



HAPPINESS IS BEING THE SUPERINTENDENT FOR 10,000 TEENAGERS

In her book, “It Takes a Village,” Hilary Clinton presents her own vision of raising children in America. Clinton acknowledges that safe neighborhoods, good teachers, good healthcare, and other aspects of a “good village” are necessary for the care of our children. She states repeatedly that it is up to all of us to see that we, as a culture, ensure that our children are cared for well. Silicon Valley Impressions magazine had the pleasure of interviewing the leader of such a village: Fremont Union High School District’s Superintendent, Polly Bove, who spoke about how she manages this village to take care of our children’s academic, social, health, emotional, and life skills’ well-being.

The Fremont Union High School District encompasses Cupertino, Sunnyvale, Los Altos, and parts of San Jose and Santa Clara. The District is responsible for the Monta Vista, Homestead, Lynbrook, Cupertino, and Fremont High Schools. It is one of the largest districts in the area and is also the third highest rated high school district in California. Our schools draw people from other parts of Northern California, the nation, and even the world to live here. Superintendent Bove has been here since 1989. We talked to her about many different subjects.

SVI: How do the Asian parents and students affect our schools?

Polly Bove: Asian parents are supportive of and committed to their children's education. However, some people are worried that such an intense focus on academics puts too much pressure on the children. However, with the right combination of support and expectations, what the Asian parents have done and what the children have achieved are quite remarkable and powerful. The blending of cultures from all over the world will benefit all of us.

As educators, we are learning to provide the same kind of support for the children.

SCHOOL FUNDING

SVI: The communities of Cupertino, Sunnyvale, Los Altos, and Saratoga have experienced a population boom due to the successful businesses established by corporations like Apple, Google, Facebook, LinkedIn and others. This population growth requires more resources for our schools in terms of school facilities, teachers, and programs in a time of financial difficulties and budget cuts. Thus, schools must find creative ways to fund various projects and programs.

Polly Bove: It is important to understand that our District draws resources from separate financial structures for various needs.

The financial support needed for school facilities is separate from that used for teachers and programs. Facility improvement programs are funded by bond measures. Measures B and K, which passed recently, will be used to improve our schools' facilities by funding the construction of

new classrooms, cafeterias, athletic facilities, etc. These are 30-year investments for capital expenditures. Because of the communities' commitment to our schools through the issuance of bonds, we are able to have high quality buildings and make improvements in our existing facilities, which are largely over 50 years old. We feel fortunate to have parents who are dedicated to their children's education.

Funding for teachers, programs, and technologies comes from the General Fund Budget, which is supported by local property taxes. Our school district is not funded by the state. Nearly all of our money comes from our local communities. Of all the resources we receive from the community, 85% ends up in the classroom in the form of teaching supplies and teachers' salaries.

This is a different financial structure from that in The Cupertino School District, which manages the elementary and middle schools. These schools are funded by the state on a per person, per day basis. In contrast, because we are not funded by the state, we have one large pot of money that is distributed to different schools, regardless of how many students we have.

PREPARING FOR GROWTH

We expect that the student population will grow by approximately 1000 students by 2020 or 2021. We now have over 10,000 students throughout the district. We have experienced the greatest increase in the Fremont, Cupertino, and Homestead High Schools, while Monta Vista has leveled off and Lynbrook High School has had modest growth.

Working with a demographer and the city governments, we can assess new construction and projects to predict our schools' future needs. Our demographer also serves the Cupertino Union School District, which has a younger population, most of whom will go to high schools in our district. Therefore, our forecast is quite accurate.

The Fremont Union School District Foundation (<http://fuhsfoundation.org>) also helps support the schools by funding activities and athletic programs. The funding received from the Foundation will serve all five schools according to their needs. Any donation is important to us, and volunteering to perform work at the schools is also a good way to help.

BEYOND ACADEMICS: PERSONAL INTERESTS AND ENRICHMENT

Our board and our communities are focused on a comprehensive high school experience for all the children. We do not simply provide an education in engineering, math, and technology; we also have art, music, drama, journalism, speech, debate, and more. Each high school has many organizations in which the students can explore and nurture their own interests. Many clubs, such as future business leaders, athletic clubs, robotics, and hundreds of others, help our students broaden their interests. We are proud that our high schools have been able to retain these programs despite budget cuts and fiscal limitations. These programs and their projects are made possible because of the strong parental support that we receive.

BEYOND ACADEMICS: EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Teen suicide is a growing health concern, and is the third leading cause of death among young people ages 15 to 24 (American Psychological Association, May 2015). Since October of last year, four teenagers in California's Palo Alto schools have taken their own lives, and this is not the first group of teen suicides this area has seen: In 2009 and 2010, five local teenagers killed themselves by stepping in front of trains, and more suicides followed the next year (Mercury News, March 2015).

Polly Bove: Suicide is a complex issue for which there are no simple answers. We wish to do everything we can to prevent it, because we are losing our most precious resources. Palo Alto is also trying desperately to develop appropriate solutions.

