



Texas Association of Community Schools

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“NOT FOR OURSELVES ALONE ARE WE BORN”, CICERO

A couple of weeks ago, my wife and I had the opportunity for a double treat. Not only were we blessed with the chance to visit with our daughter and her family, but we also got to hear Gene Watson in concert. Many of you are probably asking, “Who is Gene Watson?” If you are one of those people, I know something about you – either you are not a country music fan or you were not alive in the 1970s and 1980s. During that time period, Gene Watson churned out country hit after country hit. Some country music fans simply refer to him as “the voice”, and it is still as strong and pure today as it was when he was just breaking into the “big time”.

The warm-up act for Mr. Watson was a performer that I had never before heard. Her name is Amber Digby, and she lives in the Houston area. I enjoyed her portion of the program, and I enjoyed hearing of her life with the stories she told between songs.

Her mother and step-father were both well known in Nashville’s country music scene. Amber’s mother sang back-up for a legendary performer and her step-father was a legendary steel guitarist who played for Hank Williams, Jr. as well as other famous performers. In other words, country music was Amber’s “family business” and she grew up surrounded by much of country music’s royalty.

With this background, I was interested in Ms. Digby’s story of the country music performer whom she considered to be her mentor and who gave her the break that “set her apart” from other new performers. According to her story, she had the opportunity to collaborate with Ronnie Milsap on some songs for an album he was planning. Ronnie had worked with her step-father, so they were acquainted.

A while after the collaborative effort, Ronnie had the opportunity to host a segment of the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. He invited Amber to perform a song during his segment of the evening’s program. Of course she accepted; performing at the Grand Ole Opry is considered the biggest break a young country music performer can receive! This performance was doubly exciting for Amber however, because not only was it her first performance on the Opry, but that evening the show was from the home of the original Grand Ole Opry, the Ryman Auditorium. She could not believe the emotions that swept over her that evening! As a tribute to Ronnie Milsap for the wonderful invitation that he extended to her, Amber sang one of the songs that he had recorded and loved, but one that had not become a great hit. It is titled “Silent Night After The Fight”.

From Ms. Digby’s story it was obvious to me that she considers Ronnie Milsap to be an important person in her professional development and in her professional life. I could not help but wonder, however if Mr. Milsap was aware of the impact his kind gesture of introducing a young wannabe performer to the real world of professional country music had on her.

At a time when Texas is begging for quality teachers and school leaders we need some Ronnie Milsaps to step up and inspire more of the wonderful young people who are today’s high school students. Wouldn’t it be wonderful for them to decide to make teaching their life’s work?

Laura Yeager and I had the opportunity to meet hundreds of enthusiastic, vibrant, and talented middle school teachers during the AMLE Conference held in Austin in early October. One of the topics that was discussed in the conference was how a teacher shortage was impacting curriculum offerings and quality instruction in some schools. With Texas adding 80,000+ new students each year, many more talented young teachers are needed to fill our state’s classrooms.

If Ronnie Milsap can, with one kind act, unknowingly accelerate a young performer’s career, just think what dedicated school leaders with a purpose can do to inspire the young talent in our schools today to dedicate themselves to becoming teachers.

You look like you could be a Ronnie Milsap to me!

YOU NEED MONEY DON'T YOU?

Journalist Dan Rather and his grandson Martin Rather are sponsoring a \$10,000 prize for the best idea to improve education in the state of Texas. Founded last year, The Rather Prize honors a student or educator or a school team with the best idea. The school of the person(s) with the winning proposal will receive a grant of \$10,000 from The Rather Prize, an additional \$10,000 from Rice University to implement the idea, and an expense paid trip to present at SXSWedu Festival in Austin in March, 2017.

Last year's winner was Eastside Memorial High School in the Austin ISD. Called the Step-Up Challenge, their proposal of a mentorship program for minority and underserved students with university and business partners to provide guidance and to help prepare more college or workforce ready high school graduates caught the judges' eyes.

Do you and your colleagues have an idea for improving public education in Texas that has been brewing in your brains for some time? Why not visit <http://www.ratherprize.com> for more information or to enter the contest? You have until December 31, 2016, to submit a one-step application.

IT'S ALMOST ELECTION DAY

Many Americans are relieved to learn that Election Day is only **two weeks** away! This has certainly been one for the record books. I can never remember an election like it, and I hope to never see another even close to the vitriol, mud-slinging, and demeaning rhetoric of this one.

With that said, however, if we are working to build a "culture of voting" in Texas public schools, we cannot just choose to vote when the campaign is sterile and the rhetoric is bland. We **must** build a system that not only encourages, but also makes it possible, for every eligible voter to cast a ballot every election. What are you doing to provide time during the day for your staff and students who are registered to leave the school (if necessary) to vote? Are you providing transportation to the voting booth to ensure that your staff are serving as role models of civic engagement for your students and community? Has your Board adopted the [Voting Resolution](#) prepared by TASB and included in Update 52 of your Board Resource Manual? (If you need another copy of the resolution, email me. I will get it to you immediately!) The Resolution is protection for you as you work to encourage a voting public.

The interim hearings of the Texas legislature have made it even more apparent how desperately Texas needs legislators who are committed to strong, quality public education policy. That is only accomplished in one way – electing men and women committed to it. Electing the right people takes votes! We have two weeks left to implement a plan in every school district in Texas to make voting a priority for every educator in our state. Is your district implementing yours? If not, **GET BUSY!!**

REMINDER, EARLY VOTING BEGAN YESTERDAY AND ENDS ON NOVEMBER 4TH!!

Barry Haenisch
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