

Nation's Leaders Get First Training in Our Classrooms May, 2002

By Scott DiMauro

Consider this. What profession contributes the most leaders to our society? People in law, politics and government, business, science, and religious ministry would probably top most respondents' lists, as these are typically the areas in which "leaders" tend to be most visible. But what, really, is leadership all about? At its core, leadership is about shaping the future, and no group of professionals has more power to do that than teachers. Helen Caldicott, author and peace activist, once said, "Teachers, I believe, are the most responsible and important members of society because their professional efforts affect the fate of the earth." By its very nature, teaching is a profession that fosters—and demands—leadership.

Few would question the way in which teachers are leaders for students: establishing expectations for learning, providing students with essential knowledge and skills, and serving as role models. Teachers also provide leadership in their interaction with parents, administrators, policy makers, and in the community at large. All of us in the profession share this responsibility and must continue to take on leadership roles if we are to preserve and advance the quality of education in our society.

I recently had the good fortune of making the acquaintance of a former Worthington teacher whose professional leadership is legendary. Charles G. Rousculp taught English and history from 1949 until 1985 and left a legacy that influences many of us to this day. By all accounts, Charlie was an exemplary classroom instructor. He demanded and received the best from his students. Thousands of his former charges are now better writers, speakers, and thinkers because they had Mr. Rousculp as their leader on their educational journey. His leadership didn't stop at the classroom door, though. In 1951, he, Frank Lowery, and Harold Bischoff were among the founding members of the Worthington Education Association, and he twice served as president of our organization. In the latter half of his career, Charlie served as coordinator of English programs for the district while continuing to teach. His classic 1969 memoir, *Chalk Dust on My Shoulder*, inspired others to enter the profession. He wrote a regular "Chalk Talk" column in the Worthington News and served as emcee for countless district and community functions. By the time of his retirement seventeen years ago, his advocacy for public education, the teaching profession, and our children had truly affected more lives than any lawmaker could hope to influence.

Every one of us who teaches today is a leader. We may not be as prominent as Charlie Rousculp, but the potential of our influence is just as great. Just as Mr. Rousculp expanded the notion of what it means to be a professional beyond the classroom walls, it is up to us to be leaders in our community. That is why we are actively engaged in public policy making, from the writing of science curriculum standards to advocacy for a meaningful system of student assessment and accountability that goes beyond standardized testing.

One of the most important public policy challenges we face is the need to ensure that there is a fully licensed, qualified teacher in every classroom. The evidence from research is

clear that quality teaching has as much or more influence on student success than any other factor, yet, according to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, "In recent years, more than 50,000 people who lack the training for their jobs have entered the teaching profession annually on emergency or substandard licenses." Establishing and maintaining high quality professional standards demands our leadership.

Ivan Welton Fitzwater, a teacher, wrote, "The future of the world is in my classroom today, a future with the potential for good or bad . . . Several future presidents are learning from me today; so are the great writers of the next decades, and so are all the so-called ordinary people who will make the decisions in a democracy. I must never forget these same young people could be the thieves and murderers of the future. Only a teacher? Thank God I have a calling to the greatest profession of all! I must be vigilant every day, lest I lose one fragile opportunity to improve tomorrow." He understood the essence of the leadership role of the teacher.

The week of May 5 through May 11 has been designated "Teacher Appreciation Week" by the National PTA and "Staff Appreciation Week" by the Worthington Board of Education. Please take a moment to thank a teacher for bringing out the best in America's students. And if you are contemplating a leadership role for yourself in the future, consider becoming a teacher.

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