In our district, we take our students' emotional health very seriously. We have professionals with degrees in marriage and child therapy, and a number of school psychologists and therapists on all of our campuses. We train the teachers to be aware of signs of emotional distress, and refer those children to one of our professionals. We try to stay focused on the children's emotional health. We continue to feel very fortunate, partly because of the tremendous amount of support we receive from our parents. They are aware of their children as well, and very often, they are the ones who let us know when the kids need help.

We also have a spectrum of programs for children who have moderate to severe mental challenges. 9% of these programs are served through special

education. We have a postsecondary program that helps mentally challenged children transition from high school to adulthood. Our behavior therapists and school psychologists work with these children from the time they are high school freshman to the age of 22. After the kids finish 4 years in high school, they then go to another 4-year program to learn life skills, such as riding the bus, and simple work skills so that they can become productive citizens. We are proud of these programs. We have quite a few children who have illnesses such as Asperger's syndrome and even severe autism who might qualify for residential treatment. However, thanks to our programs and resources from the mental health community, they are able to remain in their homes.

BEYOND ACADEMICS: MAKING FRIENDS

Depending upon where our local companies recruit their employees, our school may receive students and families from anywhere. Many of these families are international. We have excellent programs for both students and adults who are learning English. We also have social groups in native languages where newcomers can go and ask questions, and we provide linguistic and community liaisons to help new students and their families assimilate into the community.

The Link program and Ambassador Program in our high schools help link older students with new students. The students in the Link program work to provide a friendly and welcoming environment for the freshman. They make friends with the new students, have lunch with them, and ensure that they adapt to the school without difficulties.

GETTING INVOLVED: PARENTS

The first thing that a new student who enrolls in our school does is see the enrollment counselor, who verifies addresses. This is not a strategy to keep people out, but to maximize the dollars spent on the kids who actually live in the community. The parents then work with an assistant principal, guidance counselor, or EL coordinator. It is important for the parents to be involved in as many programs as possible and go to as many events as possible with their children. Participating in PTA meetings, back-to-school nights, and athletic and music events help the parents get to know the school and its environment.

GETTING INVOLVED: STUDENTS

To make the best of high school life, it is important to get involved from the very beginning. Learning should not take place only in the classrooms—school life is also part of a student's studies. There are many important lessons that are learned both in and outside the classroom, and one of those is teamwork. This important skill can be learned at FUHSD in many ways, including while working in teams in a science class, through participation on a sports team, by singing in the choir or playing in the band, and by joining different clubs on campus.

BEYOND COLLEGE

We have approximately an 85% college entrance rate, and we are very proud of that. However, the goal of a public high school district is to serve all the kids who are here. For our highest achievers and those who will go to college, it is our job

to engage them and to find ways to challenge them, while for the 15% who are not college bound, it is our job to help them figure out what they are passionate about, and what excites them in their work every day so they can continue to build their strengths and decide what to do in life. For the kids who are struggling, it is our job to ask, “What are you struggling with?” and “How can we help?” Our measurement for success is that no matter who you are and where you start, you can take the next step successfully.

There is no secret for success; it is just important to do your best and find your passion. Colleges look for kids who have been themselves, have done well, and given their all. It is the growth of the entire child, of his/her internal characteristics and interests that make a person successful.

Every experience in a child’s life will influence him/her later. If parents are worried that there are only a few options, then they will become anxious. There are many more options than we can imagine. Children mature at different stages, and with our attention and care, they can grow up at their own pace and succeed eventually in what they do in life.

LIFE AS POLLY BOVE

My father expected me to become an engineer. In college, I studied

math, and minored in physics and rhetoric. I had graduate degrees in math, psychology, and education. I went to The University of Illinois, Champaign, simply because it was near my home and it offered me the most financial support. I was grateful that I had a chance to go to college, so I studied hard. There are many factors that a college considers when choosing a student, but they do not determine whether or not the student will be successful.

CITY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

By law, city government cannot advocate on behalf of the school when it plans for future development. Given these limitations and challenges, we still need to try to work together to ensure that the developers in our community value the same things that we do. The only way for them to do so is to provide resources for the community, such as those for our schools.

The Fremont Union High School District is dedicated to working in partnership with local cities to serve our community best. Recently, the five members of the FUHSD Board of Trustees accompanied me to a Cupertino City Council meeting, at which I spoke about the importance of developers providing support to schools in the community. I suggested that the Cupertino

City Council strongly consider implementing a system whereby developers contribute towards the cost of educating students who reside in their development projects.

Being first is a brave, ethical, and thoughtful thing to do. When the money comes to us, it allows all the cities to receive resources for the education of the children. We can set an example for voters in other cities, so that they will continue to work with their cities to secure the resources needed for our schools.

WITH DEEP GRATITUDE

One of our most precious resources that has made the District great is our teachers and staff, all of whom are incredibly committed to this community and to our students. Many teachers could teach at other schools and receive higher salaries, but they chose to teach for us. Our teachers are smart, passionate, and have deep connections with their students. Many students want to learn because they think that their teachers believe in them and care about them.

Each year the district selects 6 outstanding teachers to receive the Teacher of the Year Award. On the next page, we have posted the 2015 teachers of the year for Fremont Union High School District. Congratulations. As parents, we, too, are grateful that you are here for our children.

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