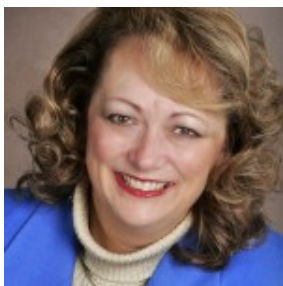


Opinion: State of the union depends on education

By Vicki Barber

President Obama's State of the Union address had a good deal to say about education. Rightfully so, high quality education does require a large portion of our nation's budget. The federal government has directed 15 percent of its budget toward education, which is equal to the amount directed to national defense. Those two budget categories are only exceeded by health care and pensions. Therefore, from a fiscal perspective, education is and should be considered extremely important.

Looking at it slightly differently, there isn't a person reading this article who did not attend school in some way. Regardless of whether this was a public school, a charter school, home school, or a private school, each of us learned to read and write through some means of education. Many of us have children and grandchildren being educated today. Yes, education is extremely important.



Vicki Barber

So what did the president say about education? 1) Without saying the word preschool, he said "... to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, our commitment to skills and education has to start earlier." I can only read that as preschool. 2) He noted that nearly every state in the union has raised the standards

for teaching and learning. More specifically, almost all states have aligned their teaching with the National Common Core Standards. 3) He supported more funds for education noting that "... a good teacher can offer an escape from poverty for a child who dreams beyond his circumstances." Having been witness to many children in our county who have come from circumstances that are perceived as less than ideal, but who go on to amazing heights, I know this is true. 4) He supported giving teachers permission to teach with passion. Most teachers go into the profession with energy, passion and enthusiasm. We want to support that enthusiasm and creativity by ensuring all teachers have the skills and experience necessary to provide all students with high quality access to those very important Common Core Standards. 5) The president issued a challenge to every state to do what is necessary to ensure students stay in high school until they graduate or turn eighteen. Our job is not to just make graduation a possibility, but a reality for every child. 6) Additionally, all students must have access to college, regardless of whether or not they choose to attend college. Encouragement to follow their dreams and to make higher education choices that support the achievement of those dreams is also crucial to the success of our next generation of learners. It is our responsibility as a society to make sure that all students have the opportunities they so deserve. And, yes, that responsibility does have a price tag.

El Dorado County has already stepped up the president's challenges. Preschool is a priority and we see outstanding programs throughout the county. Our state has adopted the Core Standards and our districts are moving in that direction. Budgets are tight, but districts in El Dorado County are actively working to support teachers and schools. We want the best because our children deserve the best. The graduation rate in El Dorado County is 90 percent, whereas the graduation rate of all of California is 74.4 percent. We actively utilize the opportunities made available through the

www.CALocalscholarships.org website. Our schools work in collaboration with families to ensure all students who wish to attend college have the funds to do so.

Yes, we are up to the challenge in El Dorado County. We're all about education.

Vicki Barber is El Dorado County superintendent of schools.