

IN CELEBRATION OF THE NEW 2018/19 ACADEMIC YEAR

The diminutive pulse of national teacher discontent must be superseded with a cogent, thunderous drumbeat advocating the better treatment of our nation's best asset: teachers.

Understanding the point of view of communities, school boards, students, parents, administrators and teachers is paramount to revitalizing our educational system. Who better to elevate the conversation for positive change than a 46 year veteran teacher?

I am a Teacher. That is to say I was a teacher until summarily dismissed, fired, forced to retire on April 25, 2017. I am not sure which term fits my demise best. Over the past 485 days, I reflected on a lifetime of teaching. In my search for answers, I discovered many esteemed educators are leaving their districts due to a hostile work environment. How do we raise up this noble profession to the reverence of yesteryear?

Communities: Make every effort to vet school board contenders to insure their educational values are based on knowledge and not political influence. What are their educational backgrounds? Have they taught in the public school system? Are they parents of school aged children?

School Board Members: Please demonstrate the same pre-election exuberance after elected. Are you resolved to insure teachers' freedom from vitriol criticism and frivolous complaint? How do you avoid becoming, inadvertently, a rubber stamp for ineffectual or bullying administrators?

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Students: No teacher exists, including the ones you dismiss as inept, who doesn't feel the day to day rigors of insuring your success. You need to avail yourself in committing sweat equity to the work required. Instead of complaining about instructors, challenge yourself to positively impact their daily routine.

Stand up for your vulnerable peers. Demonstrate, through actions, your school is a safe place.

You may need to do something drastic and unexpected to protect the wellbeing of those around you. Become a fierce warrior advocate for kids unable to defend themselves. You hold the power to make a difference.

Parents: For the love of all humanity, step away from your computer! Writing incensed e-mails to your child's teacher, hitting send and believing you are entitled to rancorous opinions is the most demoralizing act perpetrated on teachers. If you find it awkward to speak to the teacher face to face, re-evaluate the validity of your complaint. Your children are entitled to an equitable education. They are not guaranteed high grades, a lead in the play or varsity standing.

Allow your child to fail! Even if the perceived failure resulted from unfair selection or grading, supporting children in the how to's of overcoming disappointment is paramount to their development. Scottie Pippen, winner of four NBA championship rings and two Olympic gold medals, received no athletic scholarship from any university. He originally made his small college basketball team as the equipment manager. Thankfully no parent, teacher or administrator felt pressured to change the sequence of events directing his young life.

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Administrators: Two valuable tools disappeared in the last 20 years: mentorship and due process of staff. The art of constructive criticism has been lost to abrasive and unfiltered attacks. Children are NOT victims, teachers are NOT monsters and the parent is NOT always right. Dereliction in eradicating abusive student behavior and the omission of shielding teachers from unwarranted condemnation wreak havoc for the teaching profession. Administrators must provide judicious faculty assessments, unbiased decisions and guidance.

Teachers: If you are new to the profession, muster your courage and stay the course. Life exists after a poor assessment, admonishment from an administrator or parent complaint. Do not allow naysayers to destroy your passion for teaching.

Are you a seasoned teacher? If you have journeyed thus far without consternation, count your blessings. An extraordinary administrator mentored and shielded you!

Let's make sure "putting kids first" is not just a clever slogan on a school district advertisement. Our children are the future of this country. Putting them first translates into guaranteeing teachers have a supportive environment to make that true difference in a child's life. We all wear the same team jersey! If we advocate for the better treatment of teachers, this action alone could become the single positive force to alter the downward spiral of our fractured public school system.