

# Teachers Deserve Thanks, Not Blame

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As our public schools begin another school year, it's time to stop blaming and criticizing teachers and start thanking and acknowledging them.

Our schools reflect society, and society has undergone a dramatic shift from previous generations. A typical classroom today consists of many students with severe behavioral problems, limited knowledge of English usage, emotional and psychological difficulties, learning disabilities and attention-deficit disorders. And many suffer from abuse and other adverse home and socioeconomic conditions.

Unlike previous generations, many parents today send their kids to school unfed, unprepared and with little or no basic skills nor social skills. In many neighborhoods, it's the school building, not the child's home, that provides a safe, secure and predictable haven. Despite these societal problems, we need to focus on the success stories of what's right with our schools rather than what's wrong with our schools.

In my previous work as a motivational speaker and professional development trainer, I have personally worked with thousands of teachers nationwide. I have found them to be caring, hardworking, dedicated, industrious and sincerely committed to the success of their students.

Teachers' duties have now grown to the added dimensions of counselor, mentor, coach, resource person, mediator, motivator, enforcer and adviser. Instead of acknowledging that teaching is a demanding profession, critics will often focus on the supposedly shortened workday of teachers. Still others claim, "Yes, teachers are busy, but at least they get a planning period each day to help get things done." In reality, the so-called planning period is really a misnomer. A typical teacher is so involved with the day's activities that usually there is no time to stop and plan. Those minutes that are supposed to be devoted to planning are often filled with endless amounts of paperwork, meetings, interruptions, schedule changes, extra assigned duties, phone calls, conferences, gathering missed work for absent students, completing forms, submitting required data and on and on. Maybe they call it a planning period, because there's NO time left for planning...period!

Most teachers leave the building long after the students' dismissal time and usually with plenty of paperwork and tests to correct. Evenings are spent reviewing homework assignments and planning for the next day of teaching.

In addition to earning a bachelor's degree and teaching certificate/license, once teachers begin to work in the classroom, they need to immediately continue their own education. During summertime, they are constantly updating their education, earning a graduate degree or two and making sure their teaching certificates are active and valid.

Too many people have the mistaken notion that anyone can teach. They think that they could teach because they have seen other people teach.

Yet, when looking at other professions and occupations, these same people understand that they can't perform those jobs. They may have briefly seen the cockpit of an airplane, but they don't assume they can fly it. They may have spent an hour in a courtroom but don't believe that they can practice law. They certainly don't think they are able to perform surgery.

Every day, teachers are making a significant difference. At any given moment, teachers are influencing children in positive and meaningful ways. Many societal problems exist, such as violence, drugs, broken homes, poverty, economic crises and a variety of other woes. Teachers struggle with the turmoil of society while trying to offset the negative influences outside of school. As they roll up their sleeves and take strides to improve the lives of their students, teachers are the real heroes.

Today's teacher is more than a transmitter of knowledge; the demands of the profession are ever-increasing. Many parents and taxpayers have an expectation that a school system should be the do all and be all in their children's lives. Some parents have a notion that they can drop off their child at the schoolhouse door, and behold, 12 years later, they will be able to pick up a perfect specimen of a human being -- well-rounded, academically proficient, emotionally sound, physically fit and ready to meet the next phase of life.

But we know that teachers cannot do it alone. A sound, safe and secure home life is essential. An effort on the parent's part to prepare the child for school is vital. And parental involvement that results in a partnership in the child's development is necessary. When that doesn't occur, then it's easy to scapegoat the classroom teacher.

Instead of bashing our teachers, we should be conveying recognition, accolades, tributes and positive acknowledgments. Teachers deserve a sincere thank-you for the tremendous benefits they provide society. And that's why my all-time favorite bumper sticker offers a profound and important declaration: "If you can read this ... thank a teacher!"

In our schools today, there are thousands of success stories waiting to be told and there's a need to proclaim those successes proudly and boldly. Teachers should stand tall and be proud of their chosen profession. Critics should not judge them unfairly. Together, let's become teacher advocates and show admiration for the inspiring and important life-changing work they do.

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