



# President's Reflections

by Dennis Doughty



## Rigor, Relevance...and Most Importantly, Relationships

I was a new high school principal taking time to discuss with the teaching staff some academic concerns we were having with a number of students. I was somewhat surprised when a veteran teacher offered to take all of the troubled students into his classroom. As an educator, I was always impressed by teachers who didn't mind working with students who struggled. This particular teacher was very impressive because of his extra care and concern for students who really needed his guidance and support. Amazingly, the students really appreciated his extra care and responded very positively while in his classroom, achieving at a much higher level than before.

At the time, I intuitively understood that students responded positively to teachers who care but I didn't realize the importance of relationships in education. After a teacher establishes that relationship, they can really help predict why certain students struggle in school. It reminds me of the old saying, "Students don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care." Internationally known educator, Bill Daggett talks about the importance of rigor and relevance in education but of greatest importance are relationships.

After developing that special understanding or relationship with the student, a teacher considers the following:

- There are students who need direction and support every step of the way. The teachers know that special interventions, on a regular basis, are a requirement if that student is to find success.
- There are also students who can operate outside of the direct instruction and the intense support of the teacher. While they sometimes need intervention and encouragement, especially when the content or lessons are more complex, they are able to succeed. They depend on that teacher to understand and know when their specific needs are present and when more intervention is required.
- There are students who are able to work independently and without your immediate support, but they also need encouragement and emotional support to get their work done. In essence, that relationship with student and teacher addresses their particular need.
- Finally there are those students who will be successful in spite of our support and leadership. Those students are capable of getting the job done once you point them in the right direction.

We have every type of student in our schools and they depend on teachers for the correct leadership and level of understanding for them to find success. The most important technique we develop with children, if they are to be successful, is a positive relationship with them. That relationship can make all the difference between success and failure.