The Special Education Issue!

“Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.

- Marian Wright

Did you know? The Special Education Law was passed in 1975, and stated, “public schools must provide for children with special needs.” In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was passed. This created IEPs (Individual Education Plans) that must be followed, and allows parents to follow up to see if they are being correctly adhered to.
You’ve heard of the compliment sandwich -- when giving criticism, you should add a compliment before and after. This has been a standard feedback method. But is this the best way? Recent studies suggest there might be better alternatives.

The problem may be in the way we think. When we receive “constructive feedback” via the compliment sandwich, we tend to remember the last items and minimize the things that come in the middle. For example:

“You’re great.”
“You need to work on this…”
“But, you’re great.”

What was communicated? The person heard twice that they’re great, and once that something needs improvement, but the last comment reinforces that they’re mostly ok.

But the real purpose for the compliment sandwich is more complicated. It’s intent is to offset negative feelings generated with criticism with positive feelings of praise. But this can reduces the impact of criticism, which in turn reduces the opportunities for growth.

A growth-mindset reception of criticism recognizes that growth comes from each learning experience. So here are four alternatives to the traditional compliment sandwich.
Amanda Chavez

I grew up in Las Vegas, NM. I attended NMSU on a dance education scholarship and later Highlands University. While in college, I worked as a certified nursing assistant in the Forensic Ward at the Las Vegas Medical Center. I worked with patients who were deemed incompetent to stand trial for violent crimes. I have worked in education for 16 years. Prior to Cottonwood I worked for Rio Rancho Public Schools for 6 years with severely disabled children, and with The Department of Defense Schools in Wiesbaden, Germany for four years where I taught kindergarten as well as 4th and 5th grade special education. It was a wonderful experience to be able to serve the military community and travel throughout Europe. I returned to NM five years ago and taught kindergarten at Valencia Elementary in Los Lunas. I have also coached Varsity cheerleading (earning two European Championships) and Track. This is my 3rd year at Cottonwood. In my spare time I coach Gymnastics, teach ballet as well as freelancing as a choreographer for gymnasts and dance/cheer teams. I currently live in Los Lunas with my boyfriend, Leon, two kids, Jordan, and Lauren, who keep me busy with their sports, and three crazy dogs.

Interviewing Ms. Clara Roybal by Darian Kapelianis-Donado

I interviewed my math teacher, Clara Roybal, and asked her some questions about CCPS. This what she said.

What do you think about your students?: CCPS is a great school! I find for the most part that all the students here are very motivated. The students come with good and solid math foundations. The students know they are ahead in math so they take it seriously and want success. The kids appreciate the opportunity they get at CCPS.

Why did you come to CCPS?: I think I came to Cottonwood because I felt that my beliefs and my previous experiences in education aligned to CCPS, which drew me to the school.

What are some of the strengths of this school?: Smaller classes which all educators know is an important ingredient to any student’s success. My colleagues at CCPS seem very dedicated and passionate about their work, well prepared, and in general a pleasure to work with. CCPS teachers are truly quality teachers. CCPS curriculum is rigorous and thoughtful for the future success of a college-bound student. Parents truly care about their child’s education and really support what goes on in the school as well as the administration being really supportive.

What impresses you at this school?: I feel most kids help each other and encourage one another. One of the things that I have been most impressed with from my students is their focus, commitment, and preparation for Socratic seminars.

What is your conclusion of your time at CCPS?: I think CCPS is truly a great and excellent model school that other schools could benefit learning from. The students are motivated. Staff and administration help each other. In general I am amazed with how teachers, staff and parents at CCPS get creative with the resources.

Peru Adventures by Emmie Porter

Photos and Interviews by Claudia Urbina and Cooper Linderfelt

The Peru trip was a delightful trip for all the students and chaperones who went. Students were immersed into a new country and got to discover it first hand. On the first day of this adventurous trip, the group arrived in Peru in the morning. They proceeded to exchange their money into sol, money used in Peru, before they visited the JFK memorial park. After seeing this beautiful memorial the group walked to the monastery and did an hour-long tour. Not long after, they took a bus to the Larco Museum and were able to see many different exhibits. The group then took a flight to Cusco. They explored the wondrous sights of Ollantaytambo! On the second day, the group took a train to Machu Picchu, another city in Peru. After being in the city for some time, they took a bus to the ruins nearby. They were able to take a four-hour tour at the extraordinary ruins before riding the bus back to Machu Picchu to stay the night. (Continued on page 7).
Chris Eisenberg

I am an Albuquer-que native and have been working with children all of my adult life. My experienc-es include case management at Youth Development Incorporated as well as a thirty year career in NM public education. I have a degree in Criminal Jus-tice, Multicultural Education, Special Edu-cation and a Master of Arts in Educational Administration. Most of my time has been spent in leadership positions, assisting departments and organizations to become high performing systems. I am at my best when I am working in partnership with staff to support student achievement. I know the most important job in a school happens in the classroom and giving teachers quality support allows them to focus on their students. As such I am available to problem solve and design accommodations specifically tailored to meet student learning needs. I believe that all students can learn and are born to share their unique talents. Cottonwood Classical Preparatory School has graduat-ed many students with learning differ-ences and the staff works creatively to provide quality education and supports to meet each students needs.

