

Jackson addresses high quality public education for all students

Chris Seymour
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John H. Jackson was the Saturday morning speaker at the 2010 CABE/CAPSS Convention and he addressed the issue of providing a high quality public education to all students regardless of race or gender.

“We’re really talking about systems reform,” explained Jackson. “That’s really what we have to focus on. It’s not about an individual school, an individual teacher, an individual leader; it’s about creating a system where multiple players work together.”

Jackson is the President and CEO of the Schott Foundation for Public Education. Jackson also worked for seven years in leadership roles at the NAACP. He served as the NAACP Chief Policy officer and was also the NAACP National Director of Education.

“We know what works in education—there’s clear evidence that if you provide

a child access to early education and ensure that they’re literate by 3rd grade, as a benchmark, you’ve given the child the type of start that’s necessary to advance the possibility that that child will achieve high outcomes throughout their educational career,” said Jackson.

Connecticut educators are familiar with the achievement gap—in fact, the Nutmeg State has the largest one in the country. Jackson also pointed to what he called an “opportunity gap.” He noted there is a push for common course standards in education but noted there also has to be “common resource standards.”

“We know all children can learn [regardless of race]. So to the degree we see variants in educational performance—it’s not caused by the racial or ethnic differences, but the social policies and social practices which led to those differences,” said Jackson.

A Chicago native, Jackson mentioned

that he grew up a Chicago Bulls’ fan when Michael Jordan and his teammates won six NBA championships. “I won’t brag,” he joked about the accomplishments of the Bulls of the 1990s.

Jackson said Jordan was once asked about the best team he ever played on. That team included Dennis Rodman, a fabulous rebounder who was also known for his colorful hair and outgoing personality. Jackson referred to Rodman as a “misfit.”

“Jordan said, ‘Dennis had his problems but he rebounded. If I took a shot and missed, he’d be there to get a rebound and give me another opportunity,’” said Jackson.

In terms of education, Jackson observed, “Our plans have to ensure that we’re able to account for those who we need to rebound—we have to be in a posture of rebounding. That is the nature of education.

But for a teacher, but for a superinten-

dent, but for a mother or father rebounding for you—you would not be here today. Our plan can’t be so constrained that it doesn’t allow for opportunity for those who may have stepped off the path just a little bit.”

Jackson also felt there needs to be some sort of “individual student recovery plan” for those who have fallen behind. “There are some students we have sort of missed already—they’ve been in our systems; they’re a half year behind, a whole year behind. There has to be some individual student recovery plans for those students.”

These plans would provide students with additional academic support—tutoring, extended day learning—and additional social supports (such as access to a guidance counselor). These recovery plans should be supported in education budgets, said Jackson.

Sexting - What school and board members need to know

It’s a buzzword that didn’t exist until recently but one that board members and school officials need to be extremely conscious of—sexting.

What is it? Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit text messages and/or photographs between cell phones.

Michelle Laubin, a partner at the law firm of Berchem, Moses and Devlin in Milford, presented an extremely informative workshop called “Sexting, Texting and Other Uses of Technology by Students and Staff: The Legal Predicaments, Pitfalls and Possibilities” at the 2010 CABE/CAPSS Convention.

Laubin brought up a recent high profile case of alleged sexting—that of 41-year-old NFL quarterback Brett Favre, who has been accused of sending sexts to a female

team employee when he played for the New York Jets in 2008. Favre, Laubin joked, was cleared of any wrongdoing because he was found to be “too old to use a cameraphone.”

Laubin’s joke underscored just how heavily today’s youth are interwoven with technology—and what sort of pitfalls that may lead to. With the law playing catch up with technology, Laubin cautioned there are “a lot of legal gray areas here.”

In fact, some people who have received nude or semi-nude images unsolicited have been charged with possession of child pornography.

In addition, teens who have texted photographs of themselves or of their friends/partners have also been charged with distribution of child pornography.

An angry voicemail from his 16-year-old girlfriend led 18-year-old Philip Albert of Florida to forward nude photos of the girl to everyone on her email list. Albert accessed the girlfriend’s email account with a password she had previously provided to him.

Albert was charged with possession and distribution of child pornography and must register as a sex offender until he is 43 years old.

According to recent surveys, sexting has become a big problem among today’s youth; for example, 22 percent of teen girls (ages 13-19) say they have sent/posted nude or semi-nude photos or videos of themselves.

In an effort to keep up with the changing landscape of technology and better protect children, Connecticut recently passed a new law addressing sexting.

Laubin informed those in attendance of the Connecticut law, Public Act No. 10-191: An Act Concerning Sexting, which went into effect this October.

The law lessened penalties for children who engage in texting; it also created a new Class A misdemeanor offense for certain acts of texting.

For the Class A misdemeanor, teens who are convicted would not have to register as a sex offender or have longer periods of probation than those convicted of other crimes.

In addition, the law provides “affirmative defenses” in some situations. For example, an individual could use an affirmative defense if they did not knowingly purchase, procure, solicit or request the images.

One Virginia assistant principal got into hot water when he thought he was doing the right thing about cell phone photos a student brought to his attention. The administrator told a student to forward the photos of another student to his cell phone for evidence. The fact the administrator had the semi-nude photo in his possession eventually led to child pornography charges.

Laubin said the fact administrators may be charged with such an offense is “counterintuitive and troubling.”

Fortunately for the assistant principal, a judge dismissed the charges because the picture did not meet the definition of sexually explicit visual material pursuant to the Virginia child pornography statute. Nonetheless, Laubin said this story should be viewed as a “cautionary tale” for administrators.

Laubin also advised school officials to adopt board policies that address sexting, including anti-harassment policies.

Districts should provide notice in their cell phone policies that the administration may search phones if it has reasonable suspicion that a search will reveal that school rules have been violated.

Districts should also incorporate notice of the school board’s policy regarding searching of student cell phones in parent-student handbooks.

Other recommendations include instituting procedure for investigating sexting; professional development for staff; and training for school board members.

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