

OSBA Speaker Thankful for Teachers

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Nov. 15--COLUMBUS -- At first, Consuelo Castillo's first teacher and principal in Laredo, Texas, couldn't understand why she wouldn't rather be called Connie.

It was shorter -- easier to write and spell.

But then again, they didn't know Castillo's parents, who were proud of their Mexican heritage and their name.

"I told them, if I change my name to Connie, I won't make it to the second grade," Castillo said.

Castillo, now Castillo Kickbusch, was Monday's general session speaker at the Ohio School Board Association convention, which brings school board members, public school administrators and education experts together each year.

The OSBA is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year during the four-day convention. By convention organizers estimate, nearly 10,000 education professionals will be in attendance this year.

They were welcomed late Monday morning by the music of the Clark Montessori steel band from Cincinnati and were led in the Star Spangled Banner by a quartet from Walnut Hills.

Cincinnati had quite a presence this year. The current president is Catherine D. Ingram, a board member from Cincinnati Public Schools.

Her theme during her one-year term has been "Service Serving Servants," encouraging board members and other leaders in education to remember their role as public servants.

"Anytime you become more important than the people you serve you are no longer a servant," Ingram said, before Castillo Kickbusch took the stage.

One of the first things Castillo Kickbusch did, as she began her emotion-filled speech, was thank those in the audience who believed in students like her -- the students who didn't start out with much but had a real passion to learn.

"The most dangerous word in America is perception," Castillo Kickbusch said. "When they asked me to change my name to Connie their perception was that Consuelo was going to mean problems."

Today, Castillo Kickbusch is the president of a business, Educational Achievement Services Inc., and founder of the Family Leadership Institute, based in San Antonio, Texas. FLI is an educational curriculum created to provide immigrant and migrant families, primarily of Mexican origin, with tools to help their children succeed.

"Some parents believe immigrant parents don't participate at their child's school because they don't care," Castillo Kickbusch said. "Many, like my mother, thought staying away from school was better for me."

Castillo Kickbusch, a mother of five children, gained much of her fame in the military. She became the highest-ranking Hispanic woman in the U.S Army combat support field, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. Her husband, David, also is a retired lieutenant colonel.

Since retirement, she has worked with more than 1 million children, parents and educators in some of America's toughest neighborhoods in 43 states, inspiring them to believe in themselves.

There is a foundation children need to understand, especially those who are not taught it by their parents, Castillo Kickbusch said.

Similarly for many children in the U.S., her family was poor by measures of income. She lived in a home where aluminum foil covered the glassless windows. But her father told her she was rich in tradition and values.

"And he told me, 'Being poor gives you no license to act poorly, speak poorly or do poorly,'" Castillo Kickbusch said. "'This is America, as long as you work hard you are what many call the American dream.'"

You see, Castillo Kickbusch said, many of the people she learned the most from did not have college degrees -- her parent's combined educational experience added only to five years -- but, "they had a Ph. D in life."

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