

****Interview with Gustavo Balderas: Principal of Peter Boscow Elementary School in the Hillsboro School District.(Interviewer Kari VanKommer)***

Kari: Please state your name.

Balderas: Gus Balderas principal of Peter Boscow Elementary in the Hillsboro School District.

Kari: What had been your involvement with our Hispanic population?

Balderas: My background is I was an ESL student growing up my parents are from Mexico, I was an ESL student until probably the 6th grade. I learned English in the 3rd grade, so English is my second language. With that I know on a firsthand basis what a lot of our kids go through. My experience with Hispanic students: I've been an educator for 13 years, most of those years spent within the Hillsboro school district. I was an ESL teacher at Poynter middle school for 6 years. I was a counseling coordinator at Glencoe High school for 4 years. And Poynter middle school vice principal for 3 years and now Principal of Peter Boscow.

Kari: In your opinion what are the goals of the Hillsboro school district regarding Hispanic students?

Balderas: We follow the strategic plan, strategy three. I was a member of the action team that got together to realize those goals. The goals are numerous. The Office of Hispanic Outreach which is new this year was part of that and finally came lead by Olga Cuniah., she and other have done a fantastic job of making relationships with the Hispanic community. At each specific school there are various things done with the Hispanic community. Here at Boscow we have had this year 6 evening family literacy nights, most of which are bi-lingual our population is 82% free and reduced lunch, 65% Hispanic and 60% ESL and we are about 400 students, small school high needs. Parent participation the core of what we try to do at Boscow.

Kari: What do you think is most important goal of Strategy Three?

Balderas: Olga's position, The Office of Hispanic Outreach. That position with someone paid full time to do the work that was done by various people as part of the job description before. So having one person focus all of their energy has been very positive in terms of meeting the needs of the Hispanic community, and with Hispanic outreach the primary goal is to get parents into schools, and have them connect with schools. That way they can have the support. Because a lot of times we only have kids in elementary for 6 hours, and in secondary for only 8 hours, the rest of the time they are at home, so to have the collaboration with families is very very important.

Kari: What was your experience with ESL growing up? Was it positive?

Balderas: I think it was very positive. We can always do more, and I'm not just talking about ESL, I'm talking about education in general. But my experience was an ESL pull-out program. I was taken out for about 2 hours a day when I was little, and I was instructed on the old time phonics programs and also it helped my little brother.

Kari: How successful do you feel the Hillsboro School districts ESL and Migrant education programs have been in the past.

Balderas: I think very successful, I think we have a very good model in terms of what we do for kids we have summer school program that I taught at when I was a teacher. I think they do a great job of recruiting during the summer. Kids that aren't regularly in school from various camps, I think they provide very good support to the schools. And they run a very smooth program; I would consider it a model program within the state of Oregon.

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Kari: What are some problems the district has faced in providing for the needs of Hispanic students?

Balderas: I think its money, its lack of funding. And that's with any program that we have in Hillsboro, as in any school district. We could do more for T.A.G. kids we could do more for kids in the middle, we could do more for kids at the bottom, and for ESL and Special ED, and I think just lack of resources that have been cut due to the budget crisis.

Kari: Did that budget crisis affect ESL directly or just kind of?

Balderas: It affected every program directly or indirectly. All the programs are tied in together with that there is staffing, space issues just funding from the office to the principal that we have to be able to fund other activities. It's all inclusive when you talk about this one program you're talking about all the programs affected.

Kari: (talking too much) So you think it more of a funding issue as opposed to they don't want to make Hispanics a goal. You think they would do much more if they had the money?

Balderas: I think we would and any district would, because these are our neediest kids. Some of our neediest kids are the ESL kids. I think we have done a great job of matching appropriate teaching techniques for ESL kids in terms of glad and syop training that teachers get at the secondary level that teachers teach other teachers who are not ESL teachers how to work with second language learners or just different types of learners. I think through direct staff developments that are targeted at schools that have heavy ESL students for whole staff not just ESL staff is going to make all students more successful. Because you can take ESL techniques and use those with any student there are just techniques that meet kids who learn a little different. I think to give repoutraure to the teachers to meet the need of all kids individually.

Kari: What are your thoughts about the dual language program?

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Balderas: W.L. Henry, I am strongly in favor of that program because it works. You look at the research it shows it works. Kid's brains pick up a language whether it is primary or a second language and it transfers over to their native language. Kids learn languages better at a younger age, and it becomes ingrained in your memory. In order to keep that up the kids will just have to take support classes later, because the language is already in there. It doesn't affect knowledge they are just learning in two different languages. I think everybody would wish they had that. I am bi-cultural I'm bi-lingual and I have to switch off and on when I'm speaking to different patrons.

Kari: How do you think your own personal experiences has helped you in aiding Hispanics as an administrator, that other administrators might not have given they don't have a background related?

Balderas: I think every administrator brings something different to the table. Everyone brings something different to the administrative ranks. Maybe they are very strong in curriculum, maybe they are very strong in PR, or maybe they bring in a past personal experience. I think I bring a strong personal experience being an ESL kid. Teaching ESL and also having a strong K-12 experience because I have been at the high school not as an administrator but as a counselor, and then as a VP in the middle level, and now at the elementary level. I kind of see where kids start, and I've seen kids finish.

Kari: Why do you think there are so many Hispanic kids dropping out of High school?

