

Student/teacher relationship critical for success

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Who will be my child's new teacher? It's often the first question parents ask when enrolling their child in school or when they move to a new city.

It's not about charter schools versus public schools. According to the director of the documentary "Waiting for Superman," Davis Guggenheim, "Parents know that all these debates boil down to a relationship between a child and a teacher." It's such a simple truth that it gets lost in policy makers' rush to fix education.

Policy makers keep coming up with the same old solutions: holding summits, establishing commissions, having conferences, conducting studies and developing strategic plans. What they fail to consider is the importance of the teacher/pupil relationship. Lawmakers listen to business people who tell them the most important thing they want to have is a politically stable climate where the regulatory environment is predictable. Yet, they fail to see the importance of creating that same environmental expectation in overseeing education. When it comes to education, it seems every lawmaker has a pet solution that quickly turns into another layer of regulations that stifles the imagination and the enthusiasm professional educators bring to the classroom.

Policy makers look for the silver bullet to fix education — charter schools, smaller classrooms, more money, rigid testing, mentoring and recruitment. Front line teachers will tell you compensation is important, but creating an environment in which they are valued, respected and treated as professionals is equally, if not more, important. Rarely are teachers asked, "What's best for students?"

Teaching is an art and a profession that should exist in a learning environment that allows teachers to teach with the passion that drove them to their calling. There is no greater satisfaction than to see children's eyes as they learn about their world with awe. Teachers are now thwarted from carrying out the passion that attracted them to teaching by bureaucratic layers starting with legislators, the state school board and local school boards that insist on having a say, which promulgates a plethora of regulations. Teachers are then required to follow conflicting and constantly changing policies and regulations, leaving them to the whim of lawmakers and administrators.

Our educational system must be an environment where teachers are eager to come to the classroom ready to challenge, motivate and inspire students with the love of learning. Learning has

always required a nurturing relationship between teacher and student. It requires that teachers have the support of lawmakers, parents and administrators to have the freedom to use their creativity in bringing out the innate talent all children bring into the world.

The greatest gift one can give to another human being is to have expectations of him. Each of us, if we think back to our youth, will find whatever success we have had in our lives has been because someone believed in us, often a teacher. It's about the love of learning and when teachers are encouraged to practice the art of their profession. Schools are supposed to be for the purpose of educating students and not perpetuating an outdated bureaucracy. Policymakers should create an environment free from political posturing and needless regulations that stifle teachers' ability to practice their profession. That requires they eliminate the archaic bureaucratic layers and encourage local school districts to become living laboratories that create world-class schools.

Parents are concerned about finding the best teacher for their child. That should be the single purpose policymakers keep in mind as they carry out the responsibility of overseeing the education of our children. Let's put children first.

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