✓ Plussing: Pixar studio executives wanted to encourage creativity while designing a story that works. They even welcomed crazy ideas. However, another person couldn’t reject an idea. They needed to “plus it,” figure out a way to make it work.

Idea 1: “Before work, the businessman stood on the beach.”
Idea 2: “For the beach (plus) is where the bus stop was located.”

To quote David Burkus in Psychology Today (2018), “The way plussing works is that if you give a criticism, you also have to give a plus—a suggestion for how to fix the criticism you just pointed out. Then, after the issue has been discussed, the person on the receiving end has freedom to accept or reject the suggestion.”

✓ Feed Forward: Imagine you’ve just turned in a project and you’ve received great feedback. Then you think, “If only I had known this before I turned it in.” Feedback focuses on how you could have done. But what if you had been given this advice in smaller chunks along the way? Feed Forward tells you how to continuously improve. “If you add more in this section, it will reinforce your answer.” The objective is growth.

✓ PIES Method: This starts with a compliment, but instead of sandwiching the criticism, it describes the transformation process. It identifies the positive, where change is needed, why change is needed, and the growth that will occur with change.

Praise/Positives: “You had good examples in your paper.”
Identify the Issue: “But the evaluation wasn’t thorough enough.”
Explain the Effect: “You missed the full impact of the issue.”
Success: “By investigating deeper, you will be able to grow in critical reasoning and really flush out the full impact of this issue.”

✓ Velvet Hammer: The velvet approach is very different, giving the transformative power to the receiver. This approach identifies the issue, but softly lets the receiver craft the response.

“I noticed that [issue goes here.] (Pause) I was wondering what’s causing this problem (pause), because it cannot continue. What do you suggest we do?”

The listener then generates their own strategies moving forward.

Wrapping it up: whatever strategy appeals to you, remember these general tips!

General tips.
1. Before criticism, we need to build trust with one another.
2. Make it growth-centered, not a put down (those are insults).
3. We need to be ok with hearing criticism, in order to improve.
4. Finally, only give one criticism at a time (No double, or triple stuffed sandwiches / pies ... it just too much to “digest”).
Vision of Special Education Dept.

**What is your overall Vision?** Our vision is to make sure that we are helping kids in the classroom, to be available and helping teachers develop strategies to kids in the classroom.

**How has your collaborative process been this year with team?** We collaborate daily, both with coverage for IEP meetings and writing IEP meetings. The meetings go well.

**What are some of the differences this year?** In previous years there were three special education teachers. The workload was divided amongst the three. This year, Amanda writes all of the IEPs and takes care of all the scheduling and evaluations to make sure its all done on time. Cliff is the case manager the High School (grade checks, being available during advisory during student support, and facilitating meetings) and Tina handles the middle school.

**What book having you all been reading as a department?** We have been reading Fair is not Equal.

**What Defines the Special Education Department?** We just want to make sure every student feels successful. This looks differently for each different student. Some students want to letter grade progress, and others need more targeted support with academic or everyday skills. We want everyone to feel successful.

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London in Depth by: Andres de Santiago

If you had to choose between going to Stonehenge, the Tower of London, or Windsor Castle, what would you choose? Well, I was lucky enough to go see all three and more. This trip truly was an adventure of a lifetime, not only because of the things I got to see, but the experiences I got to have with my friends.

The flights on the way to London were, in my opinion, one of the most underrated parts of this trip. Although some people hate long plane rides, it’s the perfect way to relax before you really start your trip, especially if you get off to a start like ours. As soon as we arrived in London, we dropped our bags off at our hotel around 9 am and set off on a walking tour, and spent our day out and about until 9 pm. Along the way during the first day in London, we got to explore Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, and Leicester Square. During the second day, we got to explore some familiar and unfamiliar sights, like the London Eye, Royal Albert Memorial, Buckingham Palace, St. Paul’s Cathedral, and a play, The School of Rock.

