



Commissioner's

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Comments

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Taking your place at the big table

The first week of May is finally here. It's an exciting time to be in Kentucky with eyes around the world focused on the Bluegrass State and the running of the Kentucky Derby.

The first week in May also warrants attention for another reason. It is Teacher Appreciation Week and the start of Teacher Appreciation Month – a time that should be celebrated on the highest levels, but is often overlooked. So, if you will indulge me, I would like to talk about the greatest and most noble career of education.

I chose to be a teacher. My mother, grandmother and uncle were all teachers. To a certain degree, my mother had cautioned about becoming one. The pay wasn't great and her generation worried a lot about the man in the family being the breadwinner and being able to provide for his family.

My mother also made a point to say that one should only be a teacher if it is a calling, not because it was convenient or perceived as easier. Suffice it to say it was my calling.

I started college to be an ophthalmologist. I was good in the sciences and I sort of had a point to prove I think. I had even made the comment that I would never teach. That began to change sometime in my freshman year. I remember wrestling with it to a point of being so uncomfortable that I thought I was having anxiety issues. I finally gave in to my calling and decided to go full throttle. I was headed toward a degree in chemistry, so I decided to keep that and minor in education. When I finally told my parents, they were both thrilled and have supported me ever since.

So why is education a calling? Why should it be such a hard decision? Well, it is a tough job. Perhaps one of the toughest out there. Our educators work way more than many other professions and get paid way less. They are on constant display in the community. And when it comes to politics, education is like a football – everyone has a different idea on how to get to the goal.

So why teach? I will tell you why. Education is the career that produces all others. It is the moment that you see the light of comprehension in a child's eye. It is the moment you realize you are making a difference in the life of a child that saw no future.

In short, educators stand between knowledge and ignorance; I can and I can't; the impossible and what is possible for each individual. While educators would love more money, they realize education is an investment in our students. We may or may not realize the outcome. Some students will come up to you 20 years later in the grocery store and say, "Remember me?" Or they'll send you a Facebook message that says thank you for caring about me when no one else did. Then there is the student who leaves the note on your desk at the end of the school year that says, "You will never die. You will live forever through the things you have taught me as I pass them along to my children and future students."

As educators, we see our work as a legacy, not a job. So, during Teacher Appreciation Week and all month long, I honor our educators. Throughout May, the Kentucky Department of Education's flagship publication, [Kentucky Teacher](#), will be highlighting the amazing things teachers have done during the past year by revisiting some of our favorite stories. Make sure to thank important teachers in your life with the hashtag #thankKYteacher on Twitter. KDE will be sharing these tweets throughout May.

During this month, I also challenge you as educators. You can choose to make your world as large as you want. You can choose to use your teacher voice for more than just getting your kids quiet. You can choose to make a difference in the bigger vision for education. But make no mistake, this is a choice.



I have been asked many times over the past year and a half, how did a chemistry teacher from rural Georgia become a chief state school officer? Well, in short I would say it is because I believed at all times that I was never just a teacher. I AM a teacher.

I never wondered if I belonged at "the big table" when it came to making decisions about and for my students' educational needs. As a teacher, I knew I belonged. I chose to make my world big enough to understand it and to make it better for my students.

So, Happy Teacher Appreciation Month. Let's make sure we all take a moment to appreciate our teachers. Teachers, let's make sure we take time to appreciate each other and the greatest and most noble profession, education.