

Horace Mann, commonly known as the father of public education, once hailed Education as the Great Equalizer. Although these are words commonly used in speeches, I don't know that much thought has gone into what is actually required to make these words a reality. Education, and specifically public education, is and should be the great equalizer. However, those whose daily lives are far removed from the classroom may not understand that a teacher at [Garfield Elementary](#), [Calderon Elementary](#), or [Chavira Elementary](#) are having to work twice as hard as that same teacher in a suburban community outside of the Metroplex. Yet our teachers do their job and do it extremely well.

Today, as I reflect on the recently received 5th and 8th grade STAAR scores, I am thankful for the commitment and work that each one of our educators has shown. Considering that this year our schools will be held accountable for 66% more recent immigrants than they were last year and that schools still have a second opportunity to re-test students, I am confident that we have already outdone our 2013 achievement.

At the elementary level, improvement in [math](#) was as high as 25 percentage points at one of our campuses - Chavira Elementary. When I asked Mrs. Martinez, fifth grade math teacher at Chavira, why she thought the kids had been so successful, she simply stated, "It made a huge difference being their fourth grade teacher and now their fifth grade teacher again." There is something to be said for having teachers loop with the students. Excellent job! Garfield Elementary who has the largest concentration of bilingual students has already enjoyed an increase in their [reading](#) scores. Mrs. Rodriguez, a first year teacher at Garfield, was elated at her students' results and quickly praised her fellow teachers for all their support and stated that the support given by C&I and instructional coaches was incredible, "especially the workshops they had a month prior to testing. Being able to bring something back that we could implement the following day was tremendous."

The middle school scores already look favorable in both [reading](#) and [math](#). Of course, to compare apples to apples, we still have to include the results from the Algebra I and English I End of Course exams. Nonetheless, a simple projection using the second administration and Algebra I scores indicates favorable gains. Excellent job!

I am hopeful that in the weeks to come we will see so many plans come together. I am particularly excited about synchronizing the adoption of our textbooks with the implementation of our 1:1 initiative at the high school. As we prepare to buy textbooks for math and science we are also preparing to provide a laptop for every high school student. This means that our students will no longer be burdened with carrying four textbooks that are large enough to necessitate two backpacks. Instead, they will have digital interactive textbooks that will make learning more engaging and accessible.

We are also excited about implementing the recently awarded \$2 million Educator Excellence Innovation Program grant. Dollars from this grant combined with local dollars will leverage the buying power in our favor. Among many other incentives, this grant allows us to provide financial

assistance for teachers who want to obtain credit hours that will qualify them to teach dual credit courses, obtain bilingual certifications, ESL certifications, or certifications above and beyond a special education certification.

I am confident that academic gains will parallel the continued implementation of our instructional reform efforts. As pleased as I am with the efforts of our teachers, principals, and C&I staff, I often find myself taking a moment to remind myself that we, as educators, are about so much more than “scores”. Regardless of outcomes, I know that each of you add so much value to our students’ lives. Keep up the great work.

“The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were... and ask why not.”

- John F. Kennedy