

**BILL WARD**

**Interview 138a**

**July 26, 1993**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Becky Bailey, Diboll Independent School District Superintendent Bill Ward talks about the trials and challenges facing the district, its ethnic and socio-economic makeup, and his plans for the district's future.

**Becky Bailey (hereafter BB):** My name is Becky Bailey. Today I am doing an interview with Mr. Bill Ward, who is Diboll Independent School District's Superintendent. Today's date is July 26, 1993. Mr. Ward, if you will give me your full name and where you were born, and some of your educational background.

**Bill Ward (hereafter BW):** Okay, Billy John Ward. I was born in Jacksonville, Texas. Sept. 1, 1945. Educational background: I graduated from New London High School in 1963. Graduated from Texas Tech with a Bachelor's Degree in '75. I received my Master's Degree from East Texas State University, I believe, in 1980, maybe '82. 1980, I believe. And I did Doctoral work there, also, for about two years. My educational teaching experience: I was an Ag teacher in Arkansas for five years. I was a high school principal in Arkansas for two years. I was a graduate assistant, I taught courses at East Texas State University for one year. I accepted my first superintendency at Avery ISD. I was there for three years. I accepted a superintendency at Chapel, and I was there for three years. Then moved to Diboll as Assistant Superintendent for business, and held that position for three years and.....two years. And then accepted the Superintendency at Diboll, and held that position going into my third year.

**BB:** All right, okay. Of superintendencies and business, which part did you like the best? You've done both.

**BW:** Oh, I think I prefer the Superintendency, because you are involved in more areas of the school. When I was business manager, Director of Finance, I was somewhat limited as to the areas that I was involved with, and now I am able to be involved with all areas.

**BB:** Tell me a little about Diboll as it is right now. The makeup of the school, ethnic (groups) and that sort of thing, and our tax base here.

**BW:** Okay, our tax base is approximately two hundred million dollars. We have a tax rate of \$1.30. We have maintained that for the last two years. Our ethnic ratio, we have 20% Black, about 38% Hispanic, and, I think it's about 42% White.

**BB:** Socio-economic?

**BW:** About 60 to 66 % of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch...are disadvantaged, that qualify for At Risk programs.

**BB:** What about At Risk populations within the school? Not just socio-economic, but with their curriculum, too? Do you know that right off?

**BW:** Probably in the range of about 40% of our students qualify for At Risk.

**BB:** Is there...I'm trying to think. Is there remedial? And what about resource?

**BW:** Special Ed students?

**BB:** That is what I am trying to think of.

**BW:** Becky, I'm not sure off the top of my head, what...those are based on FTE's. Full Time Teacher Equivalents. And I'm not sure, I would have to...I can find that information out for you, but I'm not sure off the top of my head.

**BB:** All right. The last few years, statewide there have been a lot of problems in education. Would you like to go through some of those?

**BW:** I think the main problem that we faced with education the last few years, has pertained to finance. School finance. And I think the main problem that we as administrators have to deal with is the uncertainty each year. We develop our budget in the summer, and hopefully those budgets...well, they have to be adopted by the first of September or the last of August. And it's a situation where we don't really know what our state funds are going to be. And even when they tell us what they are going to be, there's...the last several years, there has been a great deal of proration, and we have not received the total amount of state funds that we have been told that we would receive. So it makes it very difficult to develop any kind of long range plans. For the last probably five years, long range planning in Texas has been almost impossible due to the uncertainty of school finance.

**BB:** And by long range plans, you're talking about buildings and...

**BW:** Yes, projecting future enrollment and how to deal with those enrollments. Especially when there are building programs, whether it's building programs, facilities, or implementing technology programs. Like what we have underway here in Diboll.

**BB:** Could you elaborate on that? On our technology plans?

**BW:** Sure, a few...about six months ago, we undertook the goals to develop a district-wide technology plan. And so we sent teachers to other school districts, sending administrators, teams of people to see what the exemplary school districts are doing in the way of technology and how those things can be implemented and the best way to implement those things in Diboll ISD. So we are in the process right now, we have

already developed our technology plan and we are working with Temple-Inland to hopefully receive some funds from Temple-Inland to implement our technology program and also to supplement those funds with our own district funds to...our goal is to implement a pilot program that will be an exemplary program in the state. In all areas...district wide, K-12.

