whom were our people. NM IDnet falsely argued that the new science standards support "teaching the controversy." About 7-8 creationists were present; some were skeptical. NM IDnet wrote to the Public Education Commission (PEC, formerly SBE) and mentioned that Marshall attended their workshop. Marshall wrote back to the PEC, correcting NM IDnet's misrepresentations.

CESE has accumulated educational data that shows that there are large gaps in educational achievement due to ethnicity and poverty, although some schools with poor demographics are doing well. CESE also produced a white paper on the subject that was widely distributed throughout the state.

Marshall spoke about the educational legislation, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). This bill was passed with the best of intentions; however, NCLB's goal of 100% proficiency is essentially not possible. NM had previously used Norm Referenced Tests (NRT's) that compare student performance against the average performance of a national sample. Per the NCLB law, NRT's are now being replaced by Criterion Reference Tests (CRT's), which are pass-fail systems; the fraction who score above some predetermined number on a test will be the only criterion for evaluation. This objective must be reached by 2014. These test scores will eventually show schools failing in large numbers. NM cannot afford to refuse federal funds at this time. The challenge is to convince politicians and administrators of the ramifications and potential consequences of this legislation.

The Intelligent Design Network (IDnet) has produced a video, *Unlocking the Mysteries of Life*. Several prominent IDer's are interviewed on this video, giving the impression that evolution is controversial. Last year, KNME, the local PBS affiliate, did not air the tape. This summer, they reversed themselves, and it may be scheduled for August. Eleven thousand APS employees got e-mails about this showing. The CESE board is working on this issue and has been encouraging its members to voice their concerns.

CESE's newsletter, the *Beacon* edited by Nancy Shelton, has expanded. It now also publishes data analysis and statistics, book reviews, education updates, and other articles on education in general.

Dave Johnson, our webmaster, has improved CESE's web site: www.cesame-nm.org. In addition to informing readers about important science and math education issues in NM, it also provides an events calendar and links to other related websites.

In the future, we will strive for a stronger relationship with the Public Education Department (PED), formerly the SDE, and their new staff members. We are still looking at data-based decision making and employing Baldrige Quality principles that have worked well in business and health care. In New Mexico, this program is called Strengthening Quality in Schools (SQS) and is now being applied in education, from the PED down to the classrooms.

We also support the Direct Action for Youth foundation (DAY), a program where struggling students can get after school tutoring. DAY runs for 18 weeks for 2 hours per week. Students have shown 1-2 grade level improvements at a cost of only \$200 per student. Teachers are paid extra for participating in this program.

We are also planning to become more involved on a national level, perhaps through the organization, Citizens for the Advancement of Science Education (CASE), which was established at a Summit held in Kansas City in the spring of 2001.

Marshall was elected chairman of the board of a new charter school designed for dropouts to obtain high school diplomas.

Marshall then introduced our keynote speaker, Dr. Veronica Garcia, NM's first Secretary of Education. She was formerly superintendent of the financially troubled Santa Fe school district, which she turned around.

Dr. Garcia also introduced Dr. Kurt Steinhaus, deputy Secretary of Education. Regarding the reorganization of the PED and the PEC, Veronica recognized that they stand on the shoulders of others, such as Marshall Berman, Steven Sanchez, and Sharon Dogruel, to continue their past successes.

She has been visiting school districts across the state and related one incident. In a kindergarten classroom, the children were listening to the story the "Three Little Pigs." At the point where the first little pig meets a man who agrees to sell him straw to build a house, one child says, "Hot damn, a talking pig!"

She grew up in Albuquerque, a poor child in the 50's. She went to Lew Wallace Elementary school side by side with the Albuquerque country club kids. This school had high expectations for *all* the children. When she attended Lincoln Junior High school, where the expectations weren't so high, she became one of the under-performers. Later, at Albuquerque High where the expectations were also high, she had to work hard to catch up. She knew the difference education makes in life, so her life's work has been public education. Veronica said she did her doctoral dissertation on ethical leadership and a quality education experience.

The biggest problem in education is color, she said, and the color is green. We can't do anything unless we have the money. Money and high expectations are needed. The goal is proficiency or better, regardless of ethnicity or income. We need to look at issues we can control. She referred us to page 5 of the handout for the reorganization of the PED that CESE member Jack Jekowski had distributed earlier.

Veronica said she teaches a graduate course for principals. She is also concerned with differentiating between program vs. framework. There is a problem of "program paralysis." NM has a framework.

The PED is developing a comprehensive framework to improve schools that fail to meet standards. Staff will be assigned to these schools. When a school is in trouble, it can lose its autonomy. They will examine key components for diagnosis and prescription.

She also said all teachers would be trained in Baldrige quality methods. In New Mexico, this program is called Strengthening Quality in Schools (SQS). About \$500,000 has been donated from the private sector. State and federal resources will have to be aligned. \$2.6 million will be needed for professional development.

One example of how we align our system is the Lt. Governor's "Children's Cabinet," so all children come to school ready to learn. This can start as young as 4.

She wants parental involvement, but if all of them descended on the schools at once, the result would be chaos. Therefore, a definition is required, and not everyone can be a PTA mom. She would also like to see more accessibility at work for GED preparation.

Veronica said the data show that moms are more important in influencing kids, not to dismiss the importance of fathers.

She said she is data driven. If one method doesn't work, it should be abandoned. It is also necessary to get kids to recognize the importance of education, and businesses can partner with education.

She said teachers are overburdened with tests, but high stakes testing is how NM is ranked nationally and how we are compared to other states in the country. Although the numbers change from year to year, NM is consistently near the bottom.

Each division in the PED is working on customer service. One person in the department has been assigned to each of the district's superintendents, as they are the CEO's of their districts. She expressed hope and optimism for the future. Philosophically, she desires all kids to be proficient: we should set our goals and shoot for the stars, even if it's not statistically possible.

Veronica then took questions from the audience. Kim Johnson asked on what basis would proficiency on CRT be defined and how will kids on the bottom be brought up?

It would be difficult to do statistically, but the kids will have to get some predetermined number of answers right on a test to be considered proficient; certain skills will be expected at each grade level. Many teachers around the state are currently determining that cut-off number.

Veronica wrote her e-mail address on the board, and concluded that she had to regrettably leave early due to another appointment.

Then, Dave Thomas performed another one of his very famous magic tricks, called the "Baffling Blue Balls of Benzeni." His antics and skillful juggling of multi-sized, red and blue balls amused us all.

Marshall presented next year's slate of officers:

Marshall Berman, president;

Kim Johnson, vice-president;

Jerry Shelton, treasurer;

Marilyn Savitt-Kring, secretary;

Board members at large: Steve Brugge, Lisa Durkin, David Johnson, Bill MacPherson

Marvin Moss, Timothy Moy, and Dave Thomas.

A motion was passed unanimously to accept the slate of officers. The meeting was adjourned about 4 P.M. Refreshments were served.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Savitt-Kring

CESE, secretary

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