



Commissioner's

by Stephen L. Pruitt, Ph.D.
Kentucky Commissioner of Education

Comments

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KSB students inspire others

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure to attend a book premier party, but this was no ordinary launch event. It was the kickoff for the book, *We Can Hear You Just Fine: Clarifications from the Kentucky School for the Blind*, authored by several current and former students of our own state school for the blind and visually impaired.

As I have said many times before, I am thankful for my opportunity to be the superintendent of the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) as well as the Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD). I am particularly proud of the KSB students who had the courage and tenacity to share their stories.

The Louisville Story Program (LSP) played a large role in the production of this book. The program's focus is to aid in the telling of stories for those who may have difficulty in sharing their own stories. From the LSP website, "The Louisville Story Program strengthens community by amplifying unheard voices and untold stories. We partner closely with overlooked Louisville residents by providing extensive writing and oral history workshops and intensive editorial support, culminating in professionally-designed documentary books, exhibits, and radio programs in which our authors tell the stories of their lives and communities in their own words." The Louisville Story Program has done just that for our KSB students.

At the launch event, we heard from LSP Director Darcy Thompson, and LSP Deputy Director Joe Manning. I would like to extend my personal thank you to these gentlemen and others who worked on this project. Additionally, we heard from the authors themselves. They read from the book to more than 200 in attendance, using different techniques from braille to electronic readers. The authors were incredible, and the support from the community was impressive, to say the least.

Through the partnership with the Louisville Writing Program, authors Matthew Caudill, Haley Hall, Shane Lowe, Madelyn Loyd, Selena Tirey, Kianna Waller, and Cherish Willis poured themselves into writing their stories to inform us of their perspectives and to help those of us who are sighted to understand their world. I am not sure they set out to do more than that, but they did. Their stories, their passion and their commitment, inspire us to move beyond our own perceived limitations. They inspire us to be more, to realize that every student deserves an opportunity, and too really believe that every student can do great things if given the opportunity.

I am told periodically that we should not penalize schools because special needs students may "bring down the test scores." I say, who are we to deprive anyone of the opportunity to shine? Who are we, as adults/educators to decide who deserves opportunities? We cannot begin to make the changes we need to make in education until we realize that our job is to create the environment that allows each student to pursue his or her passion. It may be hard for everyone to understand, but all of our students possess abilities that inspire us – if we just provide the opportunity.

I cannot tell you how proud I am to be the superintendent of KSB and KSD – not just because of their dedicated faculty and staff, but because these students keep me grounded and inspire me to be my best. Thank you Matthew, Haley, Shane, Madelyn, Selena, Kianna, and Cherish. Thank you for sharing the best of who you are to inspire us and awaken us to a future of possibilities.

For information on *We Can Hear You Just Fine: Clarifications from the Kentucky School for the Blind*, please visit <http://louisvillestoryprogram.org/projects/more-than-what-you-see-dispatches-from-the-kentucky-school-for-the-blind>.