SYSTEM-WIDE EDUCATORS CHALLENGD TO "A.C.E. THE DAY" IN DEVELOPMENT SESSION

By Ron Barry

There is a reason the Crockett County School District leadership has stayed "in-house" when seeking a quality presenter for its system-wide Professional Development Day.

Who better to inspire a group of teachers at the start of a new school year than a master teacher – already in residence – who knows the district as well as anyone?

And while Bobby Rawson was concerned that he might produce a Grease 2 – as in, "the sequel was considerably less than the original" – the veteran coach and mathematics mentor delivered a winning program for the second consecutive year.

Rawson created his first presentation for the 2024-25 school year, focusing on his experience of 30-plus years in the classroom to give his listeners an opportunity to become better teachers. This time, Rawson's goal was to try to help those who gathered in the CCHS Little Theater become better people – because "better people make better teachers."

Mixing all the gifts that have made him a distinguished success in teaching, coaching, and pastoring – experience, competitiveness, caring for students, a godly foundation, and a sizeable helping of comedy – Rawson focused on challenging Crockett's educators to "A.C.E. the Day," an encouragement to best utilize three key qualities that are under each individual's control: Attitude, Character, and Effort.

Pointing out that a teacher "can spend 30 years in a classroom but only have one year of experience" – a derogatory nod toward those who "refuse to change" even when everything around them is changing – Rawson said that it's important for teachers to be willing to change in order to remain relevant and prepared.

"Nothing changes if nothing changes," he said. "The starting point is to ask yourself: What is my purpose? And as a teacher, how can my purpose make this a better school system?"

Rawson, the winningest volleyball coach in West Tennessee (excluding Memphis) history, contrasted two of the several possible answers for one's purpose: God and success.

"If God is your purpose in life, then your life is about bringing glory to him," he said. "Whatever you do, whatever you say, whatever the outcome, do all in his name to give your best and give him thanks for the opportunity. Whether on top of the mountain or in the valley, it doesn't matter – you should complete the purpose, and the outcome does not matter in fulfilling your purpose. And there will always be something missing if you make yourself the 'God' that you are trying to please."

Rawson also cautioned against a half-hearted commitment if you claim God as your purpose.

"If you're going to play on his team, you wear the uniform of his team. Don't sully it. You drag the whole team down if you aren't fulfilling the purpose," he said.

If being successful is your purpose, Rawson explained, there are only two outcomes: winners and losers. Losers take things that happen to them and they pout or use them for self-destruction. Winners take whatever they feel or whatever outcomes make their way and use those things to motivate themselves to be successful in the future. "But," he cautioned, "how you define success is the key factor with this purpose. It should be measurable and directional."

In addressing ways to improve one's attitude, Rawson suggested: (1) Name things every day that you are grateful for; (2) Surround yourself with positive people; (3) Try to make other people happy; (4) Focus on what you get to do – a different point of view than having to do something; (5) Direct your energy toward solutions, not problems; (6) Pay attention to the information you consume, because what goes in is going to come out; (7) Failure is a natural part of life – learn and grow from it; and (Laugh! It truly is "a medicine for the bones."

Rawson took an extremely complicated dictionary definition of character and constructed a simplified version: "Do the right thing because it's the right thing to do." Acknowledging that "it's not always easy," he suggested that his listeners practice the "Golden Rule" ("Do unto others…) and be able to look in the mirror at the end of every day with a clear conscience and the confidence that you did something to make somebody else's life better.

As to effort – which includes holding students under your charge accountable – Rawson offered this advice: (1) Define your goals; (2) Discipline yourself; (3) Keep a positive mindset; and (4) Avoid burnout, by being aware of your emotional state, taking charge of your well-being, saying 'no' when necessary, and getting help if you need it.

Tying it together at his conclusion, Rawson said, "When you know your purpose, you can A.C.E. the day."

Rawson interspersed his talking points with a series of games that kept his audience engaged, including "Family Feud," "Deal or No Deal," and a contest in which five "actors" tried to "out-act" each other by delivering their lines as outrageously as they could. Elementary music teacher Chloe Lollar won the spectators' vote.

The Friday program capped a week of professional development for the CCSD, which was highlighted Thursday by open houses at each of the five schools and a community prayer service in the high school gymnasium. Student-led prayers were augmented by an uplifting message from A.J. Keyte, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Alamo, who challenged those attending to show the same expectation from their prayers and the same boldness of their love for God that Peter and the other apostles demonstrated in Acts 2.

Classes for all Crockett County School District students begin Monday.



Left: Bobby Rawson tries to enlist Crockett County Middle School Principal Becky Winegardner -- Earth's current world record holder for enthusiasm -- to give him a wrestling-style introduction to begin Friday's professional development session. Needless to say, Mrs. B succeeded spectacularly. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Below: The "Family Feud" winner was an elementary school team of (from left) Kendra Barry, Carol Vestal, Hayley Dunn, and Ashlee Hall. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: Walker Williams -- with Bobby Rawson's assistant for the day Kylee Garrett laughingly cheering him on -- claws his way through a Saran Wrap-ed ball of money to win the $75 prize in that contest. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Left: Before Bobby Rawson began his shenanigans, Director of Schools P. A. Pratt updated the teachers on new Tennessee laws and classroom requirements prior to sharing his own advice and preferences, along with his gratitude and encouragement. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: For the second straight year, Bobby Rawson kept the audience engaged with games and comedy before tying it all together with wisdom and encouragement at the program's conclusion. (Photo by Ron Barry)



Above: "A.C.E. the Day" was the theme of Friday's system-wide professional development. (Photo by Ron Barry)





Above: Open houses Thursday were huge successes, as typified by the overflowing parking in front of Crockett County Middle School. (Photo by Ron Barry)

Left: The Middle School hallways were jammed for three solid hours Thursday, with parents and students navigating in both directions carefully. (Photo by Ron Barry)