

Class Acts: A Q&A with Dave Fry

Modesto Bee. Monday, November 09, 2009

Jordan Stroud nominated Dave Fry for Class Acts. Stroud said that when he was at Argus High School he could tell just by listening to Fry that he cared about the students. Fry isn't there just for a job, he is there to help a younger generation find a better future, Stroud said.

Name: Dave Fry

Age: 50-plus

City of Residence: Escalon

Occupation: Social science instructor, Argus High School, Ceres Unified School District

Family: wife DyAnne; children Eddie, Danny, Kenny and Doug

Education background: Bachelor's from California State University, Stanislaus, in sociology; bachelor's from Chapman University in social science; BCLAD Single Subject Teaching Credential — Stanislaus State

Teaching experience: 15 years (last 11 in Ceres)

Why did you get into teaching? When I was in high school in Northern California (Yreka, Siskiyou County) the people that I admired the most, other than my dad, were my teachers, especially those in social science and English. I wanted to be one of them when I grew up.

What is your favorite thing about being a teacher? Having the opportunity to work with a captive audience and gauge their growth throughout a school year.

What is the most challenging part of your job? My most challenging aspect of teaching in alternative education is the daily absences by my learners. When I was in school, I wanted to be there every day.

What is the most important lesson you've learned? First, if I don't know the answer to something asked by my learners, I tell them that I don't know and do the research. Second, and probably the most important, listen and hear what they are asking you. ... Be human first, their teacher second.

What is your favorite teaching tool or activity? I use a series of daily prose and prompts to get the motors running each day. This series was developed over many years by friends, colleagues and others sending me material via e-mail, but most of all, my dad.

What's next in your classroom? I'm working on getting funding or a grant for a technology-based teaching tool (Promethean or SmartBoard) that will put ME in the 21st century ... I'm a digital immigrant, while my learners are digital natives.

What advice do you have for students? My learner advice — COME TO SCHOOL. If you're not here I can't teach you anything.

What advice do you have for parents? My parent advice — seek the help of your learners' teachers early in the school year and develop a plan for their success — don't wait until things are going the wrong way to react.

What will it take to improve academic success in the valley? Continue to challenge educators to be their best so that they can challenge their learners by example. Today's learners need to be constantly motivated and challenged.

How do you to reach students not interested in school? In alternative education, the majority of our incoming population is not motivated or interested in the next step toward earning a high school diploma because they have not had a positive educational experience elsewhere. I work with an entire staff, an administrator and in a district that believes the key to success is seeing the good in our learners and showing them the positive attributes of coming to Argus High every day.

What one area should schools put more emphasis on? Educational funding will always be a key topic when the term "emphasis" is used. California has lost that focus. I'm not sure when it disappeared, but I have had the opportunity to visit other schools and it is the same everywhere. "If only we had more funds," seems to be the consummate rally cry. I'm embarrassed that the largest state in the union is at or near the bottom of educational funding for the youth of our state.

If you could change one thing about the current educational system, what would it be and why? Although I am a CUTA union member; CTA member and a member of the NEA, I believe that merit-based pay would bring better teachers into the profession and make the United States competitive with the other superpowers of the world. Currently, we are not competitive and not reactive to the needs of our learners. Not everyone is college bound so we need to look at vocational and technical education to fulfill the needs of our learners.

What would surprise people about your job? Over the past 10 years, I have instructed as many as four subjects in a year. The preparation for that task is pretty overwhelming without logistical planning.

What are your future plans? I am working on the completion of my master's degree in education (curriculum, assessment and data) and preparing to enter my doctoral program in the very near future.