The most memorable day of our trip was definitely our third in London. We started with a two and a half hour drive to Stonehenge, one of the monuments a lot of us were very excited to see. Our time spent there was not very exciting however, as it was super, super rainy there. Some people were so miserable afterwards that they dropped 30+ dollars on socks and sweatpants. After our time in Stonehenge, we drove to Windsor Castle, which was considered by some to be the best area we got to explore, despite the fact that a good portion of us were still soaking wet. (Continued on page 7)
First and foremost, I am a proud mother of three sons and two grandchildren. I grew up in Albuquerque, attending Madison Jr. High, Sandia High School and UNM. I have a Special Ed. degree, and I am also endorsed to teach LA and Gifted. After spending ten years in the restaurant business, I first starting my teaching career working at Madison MS and transitioning to Truman MS after being sent to Estes Park to learn from gifted expert, George Betts, and his "Autonomous Learner Model". Gifted students took Seminar classes wherein they developed and implemented projects to practice and enhance their leadership abilities. My students worked alongside a Cat Rescue as well as raising money with the Make A Wish Foundation to help send a local child and her family to Disney World, among other projects. In 2004, I was awarded the Crystal Apple in recognition for my work with gifted students. Later, I taught humanities at Desert Ridge MS, and NM History at Sandia Prep School.

Besides teaching history at Sandia Prep, I was the director of SummerPrep in 2010, co-sponsored the Student Government, and traveled with high school students internationally to Costa Rica, Africa, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. In 2016, I was trained in IB and have enjoyed my continued learning as I work at Cottonwood.
During our fourth day in London, we got to see the Tower of London, take a short cruise down the Thames River that flows through the city, and explore the National Observatory and Maritime Museum. Our last day in London started with a drive to Stratford, the city in which Shakespeare was born and lived. After exploring the home in which Shakespeare grew up as well as Anne Hathaway’s childhood cottage, we drove up to Oxford, where we not only got to walk through the college, but also explore the city itself.

There were other parts of the trip that I enjoyed, but they weren’t places or monuments, they were the food and, unexpectedly, taking public transport. Over the course of this trip, we got to try a huge variety of food and see an assortment of restaurants. We got to try traditional things such as fish and chips, as well as a few other places, like a Malaysian restaurant and an Asian restaurant. Interestingly enough, almost all the local restaurants had underground areas that were usually used for seating and/or the kitchen. Taking public transport was a surprisingly fun experience. Sometimes the trains and buses were like an abandoned town and were practically completely empty, while other times, you were lucky if there wasn’t someone wasn’t bumping into you from every side.

Despite having its ups and downs, this trip was a once in a lifetime experience and everyone who was lucky enough to go enjoyed it.

On the third day, the group took the train back to Ollantaytambo taking the entirety of the day. The group spent days three and four of the trip building a staircase for a school in the high mountains of Peru. On their fifth day, they explored the market in Ollantaytambo. The group found lots of touristy items in the market. The remainder of the day, the students were granted free time to uncover and explore more of Ollantaytambo. Students Claudia Urbina and Cooper Linderfelt decided to use their time walking around the town square. The sixth day of the trip was spent driving back to Cusco and going to a special market. At the special market, the group found lots of touristy food. To start the seventh day off, the group drove to Saqsaywaman. On the way to Saqsaywaman, the students stepped out of their comfort zones and tried alpaca and guinea pig. They spent an hour exploring Saqsaywaman they drove to the hotel for the night.

On the eighth and last day of the trip, the group flew back to Lima and enjoyed the rest of the day on the beach. After the beach, they went to dinner. The group stayed up until 1 AM or the 8-9 hour flight they had back to the US. After interviewing Claudia Urbina about her trip she said her favorite thing was “hiking Machu Picchu and taking in how beautiful and unreal it was.” Another student, Cooper Linderfelt, said his favorite thing was “traveling to different cities and seeing the culture.” He also said the biggest fascination he had with Peru was “the difference in food”. Overall, Peru was an experience of a lifetime for the students and chaperones who went!
So I go to a conference, just minding my own business, and then somehow I end up in the newspaper. I’m just as surprised as you are! (That’s my story and I’m sticking to it!)

This last Thursday I was at the community conference on the new student assessment, mostly due to curiosity of the turnout and very interested in what type of reactions would be elicited from the crowds. With the exception of one overly passionate educator in the secondary teachers breakaway, everything went smoothly.

Juniper Chrisp, the student also quoted in the Albuquerque Journal, did an incredible job! The longer I teach, the more I’m convinced the purpose of students is to remind adults the wisdom of youth that has been forgotten with age. Juniper’s mother shared excellent points as well (including not wanting teachers penalized). I was so impressed because they shared nearly identical concerns to what many of you have shared with me in the hallways.

When it came to me, I walked on stage and said, “there’s nothing left to add after what the incredible students and parents shared.” Then I tried to walk away. They called me back. (Rookie mistake on the part of this new NMPED administration! As you all know, getting me to talk isn’t an issue, getting me to shut up is.)

I raised several points about the nature of students assessments in New Mexico over the last several years. The Journal wisely only printed the two most publishable of my thoughts. If you want to know more on what I specifically spoke about, just ask and I will gladly share.

Overall, it was a good conference and I’ve been impressed with this administration’s willingness to listen and seek out all stakeholder voice.

Vest Regards,

Greg