

SBUT ANNOUNCER

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SBUT Joins CTA in the 'Thank You, Teacher' Project

Happy Holidays to all of our members and their families and friends! On behalf of the Board of Directors, Elise, Mary and I thank you for all that you do to make the world a better place by educating children. Your days are long and your challenges are great, but you continue to do remarkable things to help students. We wish you good health, happiness and prosperity in the New Year!



--Sandra Goins, Executive Director South Bay United Teachers

Excerpts from the California Educator November 2011 —

Teachers, counselors, librarians and nurses make a difference in the lives of their students every day, but sometimes, it takes a thoughtful note from a former student to remind them.

Many of us have written to our own favorite teachers or counselors or bus drivers to let them know how much they meant to us. These notes may end up tucked away in desk drawers, pasted in scrapbooks, or tacked onto a bulletin board to be read on a particularly bad day and then tucked away again. Still, they serve as tangible proof of the positive impact one person can have.

These notes are worth sharing — especially at a time when shameful attacks on teachers have reached epidemic proportions.

That's why CTA is launching the "Thank You, Teacher!" Project to remind the public — and each other — of all that educators do. Over the past several weeks, CTA has been posting cards and letters that keep you going. Notes from first-graders, thank you notes from college-bound high schoolers, updates from post-grads, and letters of appreciation

from grown adults who have achieved success and happiness.

Over the next few months, the *California Educator* and the cta.org website will feature those heartfelt notes to teachers, counselors, librarians, community college faculty and education support professionals who educate and support California's students.

Send your thank-you notes to the "Thank You, Teacher!" Project, CTA Communications Department, 1705 Murchison Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010, or to dmartin@cta.org.

And maybe you want to drop a line to a teacher who made a difference in your life.



Why I Send My Children to Public Schools

By Robert Niles—Reprinted with permission

Originally posted on www.SensibleTalk.com - October 7, 2011

My two children, ages 14 and 11, attend their local public schools, and have since kindergarten. Why do I send my children to public schools?

1. Public schools work.

Every year, millions of American children graduate from public schools across the country, having completed the toughest curricula in our nation's history, surpassing standards that get tougher by the year. In our public schools, students can learn calculus, analyze complex themes by Nobel Prize-winning authors, study advanced chemistry, biology and physics, program computers, and perform music and dance in international competitions in front of crowds of thousands. Every year, public school students learn, graduate and go on to the world's best colleges and the world's most competitive jobs.

But what about all those news stories about bad test scores and failing schools? Aren't many kids falling behind?

It's true that we've got a huge gap between students in our country -- one that grows with each grade level as kids advance from kindergarten into high school. But that's not because we have an education problem in America. It's because we have a large, and growing, child poverty problem in our country.

The children whose parents can afford to send them to school with money for lunch, and who have the ability to help them with their increasingly difficult homework at night, typically thrive in the public schools, as they always have. But those aren't the majority of kids anymore in many districts.

If public education were broken, and our schools no longer had the ability to teach, then why is it you never find any of these "broken" schools in affluent communities? I wrote about this issue last spring, when I showed how the schools in my hometown of Pasadena,

California were out-performing the California average in all major demographic categories -- white, black and Latino, poor and non-poor -- but the district's overall test score average was below the state average because the Pasadena schools have a far above-average percentage of economically-disadvantaged children attending them.

When we raise academic standards and increase homework requirements, we widen the gap between students whose parents studied algebra, geometry and calculus -- and can help them with that homework -- and those who don't have parents like that, or any parent at home, to help them.

Yet even students facing immense home challenges -- single parents, foster care, parents working multiple jobs who are rarely home, parents who can't speak English or who didn't complete school themselves -- are still learning and advancing in our public schools, even if they continue to trail those students who have the advantage of living with educated parents who earn a living wage, or better. Test scores in all socio-economic categories continue to rise in our country. Our public school teachers are doing their jobs. Our schools just need *more* teachers, and more resources to help close the gap between those children whose birth gave them a head start -- like my kids -- and those whose birth didn't.

2. Private schools aren't inherently better.

A University of Illinois study, published in the *American Journal of Education*, found that public school students scored just as well in math as students attending private schools, when you compared students of similar ethnic and economic backgrounds. The study followed earlier research that showed public school students scored slightly better (though within the margin of

error) than private school students in the same income and ethnic demographic.

One of the ways that many private schools portray themselves as superior options to public schools is by cherry-picking the students they admit. It's easy to show off students with high test scores and impressive academic achievements when you admit only the students who are inclined -- through family support and personal initiative -- to score and perform well.

