



ESA Spotlight Series

Perspectives

www.aesa.us

March 2017

Education Matters: A weekly broadcast news program features the good news about Fresno County Schools

Education Matters, a weekly television spot about good news in Fresno County Schools, was awarded the Brian L. Talbott Award by the Association of Educational Service Agencies in 2016. The award acknowledges contributions in technological innovation and support to local districts and educational service agencies. This article examines how that award winning program was developed and sustained.

By John Fitzgerald

There are hundreds of stories to be told in each school – amazing students and dedicated teachers who go about the business of education without fanfare or recognition. We'd love for everyone to hear these "good news" stories of education, but how do we get those stories to the public?

Like most good things, it took a mixture of luck, timing and hard work to bring the weekly segment Education Matters to the local news in Fresno County, California. After having recently aired their 128th episode of Education Matters, Jim Yovino and his staff have the honor of calling the program a success.

Yovino, the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, oversees 32 districts with 200,000 students. Three years ago, he knew there was no shortage of encouraging things happening in Fresno County, but it was difficult to shed light on those stories apart from the more common education coverage of crime, drugs, financing and punitive national policies.

"I'm 60 years old and every time I walk into a classroom I'm so proud of what's going on. I wanted to partner with media to tell these stories," Yovino said.

This is when Yovino discovered an opportunity. Retired award-winning broadcast journalist Juanita Stevenson and her colleague, Justin Davis, owner of Fenceline Media, approached Yovino with the idea to partner on telling positive news stories in education. Together, they would produce the stories.

With Stevenson and Davis on board, Yovino approached the local NBC affiliate, KSEE 24. Vice President and General Manager Matt Rosenfeld immediately embraced the idea and agreed to run a four- to seven-minute news segment during the 6:30 p.m. broadcast every Monday night called Education Matters. The station's anchors would introduce the story reported by Stevenson. At the conclusion of the segment, Stevenson and the anchors would interact live on set about the story.

There are many qualities that make Education Matters a success, including that it airs at a consistent time on a reputable broadcast news channel. Promotional materials point to the spots and also direct viewers to other social media such as Facebook or YouTube to view the complete menu of past segments.

According to KSEE 24, the broadcast segments are viewed by more than 13,000 people every Monday. "We've had some segments receive more than 10,000 additional views through social media," Yovino said.

Although the primary partners are KSEE 24 and the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Yovino found sponsors to underwrite the cost of production. The sponsors – Fresno State, Table Mountain Rancheria, Granville Homes and Educational Employees Credit Union -- receive recognition on all segments. Air time is provided at no additional cost by KSEE 24.

The Education Matters stories aren't limited to just the school districts. Stevenson and Davis report on colleges, faith-based schools, charter schools and community colleges. "It doesn't matter as long as it's a good story," Yovino said. "Juanita and Justin will often go out on a story and come back saying, 'I have ideas for five more.' There's no shortage of things we can share."

Residents often comment about the segments and schools share the segments with parents. For example, Education Matters recently aired a well-received two-part segment on social media and how parents can monitor their child's activities. Schools now use the segments as teaching tools for their parents.

Recreating Education Matters in other districts would require the same elements Yovino found: A quality reporter and producer who are eager to do the job; a media outlet willing to provide the air time and get behind the segments with promotional materials; and several funding sources. While this combination isn't common, under the right circumstances Education Matters can be replicated almost anywhere in the country.

These are some of the reasons Education Matters was awarded the Brian L. Talbott Award by the Association of Educational Service Agencies. The award acknowledges contributions in technological innovation and support to local districts and educational service agencies.

"I'm proud of Fresno," Yovino said. "The award validates all the work we do selflessly every day as educators."