

New Teacher Orientation Talk
August 27, 2008
8:00 a.m.

I have worked in public education for over forty years in many different capacities. I have witnessed firsthand many successes, joys, and sorrows of the students and faculty with whom I have worked.

With regard to the most painful times, when I was an elementary principal, one of my students drowned in her family's pond while in her wheelchair during her own birthday party. I remember how difficult it was to summon all of my inner reserves to speak at her funeral service. When I was a high school principal, I had to work with my colleagues to support an entire school community after the massacre of a family, mother, father, and two school aged children, in their home, over Christmas vacation. Last year, in North Colonie, we suffered the loss of several students and beloved faculty members. The death of each individual was a rough blow. As we lead others through their time of pain and mourning, a toll is taken on each of us and the sense of loss is tremendous.

But then there are the times of intense joy that come with being in our profession. There is the joy I feel every time my 25 year old friend Jamie, who I have known for about 18 years, talks to me about her teaching. I particularly love the way her eyes light up and she becomes so very animated when she describes the difference she has made in the life of one of her "toughest" inner city Washington, D.C. students. At times, Jamie is teacher, friend, parent, and counselor simultaneously. While I know that Jamie had many positive influences in her life and strong role models in the education field, I know that I, too, had an impact on her decision to teach and, for that, I feel very proud. When the best and the brightest individuals enter our profession, we are making a powerful, indelible mark on the future.

The other example I wish to discuss today is about one of you. This year one of our new teachers is a graduate of the elementary school in which I had served as principal, and, in fact, he was there during my years as its principal. Before I interviewed him, I saw his credentials' file and guessed that he was someone I had known, but when he walked into my office, I was "blown away" by the person he had become. I know that he will be a wonderful teacher, mentor to his students, and a fine addition to our district. Hearing him speak about his decision to teach made me feel quite happy and confident about the future of our profession.

After so many years working as an educator, I am very pleased that it has never gotten “old” for me. I look forward to each new year and for the joys it will bring. I have the same excitement about “opening days” that I have had every year since I was a young child. I loved the feel and smell of new notebooks, and I still do. I know that the start of school is about new beginnings, reinventing ourselves, and new opportunities. My hope for each of you is that you enjoy your first year of teaching here and that you find many heartfelt joys and much satisfaction as the reward for the very hard work that you will do. In an article recently published in Educational Leadership (Wolk, S., *Joy in School*, Sept. 2008), the author writes: “As educators, we have the responsibility to educate and inspire the whole child – mind, heart, and soul.” I urge you to really get to know your students in deep and meaningful ways. You will need to “own” your teaching and understand that each day as you enter your classroom you will find golden opportunities, as will your students. Experience the joy in school for your students and yourself. This will enrich your life and make you an integral part of the fabric of this exceptional school system and part of our strong, talented, capable, and caring instructional faculty.

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