

Austin school superintendent delivers state of district address

Students, administrators must change with the world as other countries embrace innovation, Carstarphen says.

By **Melissa B. Taboada**

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Published: 9:59 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 18, 2010

To produce academically successful students, the Austin school district must teach them to change with the world, Superintendent Meria Carstarphen told a crowd of about 175 invited guests during her State of the District address Thursday.

Students face new challenges brought on by the rapid pace of globalization, Carstarphen told the audience at the UT Alumni Center.

As China, India and other countries embrace innovation and invest in their futures and education, she said, the district's challenge is "to prepare students for a future of jobs that may not exist, using technologies that haven't been invented, in order to solve problems that we may not even know are problems yet."

Speaking with the aid of a multimedia presentation system she's now put in classrooms, Carstarphen's speech — sprinkled with data, videos and a live classroom chat — outlined the district's accomplishments, goals and challenges.

In the past year, the district turned around seven of eight schools rated academically unacceptable by the state and has come out from under the management oversight of the Texas Education Agency.

District officials approached the budget process with more transparency, planning months earlier than typical and holding community forums to gather input.

The district also approved a five-year strategic plan and created a data warehouse to help the district analyze and guide planning.

"Clearly, we have made progress," Carstarphen said. "But at times, we have failed to fully address our challenges."

The district fell short with one school remaining academically unacceptable under state standards and failing to meet federal academic targets established by the No Child Left Behind Act for the second consecutive year. And some of the former academically unacceptable schools continue to struggle based on formative assessments, Carstarphen said.

To tackle some of the challenges, the district has started new programs in East Austin, revamped its bilingual education and improved intervention plans for special education students.

"I love the openness and analytics shared with the audience," said Susan Dawson, executive director of E3 Alliance, which brings businesses, educators and politicians together to improve Austin-area schools. "The district is not perfect; they have issues, but they are not trying to hide those issues. Instead, they are working with the community to get those problems solved."

mtaboada@statesman.com; 445-3620