

# Keynote speaker shares opinion

By Eric Cooper

## COMMENTARY

I had the good honor to keynote in Eden Prairie on Aug. 30 to all district staff and a number of community stakeholders and leaders. The response to the words I shared was both heartening and uplifting. More importantly, the response to the great progress the district is making on student achievement was breathtaking and certainly embraced by the educators, parents and community leaders who attended the 2010 back-to-school convocation. From a national perspective, the leadership Superintendent [Melissa] Krull, the district, board of education and community are providing speaks clearly to this year's themes of: "commitment, collaboration and celebration." Hopefully all are aware that Eden Prairie could be one of the first districts in the nation to eliminate the achievement gaps, while accelerating learning for all students, i.e., those who are currently high performers as well as those who are under-performing.

Recently I became aware of a commitment to change enrollment boundaries and grade level configurations. Changing demographics in Eden Prairie, the state of Minnesota and in the country are well underway. Racial diversity among student bodies is a reality all communities must address. The redrawing of school attendance areas to ensure balance is required if districts are to maintain those values embedded in our Constitution and Bill of Rights, and if we are to enable the promise of America for all.

Clearly the districts that embrace diversity, maintain high expectations for all students and create learning communities where students learn from each other, collaborate and succeed together, will be the districts who best prepare their children for future challenges of a highly competitive and global community. Learning in heterogeneous schools serves all students no matter what their family circumstances might be. Extrapolations from emerging data are also compelling, i.e., students who attend and graduate from diverse K-12 schools may be more successful in college where diverse student populations deepen opportunities for life-

long learning, and in the workplace as well, where workers experienced with diversity are in demand for the companies who strive to remain competitive in a diverse world. Harvard professors Derek Bok and William Bowen also provide comprehensive statistics on the benefits and strengths of creating diverse learning opportunities in their seminal and widely heralded book, "The Shape of the River."

Eden Prairie and many other successful districts are also aware that providing the critical pedagogical support for the proposals is a necessity. Guiding and coaching the educators in a manner which enables them to utilize the strategies and practices which best serve all students is of paramount importance. Methodologies which simultaneously meet the needs of high performers as well as those who under-perform. When implemented correctly, virtually all students will succeed in both their intellectual and character development. And our experience in Eden Prairie suggests all student groups are learning the problem-solving, creative, and collaborative skills required for success in the 21st century.

The journey the school community is embarking on is important, capable of transforming lives and developing the human capital the city will need to sustain its success. Equally important, Eden Prairie will be providing those circumstances which lead to simple fairness and basic justice for all of its citizens.

From our national perspective, we celebrate and embrace the dynamic leadership Eden Prairie educators, the board and the community are providing. Not only does Eden Prairie have an opportunity to illuminate a beacon of hope for the city, but also for the state and by extension the nation.

We stand ready to support the district in any way we can. We are honored to be on this journey with a stellar school community - one we point to with pride to stakeholders throughout our wonderful nation.

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