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Balderas: when you look at drop out rates I think you need to look at poverty. I think language plays into it, especially if they get here a little bit late. But I think poverty is one of the main causes. I think if you were to take all the kids who have dropped out, and look at the poverty rate, I think it would be pretty equal in terms of how many kids are dropping out and how many of them live in poverty. Because they need to drop out and work, or because they come from families that just don't value education. When you talk about kids dropping out I think schools do a good job trying to support kids especially at the high school level, having smaller learning communities like at Liberty and Century, Liberties new concept of trying the idea of "Houses" that give you a support group that meet with an advisor. And if you stick around you are going to be known by those teachers, and they get to know you. And they will bester you with "Hey how are you doing in math?" and I think kids need that mentor one person to be able to connect with. And be it a soccer coach, or be it an AP History teacher, or a counselor or a VP, or a custodian, somebody you connect with, I think that is very important in finishing up. One of the things we strive for in Hillsboro, is to try and find a niche, every kid needs to find something that they are passionate about. Ass a high school coach I connected with kids in a different way, and I saw them in a different light. Schools need to find something for kids that they are passionate about. That's what is so sad about budget cuts because every school cut programs that I think met the needs of specific kids or cut back on those programs, and with that we are getting more kids at risk.

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Kari: When you were planning the strategic plan, were you guys going off past programs, or was it a whole new vision that you needed to take on to do something about issues?

Balderas: Everybody brought in different agendas, it was a group of about 31 people, and they were of varied positions, teachers, administrators counselors business owners, and I think people brought in their different passions about what they felt was needed in the strategic plan. And with that the strategic plan blossomed. And it was the hardest I've ever done. It was long long days with few breaks. Strategy Three was talked about in depth, but the whole group felt it was needed given the population that we serve which is 24.6% Hispanic.

Kari: What has Peter Boscow done to connect with its Hispanic population?

Balderas: This is my first year at Boscow, but what we try and do is to try and embrace the whole community together, because we are here together. And to have more bi-cultural, bi-lingual evenings programs instead of having segregated evenings. A great comment that was made by one of my PTA parents was that "the only time I got to meet my son's best friend's parents was at one of these evenings, where his parents don't speak English and my son doesn't speak Spanish, but Hosea was Reed's best friend, and he said "Hey mom I want you to meet Hosea's parents" and so the parents looked at each other, shook hands and smiled. And I at least got to know my son's best friends parents." And that was very very cool. This is exactly why we are having this for. It's more for the families than for us. Is to try to get the collaboration piece, and embrace our diversity because diversity is what we make of it.

Kari: Is there anything else you would like to say that I haven't asked?

Balderas: Sure, I think every school...every principal you would talk to would speak passionately about what they are doing in their school. And when I talk to other principals I know everyone is doing fantastic things. And it's not the principal; I'm only as good as my staff.

Kari: Do you think the passion for embracing our cultural differences is new? Or it has always been there?

Balderas: I think its there, but I think there are schools that don't have diverse populations wouldn't embrace it as much, because they don't see it as much. IT'S not as in your face as it is if you come to some Hillsboro schools. I think every school makes an effort to embrace diversity. But schools with more minorities tend to more because it is what we work with every day.

Balderas: If you at Century have a leadership team, I think you should have minorities on that in order to have a true voice to what the community sees. Because unless you have different backgrounds to be able to say "What about this", have another voice. I think we need to have minority people in those positions because they are the voice. If they are not

there that voice might not be heard. Not that the people in those positions don't care about that voice, but sometimes it gets left behind.....its more of that reaching out. You need to have more gatekeepers as in minorities in positions, whether it be in student counsel or as administrators, for people to hear and seek our voice. Because some people might hear you but they aren't listening. And I think this District has just done a fantastic job in terms of reaching out to the Hispanic community. I think we have more Hispanic principals in this district than anywhere else in the state of Oregon. We have 5 Hispanic administrators.

Kari: Are you cynical at all about what the HSD has done or accomplished?

Balderas: I've been in Hillsboro a long time, and I think we have a very clear vision of where we are going and where we want to go, and there are always people that are going to be cynical. I just think that the work that I do, along with everyone else in this building is important. Because to me we are all the same, we are all in this for kids. Be it the custodian or me here in this office, we are all doing the same thing, trying to create a positive learning community, and it doesn't matter what color you are. And the district hired me because I was a good administrator. Not because I was a good "Hispanic" administrator.....And we want the best for every child we have. And id like to see every kid graduate, is that a possibility? No because there are different bumps in the road that kids sometimes make poor choices, or maybe high school graduation is not something they want. But what we want to try and instill in the kids is that there is a need for education, there is a need for parents to be involved in their education, there is a need for structure, every kid needs structure, and we try and provide that structure, as much as we can.

(Kari talks...bla blab la)

Balderas: That's right two organizations: one Union America started about 3 years ago, it's a minority all inclusive support group, who have a passion for change, and brainstorm ideas. And a few years ago a few administrators started the Oregon association of Latino Administrators to get together to be a sounding board for ideas. The bottom line is two things: student achievement, and to support each other.

(Kari talks...bla bla bla)

Balderas: talking about that separate voice, it's a different background, so when I speak from a background, my parents were migrant workers, I was a migrant worker growing up, I lived in the camps. I have first hand knowledge of what it's like living in a room 12 by 12 growing up, so I know where these kids are coming from. I know the poverty. But you talk to a lot of these administrators, and they all have different backgrounds, and many had to strive to be where they are, and there are many people in positions of authority in Hillsboro, in any district from different backgrounds, they might not be open to speaking to it, but that what makes people good for that position, because they know where those people are coming from.