

Upcoming Events:

For 2004 Cohort:
Creating a School Vision
February 1, 2005

For 2005 H.S. Cohort:
Initial Visit
January 2005

Philosophy, Change,
Taking Stock I
February 2005

For All Schools:
Principals & Coaches
February 2-3, 2005

Principals & Coaches
March 3-4, 2005

Principals & Coaches
May 16-17, 2005

Everyone has easy access to this newsletter on our website at www.swacceleratedschools.net

Feel free to duplicate this newsletter for all staff members, community partners, parent groups and district personnel involved with Accelerated Schools

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Orange Alert! Punkin Chunkin Comes to Texas



Catapults and trebuchets were primitive weapons of mass destruction. Originally they were designed to hurl boulders, pots of boiling oil, dead and diseased bodies, captured soldiers and flaming objects to lay siege against walled cities. Today, catapults and trebuchets are the centerpiece of an unusual sport featured on The Discovery Channel: Punkin Chunkin – a contest to catapult a pumpkin as far as possible.

Punkin Chunkin was the culminating activity for a unit of study on force, motion and simple machines at Callisburg Middle School in Callisburg, Texas. Over a two-week period, 7th and 8th grade science students in Debbie Welper and Joni Atha's classes became engineers, statisticians, reporters and competitors as teams built their own machines to compete in, "The Great Punkin Chunk Off."

The rules were simple. Teams of 4-6 students had to research, design and construct their own catapult or trebuchet. It had to include two or more simple machines, match the blueprint they designed, throw a small pumpkin at least 1 meter and stay within an allocated budget. Also, each team had to calculate the average speed of their pumpkin by recording the time and distance traveled during multiple launches. Students eagerly attacked this challenge with an amazing amount of energy and tenacity. They quickly realized this was a difficult but fun way to apply what they were learning in science and math class.

"Parental involvement was an important component of this project," explained the principal, Skip Waller. Family and community members received invitations to assist in the construction of the catapults and trebuchets. On the designated building day, an amazing sight began to unfold. Many parents, fathers in particular, welcomed the opportunity to help the students with this project. They arrived at the end of the school day bringing equipment, tools and expertise with them. They stayed late into the evening assisting all students with welding, building and testing their machines for the contest. *(Continued on page 4)*



The finalists in the Punkin Chunkin contest were "The Iron Pumpkin" and "Chunky-the-Great."

Highlights and Happenings...

Coaches Wanted

Teachers and administrators are being recruited to coach the 24 new accelerated high schools. The training for these schools will begin in late January or early February. Both full-time and part-time positions are available. Coaches are needed in East Texas, San Antonio and the lower Rio Grande valley. Part-time coaches are needed in Midland, Houston and Corpus Christi. If you or someone you know is interested in coaching, please send a resume to Bonnie Hamill. For further information about coaching, please visit our web site at www.swacceleratedschools.net.



Welcome Coaches!

We are pleased to introduce our coaches. Johnnie Brown, a talented educator and teacher mentor, is working with Houston area schools. Janet Reichel, who has been an ASP coach for five years, is working with San Antonio area schools. Charle Scott, who leads the Texas Staff Development Center, provides technical assistance to schools in Odessa. Martha Stone, also a long-time coach and experienced educator, is supporting central Texas Schools. Schools in the Rio Grande Valley are coached by Jessey Munoz and Tracy Sands. Both Tracy and Jessey are new to the Accelerated Schools family.

From the Director...

Happy New Year. It is surprising to me that the school year is halfway completed. It seems as if the years fly by faster and faster. This is probably appropriate since we are accelerated schools.

This has been a busy fall for the Southwest Center. In August, we welcomed 16 new schools to our network followed by another 24 in November. The first 16 have completed their five days of launch training plus two days of Powerful Learning. We will be working with the 24 schools to complete their launch training by May.

The revised Taking Stock format has helped schools obtain excellent data and do in-depth analyses. The first group of schools will have their Taking Stock reporting out session by the end of January. Although the two groups of schools had a delayed start because their grant awards were announced after the start of the new school year, they are making rapid progress.

Of the 40 new schools, we have 28 high schools, 4 middle schools and 8 elementary schools. This represents a significant shift from previous cohorts that were primarily elementary and middle schools. Eleven of these 40 schools are charters.

