



May 5, 2008

from the office of Superintendent Robert Collins



Karen Degischer (left) and Ann Morgan Department Chair from Helix Charter High School present flowers to Fredda Schiffman, Special Education Teacher of the Year

## Students Through the Eyes of the Speech/ Language Pathologists "Children Should Be Seen and Heard"



Monthly meeting of the Speech Pathologists addresses a wide range of subjects that directly affect all students in the Grossmont Union High School District

A visit with the Grossmont Union High School District's Speech/Language Pathologists provided interesting insights about Speech Pathologists and perspectives on how children learn. The first part of the meeting recognized the **Teacher of the Year for Special Education, Fredda Schiffman**. In listening to the accomplishments of Ms. Schiffman, it was interesting to note that our **Speech/Language Pathologists (SLPs) are not just SLPs** waiting down the hallway to meet with parents and students. All have multiple program assignments that include serving students with a range of disabilities including those with mild disabilities in classrooms, to social language group activities for students on the autism spectrum, to providing individualized therapy services. Many of our twelve SLPs move daily from school to school in order to provide these services. And while the Speech Pathologists have been trained specifically to address the needs of autistic and other students with speech and communication disabilities, they possess skills to address reading and communication.

Discussions regarding students with disabilities ranged from the real **need for technology** – additional computers with communication capability and SMART boards which would have a dramatic effect on students who have difficulty communicating. Our discussions included the need for **strong peer intervention programs** such as Eagle Link at Granite Hills. This is particularly true for students with disabilities who, in many instances, may be more isolated than other students.

We also discussed at length the issue of what happens to students with disabilities, once they graduate from high school. We often spend significant time trying to "get students to graduation." **Our work isn't just "graduating students," but painting a picture for students and parents as to what the future holds for them and to provide transition support to students and families.** What happens the day after graduation is often more important than graduation day.

In this context, **we need to develop more career-tech opportunities for students with varying types of disabilities.** While many of these students are still able to qualify for a four-year college, many are interested in a career, additional training at one of our community colleges and the opportunity to transition into a career that provides ongoing employment and training.

**The need to make literacy a priority and to have a core reading program** were topics of particular importance. Studies have shown that students often speak less than 2 ½ minutes in classroom discussions throughout an entire day. The issue of teaching literacy needs to be consistent throughout the school day. We will spend time this summer looking closely at the literacy issue as it affects students reading below grade level, English Learners and students with disabilities. **One thing is certain, we all need to own the literacy issue and be part of the solution.**

The final issue addressed the **scarcity of Speech Pathologists**. Speech pathologists are in short supply throughout the nation and in California. At the same time, there has been an explosion in autism and consequently, caseloads. A recent article in *California Educator* discussed an aging speech pathologist workforce, increased caseloads, increased stress, and high credential requirements, all resulting in shortages. **It is an issue that we will review, analyze and seek different solutions for in the coming year.**

Each day as I talk with teachers throughout our District about the challenges we all face, one can only believe that our children are in the hands of skilled and dedicated employees. Our Speech Pathologists only reinforce that belief.