

Education Author Offers Redesign Essentials

Acclaimed school redesign expert Linda Darling-Hammond, Ph. D., author of 'A Right to Learn,' 'Teaching in a Learning Profession,' presented an overview of her work with high-achieving schools during a presentation to teachers and administrators in Smith-Brasher Hall this summer.

Darling-Hammond, who has worked with APS on redesigning high schools to maximize teacher effectiveness and student achievement, reported that APS has been leading change in urban education, particularly in redesigning performance assessments.

Linda says she loves working in education because, "we have some of the brightest and best people to work with, and because students are so naturally intelligent." However, since her first year of teaching she's questioned how to best redesign schools in ways that allow teachers to know each student truly and deeply. In fact, she's opened a small high school that will feature many of the elements that she feels are essential to student success.

A brief history

The last time this country undertook a major re-evaluation of education was 1900-1910. One-room schoolhouses were converted to multiple classroom 'factories' in which few were considered college material and minimum expectations for knowledge and learning were common.

"Now, most of us need to be prepared for knowledge work jobs. Fewer than 10 percent are low or semi-skilled jobs; in earlier economies they comprised 90 percent of jobs available. Now, we need to teach for understanding and teach for diversity."

The old standard is that we covered the curriculum; the new standard is ensuring that children learn.

The high-achieving U.S. school districts she has researched have the following features, she said:

Continuity is important in student-teacher relationships, she claims, with the positive effects of 'looping'—creating environments where teachers and students have an opportunity to know each other quite well, and to continue to have interactions with each other across a period of several years, a vital missing link in most schools.

"The present school system severs our relationships every 36 weeks," Darling-Hammond said, "a situation that creates anxiety. Students become anxious when they have to change teachers and schools." Teachers note that their children are much less anxious and how much sooner students get into the routine.

Education Author Offers Redesign Essentials

* **Students learn best from projects which mimic the real world**, for example one built around a travel agency theme which integrates geography, math and social studies learning.

* **High performing schools teach research skills!**

“Now, parents are responsible for ‘teaching by assignment’—the parents do the research part, making students dependent on their parents’ ability to research, so not all students acquire the independent research skills they need,” Darling-Hammond said.

Other elements evidenced in high achieving schools Darling-Hammond has researched include:

- a project-based curriculum
- social science research papers
- scientific experiments
- use of technology
- literature and arts (performance and critique)

Make student achievement public

She advised schools hold frequent public exhibitions which make student achievement public so teachers can see what standards are outside their own classrooms; they learn what goes on in other classrooms and they see what high quality work looks like elsewhere.

Shared planning time for teachers is critical, she stated. All teachers should be together for a 90-minute block every day so they can plan together.

“Discovering how to get that into the curriculum is vital,” Darling-Hammond stated.

Better parent-community connections are another hallmark of schools that excel. But how do high school teachers meet with students and parents? Student portfolios and parent advisors are some ways to connect with the school’s community.