

RECLAIMING THE PROFESSION OF EDUCATION

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As I sit on a plane flying to another school district, I find myself tossed about in the turbulence of political rhetoric about our schools. I am frustrated by the fact that current educational reform agendas can only be understood by the most sophisticated rocket scientist. In our rush to test anything with a pulse, we have lost sight of the destination of our efforts ... drawing out each and every student's fullest potential. I did not embark on a career as an educator to improve standardized test scores, to follow lock-step endless regulations and directives, or to meet the constantly moving target of Annually Yearly Progress (AYP). In the government's quest to ensure that "No Child is Left Behind" they have left me behind in a wake of frustration.

There is no denying the fact that educators want all students to reach their fullest potential, do well academically and be contributing citizens in today's society. But the challenge to ensure a quality education for all has left teachers across the country inundated with guidelines that are stifling the most talented of educators.

I must have missed the graduate class in education that said, "more is better" ... more tests, more edicts, more decrees lead to more student learning. I became an educator to make the world a better place. I believed that I could actually influence the future by teaching students content, at the same time showing them I care about them as people.

As I see it, I have three options:

1. Leave the teaching profession;
2. Be a puppet in the system; or,
3. Shout as loud as I can and let the world know educators are reclaiming their profession.

I am shouting!

Stand Up

We are at a point when we must stand up and be heard or the educational policy mongers will continue to strip us of our basic purpose in education ... to allow our students to dream, reach, and succeed.

In simplest of terms, I entered education to ensure that all students have a sense of self-worth, are actively engaged in their learning, and ultimately have a sense of purpose. My 30 years as an educator tell me that when I do those things, students achieve on multiple levels—personal, social, and of course academic.

We are responsible for the whole student, not just their minds. Sure, it would be nice some days if parents just loaded their child's head on the bus, but they don't. We get the *whole* student every day and in every shape, form, and way possible. But that's okay, I didn't become an educator to pour stuff into students' heads. I became an educator to make a difference in the lives of students.

Make a Difference

I know all too well we are being inundated with mandates and, yes, I know we must follow some of those directives. But as we perform those duties, we cannot lose touch with the core of our existence as educators.

- To create a *sense of belonging* for all students to feel they are valued members of the school, while still maintaining their individuality.
- To be a *hero* to the students to ensure they have someone in their lives who provides support and guidance.
- To ensure all students have a *sense of accomplishment* and are recognized for all types of achievement including effort, perseverance, and citizenship.
- To make certain students have *fun and excitement* in the classroom and are engaged and interested in their learning.
- To encourage students to be *curious and creative*—in order to ask “why?” and “why not?” about the world around them.
- To make certain students have a *spirit of adventure* and feel confident in their ability to take on new and healthy challenges.
- To provide all students *leadership and responsibility* opportunities thus allowing them to make decisions and accept responsibility for their choices.
- To guarantee that before students leave my classroom they have the *confidence to take action* in order to have the ability to dream about their future, while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.

When those basic 8 Conditions are in place, students reach their fullest potential academically, socially and personally. In a word, they have *ASPIRATIONS!* You know, the same thing we had when we entered the teaching profession: A hope for the future and the passion and work ethic to succeed.

Shout Out

I may get frustrated from time to time as I travel from one side of the country to the other seeing the shape schools are in, but I have never forgotten why I became an educator. As you struggle through tough times in schools, never forget what brought you to education in the first place. Never forget that there is no greater profession in this world. Never forget you have the power to make this world better one child, one class, one school, one district at a time. And never forget that wonderful surprises are just waiting to happen, and all our hopes and dreams for the students we serve are well within our reach.

I ask you to join me and shout that message to your corner of the world ...