

In Praise of Public School Teachers



People who haven't been in our public schools lately might envision them as grim or dangerous places, but I want to tell you about the public school I know, one that shines as a bright light for our family and for our community.

Our public school is Leaksville-Spray Elementary, in Eden, N.C. My four children are in kindergarten, first, third, and fifth grade, so we have a combined total of twelve classroom experiences at the school.

Six years ago I was worried about what we would encounter as our oldest son started public school in a school with a 75% poverty level.

Let me tell you what we've encountered.

We've encountered a principal who is constantly looking for ways to improve her school and who says that her teachers are amazing.

We've encountered creative teachers who try to reach all of the kids in their classes no matter where they are, who take a job that isn't easy and do it very, very well.

We've encountered teachers who spend extra hours working both at school and at home, who spend their own money to pay for materials they need, who make a tremendous effort to retain their own passions while also stirring the passions of our children.

I want to tell you about a few of these teachers.

I want to tell you about Mrs. Boyd, who created an after school book club for students to talk about politics and history—in the first grade.

I want to tell you about Mrs. Craft, who started a program where her students become Mathematician Technicians to work with younger kids on math skills.

I want to tell you about Mrs. Law, who bought a book at a yard sale because she knew it was the next book in the series my son was reading, and about Mrs. Yarber, who heard about a great way to teach multiplication using music, and within one day had talked to a teacher in Indianapolis and had gotten copies of the music.

And Mrs. Corum, who has 37 kids in her fifth-grade science class this year but who continues to provide them with hands-on experiences like the Gummy Worm vs. Night Crawler lesson they did the fifth day of school.

I can go on...

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I told my son one time that he had the best teacher. He said that I always say that. Well, it's true. Every year he has the best teacher. Our school is full of the best teachers.

And I know it's not just our school.

Our public schools are full of the best teachers. We need to honor them. We need to recognize that any greatness this country achieves will be a direct result of the efforts of the hundreds of thousands of public school teachers around the country who continue to work in even the most challenging conditions among families who struggle economically, who search for that one thing to motivate that one student, who sacrifice time with their own families to do what is best for all of ours.

I don't want our public school teachers to feel as if they are under threat, as if they aren't doing enough.

The mission of our public school teachers is clear: educate our children. ALL of our children. Not only the children whose parents come to meetings, not only the ones who have books in their homes, not only the ones who share their personal values. Educate ALL of our children.

You know these teachers too. You know them at your children's schools, your grandchildren's schools, your neighbors' schools.

Tell them you are grateful.

Tell them we need them and we don't want to lose them.

Laurie Wilson is the parent of four children who attend public school in Eden, NC