

“Whatever you do, do not become a teacher.” Those are the words my parents have rang through my head as I am gearing up for college and attempting to choose a career. It was pretty ironic for them to say, considering they had both been involved in education and were both administrators at one time. Both of my grandmothers had taught for 40+ years at the exact same school district, yet I never once heard those words come out of their mouths. Actually, they completely loved their jobs and their careers. I know about 2 people out of the hundreds I know that are pursuing a career in education. What has changed from generation to generation?

I asked my mother, who is the Coordinator of Special Programs at our district, why students are not flocking towards teaching as they once had. She said that so much is being required of teachers, yet they are not being paid by professionals. Not only are they asked to teach the already expected curriculum, yet they have to meet the heavy social and emotional needs of each student and try to keep up with technological advances in the field. The minimum teaching salary for a beginning teacher in the state of Missouri is \$25,000. As my mother stated, “Legislators **have** to lobby for teachers and work on raising the minimum salary if we truly believe in the power of education and want to make the job look more attractive.”

I had the opportunity to sit in on the 8th District Educators meeting hosted by the Missouri Department of Secondary Education (DESE) the summer before my sophomore year of high school. Surrounded by educators and legislators who truly cared about making a difference in students’ lives, we discussed teacher recruitment and retention. What do we do? How do we change the narrative? The answers collectively pointed towards one simple answer: we have to support teachers more.

To recruit teachers, we have to pay them more money. Unfortunately, I do not believe there is any other solution. The workload will, unfortunately, continue to heighten. The stress will more than likely not go away. No amount of professional development days or free luncheons will make up for the fact that teachers are having to work second jobs in order to even pay their bills. Yes, they did know how much they would be getting paid when they signed up for the job, but they should not be punished for wanting to change lives. We **have** to find ways to pay teachers more. Otherwise, unfortunately, our education system will soon become extinct.

I have been surrounded by incredible teachers my entire life. I am who I am today because of them. In order to be a high-quality teacher, you must care. You must be willing to pour your entire life into changing other lives. You must be selfless and be severely passionate about changing the world. You must understand your job will go without thanks far more often than not, but the impact you leave will be far more gratifying than any compliment you could receive.

In third grade, I split purple nail polish all over my teacher’s freshly waxed classroom. She laughed and got the janitor. By her example, I learned it is okay to mess up and important to give yourself grace. In sixth grade, my teacher told me I could write a math textbook if I wanted to and that I was the “Michael Jordan of math.” By her example, I learned to believe in myself. In high school, my teacher baked me cupcakes and threw me a birthday party. By her example, I learned it is important to make others feel special and loved.

Teachers are superheroes. In order for them to keep their superpowers, we have to start paying them more and giving them more grace. Without teachers, our world is a very dark place. We have to find a way to retain and recruit teachers. We have to work less on giving the teachers

criticism and more on giving them an outlet. If we do not make the job look more attractive, we will lose precious magic in students' lives.