

Praising teachers and principals

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Within our American educational system, teachers and principals have the most direct responsibility for the achievement of students and the performance of our schools. Believing this to be true, it is imperative that as superintendent I hire the best principals available and support these principals in hiring and retaining the best teachers for our students.

In recent years, this seemingly simple task has become more difficult. In years past, teaching was considered to be the career of choice for many young people. Sadly, this is no longer the case.

Teacher job satisfaction and morale is at an all-time low and university graduates are less inclined to join the profession. The fact that fewer college students are going into the field of education is documented by the U.S. Department of Education data which cites that enrollment in teacher-preparation programs has fallen by 10 percent from 2005 to 2012. Recent data show that enrollment is continuing to drop. It is becoming more and more difficult to recruit teachers, especially in the areas of math and science.

Considering the limited number of new teacher candidates, it becomes even more crucial that a school system retain good teachers. The 2012 MetLife Survey of Teachers found that teacher job satisfaction declined from 62 percent of teachers feeling “very satisfied” with their careers in 2008 to 39 percent by 2012. This was the lowest percentage in the 25-year history of the survey. It’s troubling when the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future says that 46 percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years. These are alarming statistics when we consider the increasing number of students to be educated.

Numerous studies show that teacher and principal morale is at an all-time low. Teaching is a rewarding profession, but it is also one of the most stressful and demanding ones. Teachers must meet the demands of parents, administrators and the general public while constantly keeping the needs of their students at the forefront.

Add this to a changing curriculum; unprecedented testing; a budget-required shortened school year to complete the required work; an environment of continued strained resources; and increased expectations to raise academic scores.

Don’t forget about the responsibility of addressing the individual needs of diverse learners and engaging parents and the community in the education of students and you can see the reason for the increased educator stress.

Being a teacher or principal is intellectually, emotionally and physically demanding. These jobs do not stop at 3:30 p.m. As a teacher, I spent my nights and weekends grading papers and preparing my lessons for the next day. Teachers today have added responsibilities such as curriculum development, fundraising, recess supervision, club sponsorship, supervision of afterschool athletics and chaperoning overnight field trips.

As superintendent, it is my job to do all that I can to provide our teachers and principals with the resources they need to educate our students. I must constantly remind myself of what it is like to be in the classroom and to work at the school level. Central office exists solely to support our teachers and the learning experiences that occur in our schools.

Given the importance of the teacher and principal in our educational system and the importance of the educational system to the welfare of our country, it is imperative that parents and community members all support the work of our teachers and principals.