**BB:** Ok. You are talking about computers...only or just...

**BW:** No, we are really talking about...all forms of technology. The multi-media learning is really what we are talking about. We are talking about...video communication, audio communication...we are talking about computers. Talking about ways we can enhance learning for students.

**BB:** Statewide and maybe nation-wide there has been a lot of talk about how our education system is not as it should be. Could you elaborate some on that, and what you see, and how that affects Diboll, and how we try to teach children here?

**BW:** Sure, I think...what we have seen is a decline in education over the last several years, and it certainly cannot be contributed to any one area. It is a combination of a lot of things. And I can't help but think that the main thing that has contributed to it is the decline of the family. The role that the family plays is certainly different than it was ten or fifteen years ago. And what we strive for here in Diboll is to get the parents involved in the children's education. We believe very strongly that the more involved the parents are in their children's education, the better that education will be for their child. We are very conscious of our test scores, and the need to improve our test scores, and improve instruction in an overall manner for all our students.

**BB:** Tell me some ways you plan on doing this.

**BW:** Well, through technology is certainly one of the ways we want to improve our test scores. And in...and when I say improve test scores, basically what we are after is improved learning for our children. And we are going to continue to get...to encourage our parents to get involved in their children's education. We want to stress a love for reading for all the children. We believe that that's really the first step for children to be successful in learning. They have to enjoy reading, and they have to be able to read very well. So we are going to continue to work on those areas and develop those areas: technology, reading skills and to get the parents involved in their children's education.

**BB:** Do you have any parenting programs already in mind? Some ideas?

**BW:** Last year...the last two years we have had a parenting program...especially that we have had some good success with our bi-lingual ESL parents of ESL students. We provide programs at night for these parents to come up and feel more comfortable, to learn more about the English language, and learn more about the school district. And really making them feel welcome in the school district. So that's one of the ways.

**BB:** I know they have a nice volunteer program on the elementary campus.

**BW:** And it's really district-wide. We have a very strong volunteer program throughout the district.

**BB:** Ok. Another new area in education has been site-based management. Could you tell me how the district implements that?

**BW:** Sure, and this is a concept really that has been around for a lot of years I think really as you look back on exemplary administrators, administrators that have done a super job over the years, they have gotten input from....for decision making from the people that are closest to the level where that decision is being implemented...whether it is custodians, whether it is teachers...or whatever it is. The people that have the most knowledge and are best able to make those decisions are the people that are involved and work with those areas on a daily basis. So, what we have really done over the last couple of years is to put a name to it and formalize site-based decision-making, more so than it has been in previous years. Here in Diboll, the last several administrators that we have hired, our last athletic director that we have hired, the band director that we have hired...really some key people in our personnel have been hired through site-based decision making. And when I say site-based, I don't just mean on the campus level, I mean involving the community. We have had community people involved in those selections. And we are very excited about the people we have been able to hire using this process.

**BB:** What do you think about the goals that are set? Should they be set through site-based or through the administration and then worked toward it? How do you see that?

**BW:** I think, first of all, there has to be district goals. And the district goals have to be set by the school board and the community, and the entire educational community. And those have to be broad, some general goals, and then the campus goals have to be set to supplement those areas and those goals to....to make achieving those goals a possibility.

**BB:** How do you view your principals, and that sort of thing? How do you do your administration through them?

**BW:** Over the last few years, the role of the principal has really changed. Say the last five years. The role of the principal has really gone from a position of strong disciplinarian, to someone that has to be strong instructional leader. I think the role of the principal has really changed in that aspect. They are responsible for being the instructional person or leader on their campus.

**BB:** By instructional leader...why don't you kind of explain that?

**BW:** Sure, I think that one of the main roles that a principal has to be able to do is to go into a classroom and be able to tell when exemplary teaching is taking place. And when they feel like it is not, then they need to have the skills, the instructional skills to be able

to help that teacher give examples and help that teacher do a better job of teaching in the classroom. And not only just that, but be creative and innovative in new ideas and things...helping teachers come across to students in a manner that will make learning fun and interesting to them.

