

## A Special Reflection on National Teacher Appreciation Week

Dear Franklin Families,

In recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week, I have been reflecting on the indescribable impact that our teachers, Behavior Therapists, Aides, counselors and our other auxiliary education professionals have on the lives of our children. After reading former Governor Deval Patrick's autobiography *A Reason to Believe* and after thinking about the impact that teachers have had on my own life, I have become convinced that education is the most consequential profession in a country. In addition to their regular responsibilities of teaching their students Reading, Math, Science, Computers, music, arts, physical education – many teachers and other staff members have taken the roles of surrogate mothers, male role models and objects of hope. Former Governor Deval Patrick alluded to this fact eloquently when he explained that, as a child growing up in the segregated south side of Chicago and raised by a single mother with an 11<sup>th</sup> grade education: “My grandparents and my mother were physically close, but emotionally distant...their affection was circumscribed and conditional, preoccupied as they were by their own struggles and demons...What I craved most, consistent love and encouragement I got from teachers...” In my experience, this is not unlike the reality faced by some of our own students at Franklin. Some of them come from very difficult economic, social and family circumstances. Our school represents for some of these students a safe harbor, a refuge and a respite.

Former Governor Patrick described how a twenty-two-year-old teacher from an all-black middle school in the segregated south side of Chicago would impact his future and ultimately the state of Massachusetts. Ms. Darla Wiesenberg was an ELA and Social studies teacher who asked to be placed in the all black inner city middle school in the south side of Chicago even though she was aware that one of the initiation rites into the rival black gangs, the Blackstone Panthers and the Disciples, was “to assault the young well intentioned white teachers” at the DuSable Middle and High Schools. Ms. Wiesenberg chose that assignment, despite its inherent dangers, because she herself was inspired and influenced by her 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, who happened to be African American. Ms. Wiesenberg was driven by a utopian idealism that drove her to invest the most youthful period of her life into the lives of inner city youths whom many others have cast off as hopeless. Ms. Wiesenberg connected Deval Patrick to the organization “A Better Chance” and helped him to apply for a full scholarship to Milton Academy, a private college preparatory school near Boston. A teacher at the Milton Academy took Mr. Patrick under his wing, invited him into his home and made it possible for him to complete the four years he spent at Milton Academy. This act of kindness ultimately led to his admission to Harvard College and later to Harvard Law School, which led to a stellar legal career and to his tenure as a Governor of Massachusetts. I can attest that this is the kind of impact that our teachers and other staff members are having at Franklin. One example is the partnership that one of our Behavior Therapists has initiated with Brandeis University to begin a mentoring program at our school for our students in the METCO program.

I am both humbled and grateful for the opportunity to lead a group of education professionals who embrace similar ideals as Ms. Wiesenberg's. I am gratified that through all the changes that our school has undergone this year, their commitment to the children we serve has been unwavering. I am encouraged by their adaptability, their follow through and positive responses to feedback. Their hard work, flexibility, dedication and commitment are paying off. I am also grateful for the support we

have received from the PTO and our families. You, the families of our students, have been a source of encouragement to our staff. Thank you! We look forward to continuing our journey with you in this adventure to impact the lives of our children. We know there are latent US Presidents, Doctors, Inventors, Governors, business moguls and cultural icons in our midst waiting to be awakened and to be inspired by teachers who have embraced selfless idealism and an unfaltering belief in the promises of human potential.

I am asking you families to work with your children to show their appreciation to their teachers, behavior therapists, aides, custodians, office staff and special education professionals, through cards, notes and other creative means. Let's teach our children that education is important and those who educate them deserve to be honored.

With a grateful heart,  
Joel