What the University of Illinois research did is to make an apples-to-apples comparison which showed that similar students do just as well or better in a public school environment than in private schools.

I don't want to talk anyone out of attending a private school, if that's your choice and you can afford it. But I do want to talk you out of believing that you have to choose a private school, if you want the best for your children's education. Your child can get an excellent education in the public schools, just as millions of other are getting. The data proves it!

3. Public school students score better than charter school students.

Many politicians, including education officials in the Obama administration, are pushing charter schools as a superior alternative to traditional public schools, which are accountable to the local community through elected school boards. Charter schools don't have to follow the same rules as public schools, and the idea is that greater freedom flexibility allows them to succeed.

Except that they don't. A Stanford University study found that students at charter schools were more likely to score worse than public schools students than they were to outperform those students -- 37% percent of charter schools did worse than comparable pub-

lic schools, while only 17% did better. The rest, 46%, scored the same.

So, if you are a parent who picks a charter school over a public school, you're more likely to end up worse off than going to your local public school than you are to end up in a better-performing school.

4. Public schools are for everyone.

Public schools have to serve every child in a community. They don't get to cherry-pick only the brightest or wealthiest students. And that's a large part of their appeal to me. Attend a public school, and you're getting to know people from every corner of your community, not just people of the same religion or social class. In public school, you're part of the, well, public.

Public education offers every child in the community a chance at an education. While too many children remain limited in their ability to take full advantage of that opportunity due to circumstances at home, it's important to me -- and ought to be important to you -- that those opportunities remain available to all. Education ought to be about lifting up, not weeding out. Without a free, public education system open to all, those who are born without money and power never will have a chance to make their lives better by developing new knowledge and skills.

5. Public schools are under attack.

So public schools work, they teach as well or better than private schools, and better than charters. They're open to all and helping children from all races, ethnicities and economic classes. So why are so many stories and people so negative about public schools?

Here's my theory: Public schools are run by the government. They're the place where more people have more contact with government employees on a daily basis than any other public institution. Public school teachers are almost always members of labor unions, too.

So if you believe that government can't do anything right, or if you believe that people are better off without labor unions representing them, a successful public school system doesn't help you make your case, does it?

If you're a business leader and want to distract people from the fact that more Americans are slipping out of the middle class even as you and your colleagues are getting richer than ever, how convenient would it be to fund foundations and contribute to politicians who will blame poor test scores in the hardest-hit communities on failing schools, instead of the growing child poverty problem that's causing them?

Don't fall for their stories. The facts

show that public education works. Teachers are doing their jobs, even as society makes it harder and harder for them. We should be rewarding our public school teachers with the extra help, recognition and, yes, pay they deserve.

Here's how you can help: Thank a teacher instead of trashing them. Offer to volunteer or contribute to a local school. If your school district is asking for a bond issue or parcel tax, vote yes. They need the money.

Don't sign petitions asking to transfer control of local schools from school boards elected by parents to private companies accountable to no one in the community. If you choose to send your children to private schools or to homeschool, that's fine, but please don't tell other people that their children can't get a good education in the public schools.

I'm sending my children to public schools because I don't believe in the people who are attacking our public schools. Sending my children to public schools is the ultimate sign of support, and helps keep me more deeply involved in a precious public resource that needs, and deserves, our support.

Public schools work -- for my children and the children of our community. That's why I send my children to public schools, and I encourage other parents to do the same.

The NEA Foundation Awards for Teaching Excellence

Call for Nominations

Here's your chance to nominate an excellent educator for the *NEA Foundation for Teaching Excellence*. We're looking for candidates who are creative, student-focused, diversity sensitive and supportive, dedicated to life-long learning, and advocates for public education.



All awardees receive expenses-paid travel to the *NEA Foundation's Annual Salute to Excellence in Education* Gala in Washington D.C. Five awardees are selected for the *Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence* and receive \$10,000 each plus expenses-paid travel for themselves and a guest. *The NEA Member Benefits Award for Teaching Excellence* recipient, selected from the five, receives \$25,000 in cash and a commemorative gift. Current members of NEA local affiliates and bargaining units can download the nomination form at <http://www.cta.org/About-CTA/CTA-Foundation/The-NEA-Foundation-Awards-for-Teaching-Excellence.aspx>

HOLIDAY WRITING

Alison Murphy, a sixth grade language arts teacher at Medford Memorial Middle School in Medford, New Jersey