**BB:** How do you see the repeal of the career ladder in with this, because before there was a way to reward teachers who were doing an exemplary job? Now there is really not going to be that in place any more.

**BW:** Well, there were a lot of problems with the career from the very start and one of the good parts of the career was the appraisal process. It just never was adequately funded from the very start. But the positive things that came about from the career ladder, they just have to be the instrument, the appraisal process. And I think in...over the long haul, teachers are doing a better job of teaching now than they used to do in the classroom. And this has been because of the appraisal process. I think there should be some, there definitely needs to be some incentives for your outstanding teachers, and we are just going to have to develop a process that is going to enhance that and continue some kind of incentive...incentive program for outstanding teachers.

**BB:** In knowing that teachers do better when they are being appraised, do you think by going to one appraisal a year it is going to make a difference in the quality of our teachers? How much they are being viewed?

**BW:** I think that is really going to depend on the campus level principal. There again, it's not...there has to be expectations coming from the superintendency and from the top management. And those expectations have to be that instruction is our number one priority. And I think really what our expectations here in Diboll and my expectations as the superintendent, I want those principals to spend as much time as possible in those classrooms. Not only doing formal evaluations, which is only one required now, but just being available to those teachers, especially those teachers a...first year teachers or second year teachers that do not have a lot of years of experience. And being a strong resource person for those teachers. I think that is a very important role that the principals need to take.

**BB:** Ok. What sorts of problems face our district right now that may be unique to Diboll, rather than the state in general? The state's got lots of problems, but...

**BW:** As far as problems, I think we are in a very fortunate situation where we do not really have a lot of problems in Diboll. We have a lot of challenges, and we have a lot of opportunities. And I think what we need to do is to find ways to meet those challenges and take the...make the most out of our opportunities. And I think the challenges of raising our test scores, helping every child to learn to their potential...I think that is the main challenge that we are facing right now at Diboll. And we need to find ways that we are going to accomplish that. Financially the district is in very good shape. We are getting to the...you know, our fund balance is adequate. It is very close to what the state recommends school districts to have. Over the last few years, from a financial standpoint,

we've...we are just about where we need to be. I think what we are really emphasizing now is improving our instructional program and getting our test scores up to where they need to be.

**BB:** And you see us doing that, how?

**BW:** Well, like I said earlier, I see us doing it through technology. I see us doing it through some advanced teacher training in areas like reading and math. We want our math scores to improve. And I see us accomplishing that by providing more in depth training for teachers who teach math. And I think that needs to be incorporated in all areas. We can teach math in every subject area that we teach. There is a lot of ways to accomplish that.

**BB:** And reading the same way. Your goals?

**BW:** My goals as a superintendent? I think my goals as a superintendent here at Diboll, is for Diboll to become an exemplary school district in Texas. I want this to be the best 3A school district in Texas. And I think we have the opportunity to make that happen. And it's...and also to maintain a strong, balanced program. I think anytime that you start to emphasize one area over the other, it hurts the district overall. And certainly we want our academic programs to be our number one goal. But we also have to maintain our vocational program, our athletic program, our band program, our UIL program. I think that is one of my biggest challenges that I face as a superintendent, is to be sure that we do maintain a balanced program in all areas. And, if we put the proper emphasis in the areas that...where we need to, we certainly want instruction to be our number one priority, but we also have to give adequate attention to the other areas.

**BB:** It is going to be real different at high school this year, isn't it?

**BW:** Yes, it is.

**BB:** All new administration at the top.

**BW:** New administration, some new programs. We are excited about...the things we are doing academically out there - our vocational computer lab that we have just installed. And the possibility of building a new wing at the high school, which will give us approximately six to eight new classrooms with possibly three of those being computer labs. We are looking at putting in a language computer lab, math computer lab and a foreign language computer lab. And so there's just...a lot of things just right here on the edge of the horizon. Some strong possibilities.

**BB:** Thank you. Do you have anything that you just want to add?

**BW:** No, I can't think of anything.

**END OF INTERVIEW**