

Collaboratively Speaking

December 2011

Our Swerve

As the calendar year draws to a close, I want to wish each of you a happy and healthy holiday season and New Year. It certainly has been a momentous year for us. Since the initial stories broke in June about mismanagement at the Merrimac Special Education Collaborative and its relationship with the Merrimac Education Center we have been non-stop in our efforts to get our message out regarding the many valuable contributions each of you and your organizations make across the Commonwealth. This has not always been easy and sometimes discouraging since some want to characterize the transgressions of one as indicative of the behavior of all. I do believe that we have eradicated that perception in our conversations and presentations with the many policy makers and elected officials with whom we have met. The negativity has been replaced with more tempered conversations, understanding and acknowledgement of the vital role you play in providing high quality cost effective programs and services daily to our many member districts, staff and in many cases their most disabled students.

Recently I read a book entitled “The Swerve: How the World Became Modern” by Stephen Greenblatt. Greenblatt is a Shakespearean scholar from Harvard who also authored “Will in the World: How Shakespeare became Shakespeare.” He tells the true story of Poggio Bracciolini who was purported to be the greatest book hunter of the Renaissance. Simply stated, Pogo discovers, on a dusty bookshelf in a remote Italian monastery, the lost and only extant copy of the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius’ poem “On the Nature Of Things” Yes, “De Rerum Natura” to those of you who remember your Latin. The poem had been lost for thousands of years and was the subject of much inquiry and curiosity. Its central thesis is that virtue and pleasure are not opposites but interrelated and that matter consists of small particles in eternal motion randomly colliding and “swerving” in different directions. As you know holding such beliefs in the Middle Ages was not only wrong headed but was in fact heretical and the holder of such belief subject to inquisition, condemnation and persecution.

The author hypothesizes that that the manuscript’s rediscovery was the spark that ignited the Renaissance and its emergence from the intellectual darkness of the Middle Ages. From that seed the beauty, wisdom, and intellectual curiosity of the renaissance flourished.

So what, I am sure you are asking. Well, similar to the “Swerve” that Bracciolini’s discovery launched, we may be able to look back at 2011 as our “Swerve” year and herald 2012 as the dawn of a new era for educational collaboratives. Yes, 2012 holds great promise for us. Soon, a Commission will be established and charged with responding to many of the questions we have asked for the last several years. “What are the rules of engagement under which we operate? What is the role of educational collaboratives within the Commonwealth? Could and should that role be expanded? We now, at last, have an attentive audience to help us answer those questions, which has not been the case in the past. May 2012 be our “Swerve” moment and may we look back on it as finally defining who we are and acknowledging the value we provide. That would be my wish for the year ahead. Best wishes for a new, exciting and healthy New Year!

Best wishes,

Steve