

November 24, 2017 – Desert Sands Unified School District Superintendent Scott Bailey has a plan. In fact, he recently published the Superintendent’s Action Plan. Among the items in this far-reaching program is something called *Goldfish Bowl*.

The inspiration for *Goldfish Bowl* came from the popular television series *Shark Tank*. The premise for that adult entrepreneur show is for creative and ambitious business people to present their ideas to five “titans of industry” (as referred to in the promotions for the television show). The contestants try to convince the “sharks” to invest money in their ideas.

Fast forward (television remote pun intended) to Scott Bailey’s idea. What if students presented their innovative concepts to a group of local “sharks”? The students would benefit by spending time collaboratively creating ideas with teachers and other students; they would spend time researching the viability of their ideas; they would use economic factors to discover if their idea was worth pursuing; and not only learn while doing all of this but work with the framework known as the LCAP (Local Control and Accountability Plan). The competition would be funded using a pre-existing innovations fund.

Enlisting support from his team, a framework was created. Criteria were established. The name was decided upon...oh, yes, the name...Shark Tank was taken but what about a smaller fish, a goldfish! We know that most goldfish are housed in a bowl but another use for the term bowl implies competition especially those involving academic subjects. Thus was born the Goldfish Bowl. It seemed only fitting, though, that our little goldfish be equipped with a shark’s fin!

The competition was announced, two separate events, one in the fall and one in the spring. The date of the first one was set, Monday, November 13. Schools were invited to participate and participate they did.

Thirteen applications were received for this first round. They were evaluated by the superintendent; the cabinet, consisting of the assistant superintendents of business services, education services, and student services; the director of the information technology department; and the PIO (public information officer). The review board used a 100 point criteria to narrow the field to five. Was the project innovative? Did it have a true student voice? Did it have a potential benefit? Was it sustainable? And was it replicable? This same criteria would now be used by the judges in the final round of competition.

Taking their place in a set similar to that of its television series counterpart were:

Tim Bradley, Jr., DSUSD parent and LQHS assistant football coach, as well as world champion boxer and local restaurant owner.

Brandon Weimer, LQHS grad who started his company 10 years ago while a student looking to fund a trip to Europe. Brandini Toffee, based in Rancho Mirage, distributes worldwide.

Bianca Rae, local newscaster and founder/CEO of the Bianca Rae Foundation focused on those who can’t speak for themselves.

Mike Napoli, founder and president of Tech Coast Angles, the leading source of funding to early-stage companies in Southern California.

Joe Wallace, chief innovation officer, CVEP (Coachella Valley Economic Partnership), the nonprofit organization devoted to attracting, retaining, and expanding local business.

Kathleen McEntee, founder and president of Kathleen McEntee and Associates, a marketing and communications and business transformation company.

Facing off with the sharks were the following teams of “goldfish”:

Dr. Reynaldo Carreon Jr. Academy 4th graders asking for \$4,000 (the maximum available) to purchase ten virtually reality headsets. Title of their pitch was *Google Expeditions*. The team of Ethan Thomas, Raeannah Gonzalez, Julian Hernandez, and Isaac Gaxiola were joined by their teacher Allison Hodges. They presented their case, showed a supporting video, and provided the ultimate convincing technique by letting each of the judges try one of the headsets. The team had three minutes for their pitch and the judges had five minutes to ask questions before recessing or 12 minutes of deliberation. They returned with a large, signed check for \$4,000 for the students. Comments from the judges included their being impressed with the student presentation as well as the idea that this tool could bring new adventures and wonders to the students.



Next up, a single student from La Quinta High School, Ciro Camarena with his English teacher Jen Cortez. Ciro is an inventor and came up with a unique solution to correcting papers written in ink. A specially devised pen that includes a built-in canister of white out. The presentation by this 17-year-old junior was eloquent and compelling. He even did a survey among his classmates and provide the documentation of student interest to the judges. Questions regarding budget, profit-and-loss, and copyright were thrown out with some well thought out responses. The judges returned from deliberation with a novel offer to Ciro. Putting “skin in the game” Joe Wallace of CVEP offered Ciro a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be mentored by the economic partnership and their league of entrepreneurs. They will work with Ciro to copyright his product and assist as he prepares to take it to market. The financial portion of the offer was \$250, enough to complete the provisional patent procedure. But the promise of additional backing and assistance came from every member of the panel who both then and after the competition expressed great faith in Ciro’s ability to take the product to market. (The name of the product has been purposefully kept from this report so that Ciro can take care of the copyrighting process.)



Then came a group of 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders from Angela Sarvis’ special day class. Even before beginning their pitch these students were recognized for their bravery for being willing to stand up before the sharks and tell them about their idea. Similar to the first competitors, these students were asking for \$4,000 to purchase virtual reality headsets so that, like the title of their project they could *Take a Virtual Field Trip*. Angela Sarvis, Julian Cazares, Jamie Sims, Jenise Sims, Jesse Avalos-Alcantra, and Anahi Garcia shared their headsets with the judges and the sharks returned with an oversize check for \$4,000.



The fourth team came from Gerald Ford Elementary School with a unique idea. Titled Operation Emotional Intelligence, the project not only received a \$4,000 check but “skin in the game” was provided by Superintendent Scott Bailey who told the students that he would be closely watching their progress and would consider this as a district-wide model if successful. The project is not product-driven but rather a process-based building of skills students need to establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, achieve positive goals, and express empathy for others. Ford student council members Addison Curtis and Zara Jones were joined in their presentation by school counselor Richard Sande, instructional coach Julia Alberg-Burbank, and Principal John Preston.



The final competitor of the evening Emergency Cooler students and staff from Dr. Reynaldo Carreon Academy. This team of 5th graders, Jacqueline Acosta, Emily Cabrera, Fabian Castellanos, and Kaylee Cuevas, brought along a model of a large white cooler. This emergency system would include a solar panel to power an AM/FM and a phone charger. The cooler would hold a first aid kit, water, a thermal blanket and military-style packaged rations and would be used during school emergencies or evacuations. Led by teacher Brian Foley, the students described their idea while using the model to describe how it would work. The judges returned with a check for \$1,000 to get the project on its way with a request to come back with a report on their project.



No doubt, this day was the beginning of a successful program at Desert Sands Unified School District. The requests were eloquent and well thought out and were for funds for practical and realistic products and goals. Schools from throughout the district are already beginning to consider what projects they can present to the Goldfish Bowl to take place in the spring.



Superintendent Scott Bailey introduces sharks, Brandon Weimer, Bianca Rae, Joe Wallace, Tim Bradley, Kathleen McEntee, and Mike Napoli.