We have a number of new training sessions this spring. We have added Powerful Learning and Science and will be continuing with Powerful Learning and Math. If requested we will have Powerful Learning and Literacy this Spring also. Check out our web site www.swacceleratedschools.net for further information.

Congratulations to the fifteen schools that earned the Demonstrated Accelerated Schools award by meeting the rigorous standards established by the Southwest Center. The teachers and administrators in these schools truly exemplify the philosophy of Accelerated Schools. All of them have worked diligently for three or more years to attain this status. We congratulate Bethune Early Childhood Center, Raymond E. Curtis Elementary, Callisburg Middle School, P. S. Garza Accelerated School, Haslet Elementary Accelerated School, Laneville School K-12, Mineola Middle School, Antonio M. Ochoa Elementary, Raye-Allen Elementary, Runn Elementary, Stainke Elementary Accelerated School, Stanfield Elementary, Walnut Bend School K-8, Walnut Creek Elementary and A.C. Williams Elementary.

I encourage you to call us if you need assistance or have a question. We are here to support you in your accelerated schools journey.

Bonnie Hamill

Imagine... Three hundred and fifty teachers and administrators gathered at the Renaissance Hotel in Austin for the sixth annual Southwest Center conference. The featured presentations by Carl Glickman, Toody Byrd and Liz Carpenter, stimulated conversation on numerous topics.

Outstanding entertainment by the Dragon Dancers from Walnut Creek Elementary School (Austin), the Dance Ensemble from J. F. Kennedy Elementary in Mercedes and the Raye Allen Singers (Temple) energized the audience. The Raul Yzaguirre School for Success ROTC opened the conference with the presentation of the colors.

The Special Topic Seminars on Saturday morning earned rave reviews. Two-hour seminars provided Powerful Learning ideas and strategies to use immediately in classrooms. The Southwest Center is fortunate to have so many talented teachers.

The seventh annual conference planning is already underway. Mark your calendar for November 4 and 5, 2005. The call for proposals will be sent to you before the end of May. Of course, student entertainment is always welcome. Many schools whose students have performed at previous conferences, make the trip to Austin into a field trip with visits to the Bob Bullock History Museum, the Capitol, the LBJ Library or a UT campus tour.

Change...How to support those implementing new practices?

Carl Glickman, featured speaker at the Accelerated Schools Conference, explains in his book, *Renewing America's Schools*, that school communities follow a three-phase sequence when implementing new ways of teaching and new ways of student learning (pg. 75).

1. **New approaches to teaching and learning must be explained and then demonstrated.** When teachers first go through the process of new learning, they are concerned with what the benefits of the innovation will be, how other teachers (and systems) have done it and how it will change established practices. They need to know what the innovation looks like and how it may make their teaching life better.
2. **Opportunities must be given for role playing, applied practice and feedback.** As teachers face the experience of actually using the new practice, they are concerned with how to make it work. They face discomfort. They ask "What am I gaining when it would be far more comfortable to keep doing what I have already done?" As faculty members practice new approaches with students, skills are sharpened if colleagues who are also piloting the change observe and give nonjudgmental feedback to one another.
3. **Implementation is sustained by having faculty members involved in ongoing meetings, where they share, brainstorm and revise the use of the new approaches.** Implementation will be maintained if the faculty has continual opportunities to discuss and share successes, failures and ongoing concerns.

It takes extended practice and application before a particular change becomes routinized. Therefore as school communities are implementing new practices, the following guidelines are offered:

- Preplan for predictable staff concerns.
- Provide staff with necessary training, coaching and resources.
- Support teachers as they collaborate; demonstrate concretely that you value their collaborative efforts.

Coaches' Corner

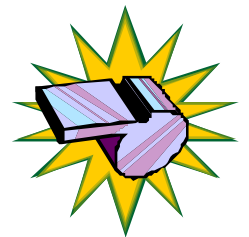
Asking Questions, Not Giving Answers The Role of an Accelerated Schools Coach

"...The key linchpin is the accelerated schools coach who must work with the school in a constructivist mode to get everyone involved in the accelerated school activities and practices... Members of the school community must do their own research to discover all of the important dimensions of their schools and to jointly develop a school dream that engages their students... *What the coach cannot do is tell the school what its problems are and how to solve them.* To do so is to violate the only effective process for obtaining deep transformation: the school constructing its own understanding of its challenges and potential solutions and taking responsibility for choosing, implementing and assessing changes.

