

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. John Harper
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May 2008

Superheroes are big business these days.

Every summer we see a new slate of movies about superheroes. This year, it's Iron Man, Batman and the Incredible Hulk. In past years there have been movies about Superman, Spiderman and many other such heroes.

Each has some unique power that helps them make the world a better place. But in my mind, none of these characters can stand up to a single teacher.

May 4-10, 2008 is National Teacher Appreciation Week. So I take this opportunity to celebrate, honor, praise and thank all professional educators, and most especially ours in District 202, for the "heroic" work that they do in their classrooms.

Teachers are real-life heroes. Every day they do the seemingly impossible and too-often-thankless task of opening our children's minds to the life-changing magic of learning. In this way, teachers really do make the world a better place.

Stories abound about the work teachers do to improve the lives of their students. I could share many examples of educational excellence, ordinary people doing extraordinary things in schools every day, rain or shine, rich or poor, happy or sad.

I could share stories about teachers working with kids so poor that they can't afford shoes to cover their feet, much less a home computer. Or kids who don't speak English, but need only a little assistance to unlock brilliance that transcends the limits of language.

Or hundreds and thousands of average middle-of-the-road students who are routinely inspired by a teacher to dream about, aspire to and achieve their own greatness one lesson at a time – whatever it looks like, no matter if it can be measured by a standardized test.

I could, but I won't. Not because the stories aren't good or powerful, but because they're not unique to District 202. This kind of awe-inspiring experience happens in schools and classrooms every day, everywhere. The fact that we don't know about them is our own failing, not that of the teachers.

As a society, we gobble up every bit of minutiae the media serves about the lives of this pop star or that athlete. To be fair, the media report this so-called news because that is what people seem to care about the most. That's what "sells newspapers," as the saying goes.

That information may be interesting. But it certainly isn't as important as what happens in classrooms every day.

There, you will find adults who have dedicated their lives, both personal and professional, to helping shape, mold and direct the young minds will help move our world forward. Teachers work today, to create “tomorrow.”

Teachers help create the leaders and servants who will guide and protect us.

Teachers help create the scientists and doctors who will improve our lives.

Teachers help create the new thinkers whose ideas will expand our horizons.

And yes, teachers even help create the artists, musicians and performers who give us the gifts of art and entertainment.

They do all of this with little expectation of reward, except for their paltry paycheck – that teachers get paid so little a terrible reflection on our society’s values than on the value of their work.

So, until teachers earn what they actually deserve, the very least we can do is thank them for their commitment and expertise. Teachers work for the only reason that really matters – to help children.

Together, with our teachers, we are preparing learners for the future.

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