

Blaylock: Schools no place for hate or bullying

By Tim Blaylock

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When children feel threatened, they cannot learn. That truth was cited recently by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan at the U.S. Department of Education's first-ever anti-bullying summit held last month.

Meanwhile, it has been over the past few years that the Rio School District has been taking action to prevent bullying and to promote respect and tolerance on our campuses, creating a quality environment where students can learn and grow.

For the past four years, the district has been on the forefront of anti-bullying programs, which are focused on helping all children and employees feel safe and respected as members of a community of learners, educators and mentors. We operate with the philosophy that every employee is an educator, and this theme is central to our strategy of building strong connections among caring adults and students to create a safe harbor at each of our sites.

In 2008, the Rio School District joined a nationwide network of school districts committed to ending racism and bigotry, a key source of bullying. Rio schools participate in the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate campaign, which works to create a respectful, inclusive and safe learning environment and community.

All district principals receive training in the ADL's Becoming an Ally, a program that addresses the problems of name-calling and bullying, and our principals receive training in A World of Difference Institute's internationally recognized anti-bias and diversity training program.

We are very proud that each of our schools is designated as a No Place for Hate community because they formed committees to oversee anti-bias activities in school, everyone has signed the "Resolution of Respect" and all campuses have completed three or more activities in one year that celebrate diversity and promote respect.

All Rio schools also are part of the **PeaceBuilders** program, which is a research-validated violence prevention and character education program. Participation in **PeaceBuilders** reduces aggression, promotes language development, teaches pro-social skills, increases parenting skills, creates inclusion for special-needs children and fosters safer communities.

In the school setting, **PeaceBuilders** increases academic achievement by allowing teachers to spend more time teaching and less time disciplining. In all settings, the program creates a peaceful environment by increasing positive, respectful, thoughtful behavior, while decreasing violence and disruptive behavior.

Our Office of Student and Family Services also helps students and their families access community resources and support that help our students be safe and supported, so they can learn, grow and achieve their potential as healthy, happy, responsible young people who are very important in our community.

I am proud of the Rio School District's work building bridges across different cultures and celebrating our diversity. By continuing to work together with open minds and mutual respect as a community, we will ensure our schools are no place for hate, and an excellent place to learn and grow, regardless of socio-economic position, orientation, religion or culture.

— Tim Blaylock is president of the Rio School District's board of trustees. This commentary was also signed by board of trustees members Robert W. Guillen, Ron Mosqueda and Simon Ayala.