The job of an Accelerated Schools coach is not easy. Typically, coaches help articulate between their school's unique situation and the rules, regulations, curriculum requirements, school guidelines and policies of the central office, while patiently working with a school to internalize the accelerated schools philosophy and process.

Progress is neither smooth nor continuous, but often comes in fits and starts. Nor is the timeline predictable with some schools coalescing around the process quickly and others revealing significant pockets of resistance, sometimes the most stubborn resistance emanating from the site administrator. Coaches must learn to ask questions rather than giving "answers," and must look for strengths among school staff and other participants rather than preoccupying themselves with weaknesses.

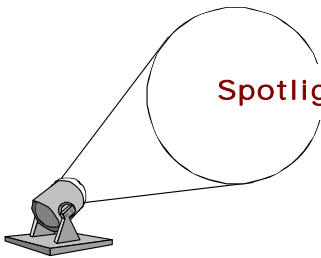
The role of the coach is often frustrating, never easy. But, almost all report that it is personally meaningful, often the first time in their careers in which their personal values are in harmony with their professional responsibilities and in which they can obtain their share of joy for an impressive record of school accomplishments. We celebrate our coaches and what they have achieved, while recognizing the challenges that they – and we – face in looking to improve the effectiveness of both our training and mentoring of coaches and their effectiveness in working with schools." *This excerpt is from the Spring 1995 Newsletter written by Dr. Henry Levin, Founder of the National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project*



"It is especially hard to stand back and watch them make mistakes, but it is necessary. I can't always have the answers and this is not what schools are used to. They expect you to have the answers for them."

Voices from the Field





FYI...

To access Punkin Chunkin lesson plans and student activity sheets log onto our website, click on **Resources** and select the link titled **Spotlight on Powerful Learning**.

Select the **Picture** link to see additional photos from Punkin Chunkin.

(continued from Page 1) Finally it was time for The Great Punkin Chunk Off to begin! Catapults, both large and small, competed each class period to advance to the final round of competition. During the final chunk off Chunky-the-Great beat the Iron Pumpkin with a winning toss of 31.78 meters. When asked about the winning design, one member explained, “The design was chosen because we all thought it would work well. Then everyone in the group worked together to weld, build and paint the catapult. We used metal parts from a tractor, springs, stakes and a come-along.”

Susan Conyers and Vonja Skjolsvik, Language Arts teachers at Callisburg Middle School, made sure this popular event was well documented. Students became members of the “Pumpkin Press” and were responsible for recording the events of the day. They interviewed their peers, took pictures and wrote articles for the school newspaper. The Gainesville Daily Register and Channel 12 News provided local media coverage for the schoolwide competition. Needless to say, the students were thrilled to see themselves on the 6:00 and 10:00 news that evening.

Students, parents, teachers and administrators agreed that Punkin Chunkin was a success for everyone involved and hope it will become an annual event at Callisburg Middle School.



What is Powerful Learning?

Powerful learning is based on the premise that the education we use with “gifted” children works well for *all* children. Accelerated school communities, as demonstrated by the Punkin Chunkin article, create situations in which every school day encompasses the *best* things we know about children and learning.

In accelerated schools, children see meaning in their lessons and perceive connections between school activities and their real lives. They learn actively and in ways that build on their own strengths. In such situations, children actively construct and discover the learning objectives rather than passively going through textbooks and filling out worksheets.

The Accelerated Schools Project does not set forth a recipe or checklist of features for creating powerful learning experiences. Rather, each accelerated school creates and chooses its own ever-growing set of powerful learning experiences based on its unique needs, strengths, resources and vision.

Constructing powerful learning situations requires creativity, an openness to risk and a willingness to share responsibility with students. If you have never created learning opportunities like this before, you may want to start slowly and work with a group of your peers. As you begin to build on strengths – your own and those of your students and colleagues – you’ll be able to find new highs in teaching and learning.

POWERFUL LEARNING FRAMEWORK

What we want for our own children

