

Foreword

By David McCullagh
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In my many years as a school board member and as a parent, I have learned that there are few things that arouse more passion, interest, concern and sometimes fury than the education of our children. From the exciting and nerve-wracking first day of preschool or kindergarten through high school graduation day, our children are entrusted to schools for about seven hours a day to receive a large share of their education and socialization. We have a name for those who are brave (and some might say foolish) enough to take on this awesome responsibility—we call them teachers.

The teaching profession is one of life's great paradoxes.

The Teacher Chronicles

It is at the same time one of the most familiar jobs there is and also perhaps one of the most misunderstood. Most adults have attended more than a dozen years of school and perhaps have relived the experience many times over through their children. The erroneous notion that many people possess is that they have seen hundreds of teachers in action over the course of their lives, so there could not be anything about the teaching profession that they do not know. The truth, it turns out, is not that simple, and this book eloquently clears up many of those misconceptions.

One of the many things that *The Teacher Chronicles* does exceptionally well is to challenge the notion of how much we really know about the people who educate our children. The book does this by offering insights into how teaching and education have evolved over the years. To fully describe how education has changed since most parents attended school as students would be the subject of a rather lengthy book in its own right. One of the most important myths that this book debunks is the notion that teaching is a nine-to-three job, with summers off. Teachers face new demands on many fronts that impact the amount of time required to fulfill their responsibilities. The immediacy of today's forms of communication, such as e-mail, voice mail and cell phones, raises the bar in terms of expectations of teacher-parent communication and can add hours to the workday. Other demands that impact a teacher's day and summer schedule include teaching to new, high-stakes testing requirements

brought about through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation; teaching to the diverse learning styles of special needs students that are increasingly brought into mainstream classrooms through inclusion and collaborative learning initiatives; fulfilling professional development requirements that often must be done in the summer months due to time constraints during the school year; the list is endless.

It is the stories, told by the teachers from their point of view, that give this book its voice and power. The author has done her homework and has interviewed more than 50 teachers from all over the country, across all grades and disciplines, to give the reader a true sense of what the job of teaching is like. She does not get in the way of the stories at all and only interjects occasionally with timely data and information to give the reader a deeper understanding of the subject.

So why should someone read *The Teacher Chronicles*? The stories about today's students and parents are at the very least fascinating and at the most shocking. Stories about students intentionally getting a teacher they do not like in trouble are disturbing yet compelling reading. The stories about the lengths some parents will go to to help their children with grades, socialization and the all-important college acceptance raise concerns about how our society has perverted the meaning of a good education. One thing that no one will challenge after reading the book is that students and parents are much savvier about their rights than previous generations, and they are not afraid to bully teachers to get their way. This

The Teacher Chronicles

phenomenon takes its toll on many teachers and is a big reason many potentially great instructors decide to leave the profession for less demanding jobs.

The book, however, does not center on titillating stories that show the education system at its worst. Rather, the bulk of the stories that the teachers relate provide great insights into what it takes to be a successful teacher in light of today's *new* challenges (no one denies that challenges in the profession have always existed). *The Teacher Chronicles* at its heart reveals the passion, the caring, and the commitment that all great teachers need to have in common to be successful at their jobs. The theme and common thread that unites most of the stories in the book is that the ability to reach those students who are at risk and inspire them to learn and achieve is what makes teaching such a rewarding profession. Most teachers are more than willing to put up with the challenges of their profession to make a difference in the lives of children.

So who would benefit from reading *The Teacher Chronicles*? The most obvious audience is teachers. By reading this book, new teachers will receive a roadmap for success and will hopefully be able to avoid the common pitfalls that bedevil many inexperienced teachers. Experienced teachers will perhaps relate best to the “war stories” about their profession, and the book will help them connect with why they chose to be teachers in the first place. Parents who read *The Teacher Chronicles* will gain a better understanding of their child's

teacher, as well as the parent's role in the education process. The book points out that "parental involvement in a child's education is a major factor in determining academic success" (page 74). A successful relationship among all parties is the classic "three-legged stool," where students, teachers and parents understand the role each plays in the process, and respect and value the contributions of the others involved. Another important group that would benefit from reading this book is taxpayers. Our public schools have the only governmental budgets that citizens have the power to say "yes" or "no" to each year. Many citizens vent their frustrations with high taxes in general by voting "no" to school budgets. This book will show taxpayers how the education system has evolved to meet the needs of diverse learners and how hard teachers work to make a difference in the lives of our children. Reading *The Teacher Chronicles* will help our citizens make more informed decisions when they go to the polls to vote on their school budgets each year.

Teachers help provide students with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to be successful in whatever fields they decide to pursue. Really great teachers inspire our children to want to learn more, to spend the rest of their lives satisfying their own sense of curiosity and pursuing knowledge for its own sake. *The Teacher Chronicles* tells the story of these remarkable people, and tells it in their own words. We all owe it to them to sit back and listen. Who knows, we may learn something.