

WHY TEACH?

ALL MEANS ALL.

WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER.

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Dr Baldwin, administrators, BOE members, teachers and staff welcome to the 2016-2017 school year. I want to thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning. Thank you also to the teacher who nominated me and everyone who served on the nomination committee. Additionally I would like to congratulate all my colleagues who were also nominated. I believe that being nominated is one of the highest accolades we can receive. Congratulations.

Take a moment to think back to your own schooling. Recall a favorite teacher. What makes him/her stand out in your mind? Was it someone that influenced you to become a teacher? Someone who shaped how you are in the classroom? Was it someone like Mrs. Pite, my kindergarten teacher, who made each and everyone of us feel special and loved? Was it Mrs. Crocker, 3rd grade, who let me know it was okay to ask for help? Was it Ms. Bartolome, 7th and 8th grade math, who pushed me to challenge myself? Was it Ms Pratson, my high school basketball coach, who encouraged me to be me even in front of my peers? Or maybe it was someone like Matt, my English professor, who believed in me when I failed? Perhaps it was someone like Principal Jack Heffley who provided guidance to a green teacher? Or a mom and dad who just asked me to do my best? Or like my daughters and husband who remind me daily to be

patient, there is more to learn? All of these teachers and many more shaped the teacher that I am today. However there is one other whom I have yet to mention. His name was Peter. Early in my teacher career, I was teaching reading to a 12 year old boy with dyslexia. As a young child, he had been labeled emotionally disturbed. This label was assigned to him because he would throw tantrums in class, tantrums where he threw books, papers, and chairs across the room just to get out of reading. He entered my class with a huge chip on his shoulder and asked his first question, "who do you think you are that you're going to teach me how to read?" I looked at him. How would I answer such a question? I thought for a minute and I looked directly at him and I said, "I'm not." I went back to gathering together the work that we were going to do that day. He was dumbfounded but he proceeded to ask, " isn't this reading class?" My prompt reply was, "yes; yes, it is." He countered with "well aren't we going to read?" I looked him right in the eye again and I said, " yes, we are. But I am not going to teach you how to read because you already know how to read." He looked at me quizzically. I continued. "You CAN read. I get it; you don't feel you read well. You don't think you can read like your peers. In fact you'd rather not read. But you CAN read. We are going to work together to help you to read better. " This moment taught me that I needed to show this boy and every other student that I had would have after him that I believed in him. Students will hear me say, even shout encouragingly, "I believe in you!" It is my hope that their response is, "I believe in me." All kids can learn if someone just believes in them. I agree with Rita Pierson, "Every kid needs a champion. "

Yes, every kid. The one who looks different, act different, marches to her own drummer. The one who pushes your buttons in ways that no other student ever has. The one who never does his homework or can't find the assignment you gave him yesterday. The one that doesn't come to school often. The one that can't sit still or continually forgets to raise her hand before speaking. The one who struggles - struggles to find friends, struggles to have people like him, struggles to learn. Each and everyone of them need a champion.

The world of dreams for our students lies with personal accomplishment. It is essential to aim high. Aim higher than you or even think they can reach. If our students give their best, they will ultimately feel good about the outcome whether or not they actually accomplish their intended goal. This is not always easy. Kids get distracted. For some kids shame comes along with these distractions - be it a learning need, a situation at home, something unknown to us . . . It is our job to remind them of our expectations, to challenge them. Scientists have proven that you can improve your intelligence. According to Paul Tough, "Whether or not [the scientists are] right . . . , if you think that, especially when you're a kid, when you're a teenager, you do way better at school. It gives you this sort of confidence, this optimism, this ability to try new things, to push yourself harder. Kids who are most anxious about their skills, are the most affected by this belief." Students need to think about this as they are going through their day. We need to tell them that we expect great things from them, from each and every one of them. It is our job as teachers to make

sure they are challenged and are faced with adversity, obstacles, and even failure, along with support, fun, and success. This wider and deeper preparation will lead to a genuine sense of confidence and enthusiasm for life.

A technique that I use from Laura and Malcolm Gauld is called The One Thing. It is short for “the one thing I will do each day, not *try* to do.” It helps us to aim high and take control of our own progress. Consider the student having trouble at school. Students like this often become overwhelmed and it can look as if things are out of their control. They express this using statements that look at what others are doing or saying, “the teacher doesn’t like me,” “I can’t do math.” etc. When asked to focus on the one thing that they can control, a true plan can be enacted. This avoids focusing on the obstacles, instead creating steps to achievement. As a teacher, I have suggested the one thing for my students. When a recent student said she could not complete her math work without assistance and wanted to wait until I was free to help, I asked her one thing she could do before I was able to see her. She told me that the one thing she could do would be to set-up her paper and look at the directions and the problems that she had to complete. It was simple and doable; she committed to it everyday. When I reached her desk, I found her working independently on her math work, tackling the problems. She was able to focus on what she could do right now. Soon she was among the stars and smiling about her math progress.

**WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.**

I believe in students. I am not a perfect teacher. When I share my struggles with my students and ways that I continue to seek growth, I inspire them. When I share with them the high expectations that I set for myself, they are more likely to have similar actions in their own lives. When I share them with my colleagues, I gain support. There is so much that needs to be done in order for all students to reach personal accomplishments. Nonetheless, I cannot do it alone. As educators we are spinning our wheels, working hard, trying new things - sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail -- we grow. When we do this alone, we face obstacles, we struggle. We need synergy, true collaboration, in order for these successes to be abundant. Education of our students, our future leaders, is not a stand-alone activity. Years ago when co-teaching began in my school, I was partnered with a team of teachers. I don't think one really wanted to partner with me. When I arrived at this classroom, I found the door locked. (This was long before the mandatory keep your doors locked at all times initiative.) As I did not want to disrupt the class, I asked the secretary for my own key. This allowed me in the room but did not create our partnership. Over time this teacher grew to understand that I was not only there to help the students with special needs, I was there to help all including him. Patience, cooperation, understanding, insight, inquiry, time - all of these strengthened our partnership. Not only did our relationship grow so too did the students that we shared. We need to join knowledge bases and resources to create an environment where ***all*** are challenged to learn, to create a shared understanding and respect for differences.

Together, more gets done. It is not about you; it is not about me. We need to put our egos aside. Students can accomplish their own personal goals. When they work toward these, they achieve. This personal growth is the accomplishment that we want and need to see in all of our students. This is our measure of success. If we, as teachers, can work together to find ways for students to aim high, then we create life-long learners who will enrich our societies. This is our purpose; this is how we should be measured.

In the words of Carl Jung, “One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material but warmth is the vital element for growing plant and for the soul of the child.” That student who is struggling or treating you in the worst way possible might just need you the most. Remember when you are feeling unsure or overwhelmed, help is just a step or a click away. Just ask. Come out of your room either physically or electronically; solutions are just at your doorstep. We are all in this together. This is going to be the best year yet. Enjoy. Thank you.