Ed doctorate a key step for kids' success

By HAMID SHIRVANI

Here in the rich Central Valley, we raise many products of great value -- from almonds to alfalfa -- but when it comes to raising our children, we are not doing the job we could and should do.

Our high school graduation rates are alarmingly low. Too many of our young people who attend a community college fail to cross the bridge to a four-year institution. Even literacy rates are below what they should be.

Parents, indeed all Californians, should be alarmed that we are not producing the educated work force that can keep pace with demand.

This situation is not only surprising, it contradicts what most Americans say they believe: that a college education has taken on the importance that a high school education once had.

According to a 2000 study by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, the majority of Americans believe a college education is a necessary ingredient for a good job and a comfortable lifestyle. Yet too many of our children are not taking advantage of the resources at hand.

What is the source of this disconnect between what we value and what we do? Why are so many young people not getting the education they will need to succeed?

The answers are not easy to come by. Although we can offer many explanations -- poverty, the high numbers of immigrant families -- in truth, we don't know as much as we should to address this grievous problem.

What we do know is that we need more educators who are specifically trained to research these vital issues. We need more educators who can help us find the answers to why our young people can't read, don't finish high school or stop short of completing their college degrees.

Under the leadership of Chancellor Charles Reed, a landmark agreement between the University of California and the California State University systems promises to help break this logjam between what we know and what we need to know.

Our two public systems of higher education have agreed that our state universities can begin offering a doctorate of education (Ed.D.) degree, pending approval by the Legislature. What does this mean for California's children?
Nothing less than a chance for a better future.

The doctorate of education is an applied research degree. This means that graduates of this program are trained to connect theory to practice; they are trained to be leaders in their field, to conduct and interpret research that will improve the practice of education.

Ed.D. graduates will be prepared to help us resolve the issues that face not only our K-12 systems, but also improve education and training in the public and private sectors, in our schools and in our communities.

The Ed.D. degree was first developed at Harvard University in the early 1920s. By 1999, it was offered by about 180 colleges and universities. Yet there still are not enough of these educational leaders. This landmark agreement will help us to develop the leaders and researchers we need to answer these important questions.

The decision to offer the Ed.D. degree in our state universities should have been made long ago. California State University, Stanislaus, is ready to move forward swiftly to offer this program to those already employed as superintendents, principals and teachers and to the next generation of educators still completing their degrees.

Here in the Central Valley, we have developed one of the richest agricultural industries in the world. We have done so because we know the value of research that connects what happens in our fields with what we know about pesticides, soil chemistry, fertilizers and more.

The time has come to bring that same focus to our children's education -- to apply the value of research to making our schools better and to removing the obstacles that keep our children from taking advantage of the educational resources available to them.

Our children deserve no less.

Shirvani is the new president of California State University, Stanislaus.

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