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HIGHTECHNOLOGYCOUNCIL

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Roxbury Prep 10th Anniversary
Christopher R. Anderson, President
May 7, 2009

It is a great honor to be included in your anniversary celebration, and to be able to speak directly to those of you who are singularly responsible for accomplishing incredible feats every day

Around the nation, education experts, elected officials, employers and families have high hopes for our schools. While these hopes might be expressed differently by you and me, a book titled *Disrupting Class* by Clayton Christensen begins by summarizing these aspirations as:

1. Maximize human potential
2. Facilitate a vibrant, participative democracy in which we have an informed electorate that is capable of not being “spun” by self-interested leaders.
3. Hone the skills, capabilities, and attitudes that will help our economy remain prosperous and economically competitive
4. Nurture the understanding that people can see things differently—and that those differences merit respect rather than persecution.

As a nation, we’re not doing very well in our journey toward these aspirations. While our individual faith relationships and family environments are such fundamental factors in how our young treasures mature, it is our public education system that is charged—rightly or wrongly—with the lion’s share of that responsibility.

In Massachusetts, while we are doing better in educating our children than the other 49 states, we have within our 351 cities and towns an unacceptable disparity between high performing schools and school districts and underperforming schools and school districts.

At Roxbury Prep Charter School, however, you have Will Austin and Dana Leman, who are remarkable leaders following in the footsteps of the schools founders John King and Evan Rudall as they employ the type of forward thinking innovation that helps each student who moves through this school become more likely than not to reflect each of those previously mentioned aspirations we hope for.

When President Obama recently asked that arbitrary caps on charter schools be lifted so that best practices could be shared and more quickly adopted he no-doubt was referring to you and your distinction as a two-time EPIC (Effective Practice Incentive Community) Award winner

In my work as President of the Mass High Tech Council it is my responsibility to represent and pursue the public policy priorities of the leadership of Massachusetts’ broad innovative technology sector at the state house in Boston and in Washington

For more than two decades the CEOs of Massachusetts high tech employers have collectively considered education a priority on par with any economic issue

The reason is obvious: in order to run a successful technology business you need a workforce skilled in science, technology, engineering and math talent

In my capacity as Chairman of the Board of Education in 2007 I spearheaded a campaign to have Massachusetts students join their peers from classrooms in 68 nations as participants in the international math and science or TIMSS testing. Massachusetts was one of 2 states to compete as if we were our own nation.

We received some heartening news in December when Massachusetts students competed well against their global peers placing:

8th Grade Math – 6th
8th Grade Science – 3rd
4th Grade Math – 4th
4th Grade Science – 2nd

It was this show of excellence, our strong MCAS system, and the improvement our students demonstrated that led President Obama to single-out Massachusetts as a model for other states.

So we CAN compete. The question is; ARE we doing everything we can to compete?

Certainly when we visited Roxbury Prep recently I saw some extremely positive evidence.

We were able to drop in on Jason Armstrong, Roxbury Prep's answer to John Housman, leading his class through some very serious deductive q&a attacking the question what defines the surface of a three dimensional object?

We were taken with the idea that each of the 11 advisories is named for colleges and universities that Roxbury Prep alums are attending; and I personally hope that that there is a University of Notre Dame advisory within the coming years. Will, Dana, just let me know, and I'll outfit one of the best new advisories at Roxbury Prep.

Each advisory also had a picture of the successful college student currently attending that school on sign with the inspirational question "Could This Be You?"

I presume that we will be seeing a picture of Alex Johnson up there in the future. Alex was a little quiet the day we met because had a quick chat in a crowded, hallway full of his friends. Sorry Alex, I wasn't aware of the "no talking" rule. I want to share with you this brief conversation we had. I asked Alex what he would want others to know about his experience at Roxbury Prep. He didn't know he was going meet me until about 10 seconds before we met. Yet he didn't hesitate when he replied: "They really care."

I'd like to add my sincere congratulations to Alex for his accomplishments at school, especially the honor of being the third Roxbury Prep student to win the Jack Kent Cooke scholarship.

During our visit, we also attended a literacy class in the Vanderbilt advisory taught by Ben Wells and Michael Blouin who is an apprentice literacy teacher

The apprentice program is part of an induction process for teachers that should be a part of our statewide education deliver system. Mr. Blouin observes and supports the teacher which helps in

classroom, but he also works with the teacher outside the classroom to develop his own curriculum development and teaching skills

It is not a mystery that in order to have world-class schools you need world-class teachers and in order to attract and retain these teachers you need to cultivate an enriching professional environment where education professionals mentor, share best practices and provide support

This year I understand that Roxbury Prep is hiring two new science teachers and Will and Dana and I discussed how difficult it is to find a teacher with a high degree of STEM content knowledge to teach in a middle school

That rare individual is exactly who we need teaching our middle school students so that kids are inspired to learn and are receiving instruction for someone with knowledge and a passion for the subject and those with these skills are drawn to innovative and professionally gratifying environments like the one you've established here.

The practice that I was most impressed with is that every teacher at Roxbury Prep develops their own curricula.

In doing so the school ensures a level of buy-in, content knowledge and accountability that I would think all teachers would want entering the classroom.

Each teacher is asking and responding to three questions:

- What do my students need to know?
- How will I teach it?
- Have the students learned it?

Over your 1st 10 years, you have mastered what really is a relatively simple design for success. Congratulations. I hope each of you will continue to love and support your children, your teachers, and your administrators. I also hope you each will find a way to share your experience at Roxbury Prep to help melt the opposition by some to the charter school experience, and to help nurture the understanding that people can see things differently—and that those differences merit respect rather than persecution.