

*Remarks of Hayes Mizell on Sunday, July 16, 2006 at the conclusion of the Summer Meeting of the 12 Under 12 Network. Approximately 40 educators attended the one-day meeting at the Washington Hilton in Washington, DC. The Network includes a total of 10 elementary, middle, and high schools from Texas, Illinois, Kansas, and Nebraska that have committed themselves to getting all their students to the proficient level of performance by a date certain in advance of the NCLB goal of 2014. Mizell is the Distinguished Senior Fellow of the National Staff Development Council.*

## **Being Faithful**

For people from the Christian tradition, Sunday is a day to be faithful—faithful to God, faithful to worship, faithful to one’s church community. We have been meeting today because it is the only day available to us in conjunction with the National Staff Development Council’s summer conference. Yet, I want to thank you because by your presence and participation, you have been faithful to the purpose of the 12 Under 12 Network and to your colleagues who are also here today.

As you know, 12 Under 12 is an effort to encourage your schools to keep focused on the goal of all students performing at the proficient level well before the NCLB target date of 2014. This is a challenging goal. Some people believe it is a naïve goal, even a laughable goal. They cite the fact that your students have widely varying abilities, come from dramatically different socio-economic, language, and cultural backgrounds, and have experienced during their educational careers shockingly disparate levels of preparation. All this is true.

Other people believe the goal of proficiency by all students is beyond your reach because your schools are not up to the challenge. They say your schools are like Ford and General Motors, knowing that fundamental change is necessary but crippled by union agreements, bureaucracy, and the lack of knowledge about how to change, and the will to make the effort. You are now demonstrating whether this is true, and how true or false it may be.

The National Staff Development Council knows, and you know that the odds are against you. This is why 12 Under 12 is necessary. This is why you chose to participate in this meeting today. Thank you for your faithfulness to this Network.

The fact is that your faithfulness is about the only thing this Network has going for it. NSDC has no money to give you. It has no miracle cures for your students' learning problems or lack of motivation or effort. We can share with you some experience, knowledge, and insights but whether that has impact depends on how you process and use it. 12 Under 12 is about learning. Your faithfulness to learning will determine not only the results your schools achieve but also the efficacy of 12 Under 12.

Equally important is your faithfulness to each other. It is manifest when twice a year your schools make the effort to send representatives to the semi-annual Network meetings. It is manifest when your schools' leadership teams prepare for and participate in the monthly 12 Under 12 professional learning telephone conference calls. It is manifest when you candidly share with each other your dilemmas and failures, as well as your insights and successes. Thank you for your faithfulness to your colleagues in 12 Under 12.

What is most important, however, is your faithfulness to your students. They are what 12 Under 12 is all about. It is certainly true that each school day, some students give you and your schools' teachers good reasons to give up on them. It is easy to lose faith in them. Losing faith seems to be the norm in our culture. Everyone values the achiever and hard worker. Few people value the bumbler, the struggler, the stranger, the wander, the confused. But it is these students who are at the core of the 12 Under 12 mission. They are the ones your schools much reach for all students to perform at the proficient level. The rest of society has little appetite for this task, but you do. Thank you for your faithfulness to your students.

Whether you and this Network can hang on to complete your mission remains to be seen. Schools are not rushing to join you in the Network. Perhaps they consider our goal to be folly. Perhaps they don't think it is worth the sacrifice. Perhaps they are turned off by the lack of tangible goodies. Whatever the reason, the Network has experienced some attrition since its beginning. We ask for your help in recruiting at least one more elementary school to our ranks. We need to maintain at least three schools at each of the elementary, middle, and high school levels and we would welcome more that are willing to meet the Network's rigorous standards for participation.

For schools currently in the Network, we face another challenge. When schools change principals, the outgoing principal is not always faithful about "passing off" the school's participation in 12 Under 12 to the new principal. This may be because the outgoing principal was himself not the original principal in the Network and therefore has little investment in it. The turnover of principals can result in a less than smooth transition that can significantly impede a school's progress towards meeting its student performance goal. It can also derail a school's participation in 12 Under 12. The transition should be a school's entire leadership team, not just its principal. It is the team's role to educate the new principal about 12 Under 12 and the schools participating in it. Distributed leadership is a key concept for 12 Under 12 and a school's participation in the Network is a responsibility of everyone leading the school's efforts to help students perform proficiently. Principals will continue to come and go, but a school's progress is dependent on the stewardship of a leadership team composed of stable faculty and administrators. The relevance and vitality of 12 Under 12 depends on the faithfulness of schools' leadership teams.

On the subject of ownership, we want to increasingly move into a mode of you owning the Network and determining its future. You have already taken steps in this direction by principals' helping shape the agenda for this meeting and by your discussions about a visitation to Hawthorn Middle School North in fall. Let me be clear. We are not dumping 12 Under 12 on you. George Perry and I will continue to provide support and coordination just as we have been doing. Nothing will change in that regard. We hope, however, that you will begin considering 12 Under 12 as *less* NSDC's network and *more* as *your* network. That means continuing to focus on moving your schools to all students proficient *and* thinking *more* about how 12 Under 12 can support your efforts in that direction. To put it simply, we want your ideas and suggestions for the Network's organization and activities that will help you achieve your schools' student performance goals. Let us hear from you and, more importantly, join us in taking responsibility for 12 Under 12.

Finally, I am pleased to inform you that the Fall issue of the *JSD* (Journal of Staff Development) will focus on the achievement gap, and one of the feature articles will be about 12 Under 12. The article will quote several of the principals here today and will obviously give new visibility to the Network and your work. We encourage you to use this within your school systems to validate your efforts by helping clueless school board members, superintendents, and central office staff understand, and support your schools' participation in 12 Under 12. The *JSD* article is recognition of the progress you have made during the past several years, but is also a reminder that as you begin closing in on the target dates of your student performance goals, many more people will be watching and wanting to learn from you. There will continue to be skeptics, but I urge you to stay faithful to your students and the mission of 12 Under 12.

Thank you.