



# Martin Luther King Jr.

## Garlanding Ceremony

January 18, 2008

### Larry L. Powell Superintendent's Message

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Edmund Burke said, "All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing." Martin Luther King was a good man who did something and his legacy can be found in his work, his speeches, and his deeds. Dr. King had an amazing ability to put words together that had both an immediate and a long-lasting impact on the world around him. I will share some of those powerful words with you today and I will add a comment or two.

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." What a challenge for each of us here today! The harder path is the one Dr. King chose and that is to avoid the destructiveness of selfishness and to look for ways to positively engage those around him...friend and foe alike. What a great example for all of us these almost 40 years since his death. The Bible says that darkness cannot contain the light and in a like manner, when we utilize the light of creative altruism, we make the world a little better place each time.

"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." A dream or goal only dies when we cease to build on the struggles and suffering of those who have gone before us. Suffering only loses its value if a group of people develop a callousness of heart and fail to realize that when one man suffers, we all suffer. The struggle for fairness and inclusion never ends and should not as long as even one person is treated as worth less than another. Our continuing passion for justice can and should be an affirmation of the work that Dr. King started so many years ago.

As an educator, my heart is lifted everytime I hear or read these words from Dr. Kings "I have a Dream speech."

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

One of my favorite pictures in my office is of a group of students from Lamar Treadwell's class at West Fresno Elementary crowded around me after I had spent some time with them answering many different questions. As I look at that picture, I am struck by so many eyes filled with excitement and anticipation of their futures. They are bright eyes that shine of hope and a bright tomorrow. They expect us to judge them on their character and not on the color of their skin. And we should not do less.

Another thing Dr. King said is: “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.” Public schools are making an effort to live up to this important goal. We must not only develop the intellect and academic part of a student but we must also impart universal values found in the writings of Dr. King and programs like Character Counts...where dignity and self-worth are a birthright of every child in school. Garrison Keeler of *Prairie Home Companion* says that everyone needs a Storm Home...a place of safety out of the hurricane of life. To me that means that every student has the right to expect that they will feel safe and secure at school and not be full of fear. Schools should be a storm home where they can realize their dreams and hopes and be encouraged to become all that they can be.

Let me leave you with this challenge from one of Dr. King’s speeches: “We will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends. The time is always right to do what is right.” Until every student in public school knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are treasured individuals possessing unique qualities that greatly contribute to the world around them, we have not done our jobs. We must not faint from the challenges ahead but must face them with courage and determination so that, not one day, but today, every child attends a school and lives in a neighborhood that recognizes their value and encourages them to fulfill their dreams for a better life. Please join me in this most noble and worthwhile effort. If not now...then when? If not you, then who?