

BUILD EXPECTATIONS

By Curt Harler



The recent uproar over the “unexpectedly” high test scores since California banned bilingual education is not about speaking Spanish or Vietnamese in

the classroom. The lesson here – and it applies to turfgrass managers and the rest of us -- is about expectations.

For those of you not familiar, in June 1998 California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 227 which banned bilingual education in the state’s schools. Everyone from President Clinton to local school teachers predicted disaster for non-English speaking students.

The children surprised everyone. The opposite happened. Their math scores went up 14 points. Reading (in English) scores jumped nine points. What happened?

Two things were at work here. First, it seems that those in charge had very low expectations of a group of normal kids. We’ve all seen it happen – the guy who was always raking leaves in the background

turns out to have unexpected talent as a mechanic. Or the quiet one who didn’t say six words all summer turns out to be a whiz handling the job-scheduler on the computer. By next season he’s in the front office working with PCs.

It’s just a reminder that we should give everyone a chance to shine. There likely is hidden talent on your team. But it requires taking time to find out just what a person’s aspirations are. Many workers, especially newer ones, are simply too shy to speak up. Seek all of your employees out informally, perhaps on a lunch break, and find out what their goals are. Some will have none. But others will surprise you.

The second factor at work is acceptance. No one – student, summer help, supervisor – likes to be branded as different. It is both distracting and humiliating. Whether in school or on the golf course, it interferes with getting the job done.

Expect the most from people. True, you’ll occasionally be disappointed; but for the most part you’ll be pleasantly surprised. And your workers will be delighted.

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