I have a great writing activity for the week before winter break that can be used for any holiday celebrated around that time. My kids love listening to and reading stories from the popular Chicken Soup series. So, I explain to them that they are going to make their own books designed to be a holiday gift for a family member. The book is titled Chicken Soup for the Holiday Soul, and the students make a cover just like the Chicken Soup books, a table of contents, and a dedication page. Stories that I have them include are: Best Holiday Gift I Received, Best Holiday Gift I Ever Gave, Favorite Holiday Family Tradition, What the Holidays Mean to Me, and so on. I also have the students include some fun poetry, like acrostics about Christmas or winter. Students also have fun making silly lists like Top 10 Best Things to Get in Your Holiday Stocking. The kids have a great time decorating and writing these stories, and the best part about these gifts is that they are from the heart and free.

WINTER HOLIDAY ROTATION

Anonymous

“Our team of five first grade teachers agrees to a winter holiday rotation every year. Each teacher prepares a lesson to cover one winter holiday, and the kids rotate through the classes all day long. We can fit in four rotations of about 35-40 minutes a lesson. We cover our own class with our lesson on a separate day. Students think this is a very special day, because they are visiting different teachers’ classrooms. Each teacher can focus on one holiday and give it the attention it deserves instead of trying to cover a lot of different holidays in addition to the regular curriculum. We typically cover Hanukkah, Christmas around the World, Kwanzaa, Chinese New Year, and Diwali.”



HOLIDAY SHOPPING

Julie Engel, a second/third combination class teacher at Redwood Elementary School in Fontana, California

We are on year round school and my class is off for December so I usually skip holiday stuff. This year, while struggling to teach my students not only to count money, but to add and subtract it, I hit on a really fun way to do it. After going over the basics, we planned a fantasy lunch with menus from a local burger place. I tell the kids they have a dollar amount, and they choose their lunch, then calculate the amount they spend and the change they will receive. I add situations such as 'You have \$15.00 to buy lunch. Later you are going to Scandia (a local amusement park) and want to have money left over to spend at the arcade. What would you buy for lunch that would give you the most change?' (The least expensive lunch was the boy who ordered 'extra cheese' and a soda.) I was sitting at home the other night contemplating a pile of catalogs and trying to think of a classroom use for them, when it dawned on me that I could use them in the same way. Next week we will be having a 'Fantasy Holiday Shopping Spree.' The kids will be using many math skills, such as estimation, addition, subtraction and regrouping. If your kids are already competent doing paper and pencil math, let them break out the calculators to speed things up. (I always make them write everything down even when using the calculators.) They will have to plan, organize and write about their choices and the people for whom they are shopping. I think that this will be a lot of fun, and a heck of a lot more interesting than traditional worksheets. One thing though, I don't expect this to be a quiet activity - after all, how can you shop quietly?

GIFT CERTIFICATES DRAWING! See's CANDIES.

SBUT Members: Win one of four gift certificates for a 1 lb. box of See's candy.

Call or send an email to the office by Wednesday, December 14th at 4:00pm to put your name in the drawing. (And be sure we have your current home mailing address).

HOT GIFTS

Cyndi Stumpf, a second grade teacher in Jefferson Township, New Jersey

For the holidays, my students make a hot plate out of a 12-inch solid white tile. I purchase the tiles at a local home improvement supply store, and the students decorate the top with permanent markers. I spray the tiles with an acrylic paint sealer, which is also available at the same store. The students glue felt squares to the bottom for table protection. These hot plates have been a popular and useful gift as well as being applicable to all holidays.

SHARING WITH SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

Christy Goodney, a US history teacher at Dripping Springs High School

Just before the holidays, I had my students collect and mail out generic 'Happy Holiday' cards to soldiers in the Navy and Army. They signed and wrote a note in the cards but no personal information was given. We then sent a package of cards to 'Any Soldier' for the soldier to share with his/her friends. We found the mailing addresses on the Naval Fleet official web site. Some of my kids wanted to send more cards so I took the cards to our local VA hospital for the staff to distribute. The staff was thrilled beyond belief that a group of high school kids were so considerate and caring. We used the school mailing address as our return address and have already received several letters from the sailors. This is a project that can be done at any time of the year, even for no 'holiday' reason. It's a great feeling to pass on good cheer to those who protect our freedom. Write to: Any Soldier --- Germany/ Eco 51st Inf (LRS) (ABN)/ CMR 440/ Apo AE 09175.

HOLIDAYS ON THE NET

Karen Lovell, a teacher from Huntsville, Alabama

<http://www.holidays.net>, is a great source of inspiration and ideas for me. It's also a nice place to send students for information concerning holidays.