

Lesson No. 1

Teachers Deserve – and Need – Our Support



By Caryl Auslander

With the new school year underway, what better opportunity is there to celebrate the people who make such a positive impact on so many lives.

I'm talking, of course, about teachers. That makes it all the more troubling to see recent stories about a dramatic decline in education school enrollment, as well as district difficulties in finding qualified teachers for available openings.

The all-too public disputes between the Indiana Department of Education and the State Board of Education are hopefully a thing of the past. There is no worse example, or bigger drain on morale, than adult battles that can – and should – be avoided.

As a wife, daughter and sister of teachers, I see firsthand the passion and commitment they bring to their work. As someone advocating in the areas of education and workforce development, I'm in constant contact with others who share that dedication to seeing all students have the opportunity to succeed.

I'm proud that my employer has a mission that calls for providing "economic opportunity and prosperity for the people of Indiana" and leads an *Indiana Vision 2025* plan that boasts Outstanding Talent as its most important economic driver.

I'm pleased that our state has opened new doors for families through the introduction and expansion of charter schools and vouchers. These schools and these programs, like all others in education, however, must continue to demonstrate proven results. There is no room for underperformance in this critical enterprise.

I'm happy that the Indiana Chamber and its allies have helped deliver alternative routes for persons holding professional degrees to share their expertise by becoming teachers. The success stories of these career changers and the lives they impact continue to grow.

I'm encouraged that full-day kindergarten options are in place and that preschool pilot programs are taking off in a few selected counties. The expedient expansion of early education, especially for low-income and other disadvantaged population, is hopefully among the next

steps. The results are proven and the need is great.

But what about those teachers? They are the MOST critical factor in each student's ability to obtain the quality education that allows them to become productive members of society. There is no doubt that more needs to be done to attract, retain and reward the best teachers. "More" includes:

- increasing starting pay for teachers to attract the best and brightest to the profession;
- paying our best teachers more money;
- directing more than the 57% (as of 2013) of every K-12 dollar that reaches the classroom;
- providing meaningful feedback and professional development for all educators; and
- celebrating teaching successes and lifting up those who have the greatest classroom impact.

While teachers play that crucial role, discussions about public education need to focus on the students. Equal opportunity for a quality education and success in school for every child is the most important social justice issue of our time. That quality education is the surest way to break cycles of poverty, transform individual lives, lift up our communities and our state, and attract the best employers and jobs.

Thousands of well-paying jobs are going unfilled today and our future ability to secure the best jobs relies on what we do now to provide educational opportunities for all. Every child, every school and every community benefits when all children are learning and succeeding. Students with a high-quality education gain the confidence, character and abilities to become engaged and productive citizens.

Education is not about public versus private or unions versus politicians. It's about parents, educators, employers, communities and all others coming together and creating an expectation, opportunity and clear path to success for every child.



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