

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Jonathan Juravich, Teacher-In-Residence - Ohio Department of Education
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Chairman Blessing, Vice-Chair Jones, Ranking-member Robinson, and members of the House Committee on Primary and Secondary Education, my name is Jonathan Juravich. I am an elementary art educator with Olentangy Local Schools in Powell, Ohio and the 2018 Ohio Teacher of the Year. Currently I am piloting a role at the Ohio Department of Education as the Ohio Teacher in Residence. This position transforms the Ohio Teacher of the year program from a one year experience into a two-year commitment. The first year is one of recognition followed by a year of service to the state. I have taken a sabbatical from my classroom to support other teachers in the field.

As the Teacher-in-Residence, my work focuses on Teacher Voice, Teacher Leadership, and Teacher Recognition.

During this year I have toured the state, meeting with teachers, administrators, and students learning about their schools, their aspirations, and the importance of community. Other times, I offer professional development for teachers or have led whole school student assemblies. I then bring information and stories from my visits to the Ohio Department of Education to provide context for decision making. There have been times when I will be in a meeting and a topic will spark a connection about some inspiring work happening in a classroom in say Troy or Westerville.

I want to share with you a few brief stories about how this work has come alive for me this year. About the educators that have inspired me, and how teachers impact our state beyond their work in the classroom. I and the Ohio Department of Education, believe Ohio's teachers should have a big presence in state education policy.

Teacher Voice

The State Board of Education and Superintendent DeMaria have shifted the department's work from compliance to support. This intentional change offers a new opportunity for the department to engage with and learn from teachers. That's where I come into the picture.

Not only do I share my personal perspective with departmental leaders, I also share the experiences of the teachers and administrators that I meet. I have the honor of listening to and then echoing their voices. I think two stories illustrate this best.

As an elementary art teacher and an artist in my own right, I used my teacher voice visually in the creation of two works that were featured in the Riffe Gallery during an exhibit of Art Educators as Artists. This exhibition was filled with artist educators that have found their voice to share about communities, explorations in nature, and the students that influenced them. Such as Jeanne Eferpe of Amherst who exhibited a beautiful pencil study of one of her junior high students. The act of drawing portraits of her students is a way to build a connection with those in her classroom, a way to get to know them and share their stories with the broader community.

I have seen teachers share their perspectives to guide decisions that affect their students and schools. Educators like Mikela Thomas at Cheshire Elementary in Lewis Center who speaks with other teachers in discussions about equity and our implicit bias in the classroom. Or, elementary educator Catherine Duplisea of Cleveland Metropolitan Schools who speaks about the importance of tech integration to meet the forward-thinking needs of Ohio's students. Catherine worked to engage kindergarteners to explore coding with simple robots. These teachers challenge our preconceived ideas of bias and technology, and they have influenced the decisions of policy makers and educators throughout the state.

I am so honored to get to amplify the voices of my friends and colleagues to you and your colleagues.

Teacher Leadership

Inevitably when you use your voice you are entering into the world of leadership. There are exceptional teacher leaders in our state, that are leading from the classroom to positively impact education. I have been able to serve on the Ohio Teacher Leader Advisory Council this year alongside many great teacher leaders who are organizing a Teacher Leadership Summit for June 3rd. During this time, educators will come from across the state to share, grow, and celebrate the importance of teacher leadership in our schools.

One such educator, Chris Basich of Riverside Local Schools, who teaches High School psychology and works as the College and Career Readiness Coordinator for the district. In his work he builds up other teachers to feel district pride by championing a system-wide character education program. He encourages his colleagues to see the limitless potential in their students' futures through college and career readiness assessments and supports. This is a remarkable teacher that lives teacher leadership and has the trust and support of his fellow teachers.

Mona Al-Hayani, is our 2019 Ohio Teacher of the Year, a social studies teacher with Toledo Public Schools. Mona works to advocate for human trafficking awareness and build discussions for students and teachers around prevention strategies. She is a leader in this field, making a direct powerful impact on our communities and for the safety of our students. I am in awe of her leadership in our state.

Identifying local teacher leaders and connecting them with policy leaders helps scale and promote solutions to common problems in schools.

Teacher Recognition.

Mona and I both have had the incredible fortune of being recognized in a very public way for our work. But there are numerous educators throughout our state that should be seen and recognized for the work they do.

During my time at the department I helped create an additional state-wide recognition program called the TORCH Recognition. This acronym stands for Teachers of Ohio Representing Character and Heart. Nominations came in from across the state from students, administrators, parents, community members, and fellow teachers. From these nominees, five exceptional educators have been selected that exemplify dedication to equity and their communities. So far one teacher has been recognized. Alicia Spears, is a teacher at the STEM+M Early College High School in South Point and was recognized for her work with the Appalachian Community. She encourages her students to strive for greatness and then give back to their community, hoping they will stay to help improve the local economy and quality of life.

The remaining four inspiring honorees will be recognized in the coming weeks.

But Teacher Recognition is not always about grandiose gestures, it is also about the small things. During the month of February, I surprised schools across the state with a Build your own Hot Chocolate Bar, as a way of saying thanks. It gave me the opportunity to talk with teachers over a warm beverage, about what makes their school unique and undeniably important to the community. I learned so much about parts of the state I knew very little about, and sometimes was surprised in my own backyard.

I live within Columbus City Schools, where my daughter is a student. But it was when I went to the Columbus City School Colerain Elementary and spent time in the classroom of Chris Williams that I learned about the special things that happen at this school. Chris teaches second grade students with special needs, and does so with grace, humor, and love. About half of the school's students have mobility issues or have been identified as being "medically fragile." I watched as Chris welcomed each student into the classroom that morning and

talked with them about the snow day they had just experienced, the activities they enjoyed, and their feelings about missing a day of school. Through cue cards, gestures, American Sign Language, and via alternative communication devices, each student and their experiences were seen and valued by their teacher. I toured the school observing this practice of inclusion and compassion in classroom after classroom. The accomplishments and heart of the teachers in this school are inspiring and should be recognized. Even if that means simply talking about them everywhere I go.

Teacher Appreciation Week is coming, May 6th-10th. And there are small ways we can show our gratitude to Ohio's educators. Over the course of this year I have been handwriting thank you notes to teachers across the state that will all be delivered next week. An unexpected handwritten note of encouragement can mean so much to an educator in the field.

Conclusion

As I prepare to step back into my elementary art room next year, I am most thrilled about the work of the next Teacher-in-Residence, now to be known as the Ohio Teacher Fellowship. Each new Ohio Teacher of the Year will have their own unique spin on engaging educators to use their teacher voice, to advance leadership, and to recognize the goodness in one another.

Too often, we unintentionally confine a teacher's impact to the students that have been through their classrooms. Their voice on public policy is critical. They lead in their buildings, communities, and on issues. They should be recognized, in big and small ways, for their passion, expertise, and commitments. I feel so honored to have helped in my way, with each of these efforts.

Thank you.