

Teachers are Doing a Better Job than Ever November 20, 2002

By Scott DiMauro

Ever long for the “good old days” in education? Let’s go back to 1921. Then, the first observance of American Education Week was driven by concerns that our educational system was failing to meet America's economic and national security needs. With 25% of the nation's World War I draftees illiterate and 29% having lacked adequate physical fitness, the National Education Association and the American Legion met in 1919 and pledged to work together to seek ways of generating public support for education. Two years later, they were the first co-sponsors of "an educational week . . . observed in all communities annually for the purpose of informing the public of the accomplishments and needs of the public schools and to secure the cooperation and support of the public in meeting those needs."

I am pleased to report that what our public schools are producing today bears little resemblance to what we got 81 years ago, or even 10 years ago. In fact, America's public schools are doing a better job with a larger and more diverse student population than at any time in our history. SAT and ACT scores have risen steadily with more students taking the tests and going onto college than ever before. Public school students are being challenged to read more, do more meaningful homework, and take more challenging courses than what most of us took when we were in school.

Visit a kindergarten classroom today, and you'll find children learning knowledge and skills that you may not have been exposed to until first or second grade. These high expectations are paying off. A recent Brookings Institution study concluded that average nine-year olds today know as much mathematics, for example, as ten year olds in 1973, and thirteen-year olds today know as much mathematics as fourteen year olds in 1973. High school dropout rates have declined over 20% since 1980, and during the same period the proportion of high school graduates who enroll in college by age 24 has increased 28%. The commonly held notion that schools today aren't what they used to be is correct--thank goodness the "good old days" are gone!

Worthington results mirror national trends. Over the past ten years, the percentage of students achieving scores of 3 (“qualified”) or higher on Advanced Placement Examinations has remained steady at around 82%. Over the same time period, however, the number of students taking those tests has nearly tripled. Our tradition of excellence remains high, and more students than ever before are meeting our high standards.

By now it is well known that the Worthington School District has been perfect on state report card standards for the past two years. What is even more impressive is how our students do on standardized achievement tests when their performance is measured against their own ability or IQ. As measured by median percentiles in every subject at the benchmark grades of 5 and 7, our students outperform their own predicted level of achievement. Clearly, it is our public schools that are doing a tremendous job in taking our students--with whatever interests or skills they bring with them--and helping them reach their full potential.

These results do not come by accident. The most critical factor in predicting student achievement is the quality of teaching in the classroom. As we continue to invest in quality mentoring, professional development and continuing education for our teachers, our students will continue to excel.

Our schools, however, cannot be alone in ensuring the success of every student. "It takes an entire village to raise a child" is not just a cliché. We need volunteers in our classrooms to provide extra support to our students. We need parents to provide a home environment that encourages reading, good work habits, and a lifelong love of learning. The foundation for student success can't be achieved without school employees, community members and parents working together. That is why the Worthington Education Association, in partnership with our state affiliate, the Ohio Education Association, has provided hands-on strategies for parents in a pamphlet entitled "Your Child's Best Year." These were distributed at the recent elementary parent-teacher conferences, and additional brochures are available for any interested parents through their children's teachers.

We all share the responsibility to make public schools great for every student. Let us remember the words of an anonymous citizen who wrote, "Fifty years from now it will not matter what kind of car you drove, what kind of house you lived in, how much you had in your bank account, or what your clothes looked like. But the world may be a little better because you were important in the life of a child." Please join us in making a difference in the lives of all our children.

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