



# High School Teacher Experiences Amazing Potential in Teenagers Every Day

By: *Kimi Romey, OSSA 2015-2016 Teacher of the Year*

“No, I’m sorry . . .”

One of the most frustrating things about being a teacher is when people apologize to me for what I do. Let me explain: when I meet someone for the first time, I am often asked what I do for a living, as is customary per new acquaintance etiquette. However, when I tell them that I am a teacher, very frequently I get the response, “I’m sorry” for assuming the unlucky role of a high school English teacher. Now, I know that education is a highly prized American right and that good teachers are highly valued, so I am always taken aback by the apologetic response to my admission of profession, one for which I have a deep affection.

After justifying my choice of career, I often ponder about the response that I get, but then I realize that the impressions that many people have of high school students is cemented by the media. Upon doing the most basic of Google searches it is easy to see that the media feeds us the negative stories of teenagers.

The top stories that resulted from my search dealt with teen pregnancy, inappropriate use of social media by teens, teens killed in crashes due to reckless driving, substance abuse by teens, low test scores and minimal academic success. It is no wonder outsiders think that teaching in a high school is akin to managing a prison.

This is sad. Truly. Occasionally, we hear stories of the kids who excel in music, art, sports and academics, which momentarily revives the hopes of Americans in the potential of our youth, but when they drive through town and see a kid on a skateboard, do they stop to think about that kid’s SAT scores? Probably not. The myths surrounding teens make it hard to convince anyone that the skateboarder could be putting in volunteer hours in preparation for heading to an Ivy League college.

For those of us who have the opportunity to work in schools, especially those within a small district, we actually get a chance to get to know these teenagers. Where I teach in Amity, as in many small schools, we have

an informal “all eyes on deck” policy, which means that we make sure that someone on staff has eyes on every student within our school. It is our goal to make sure that every student has a member of our staff that he/she can go to with questions, concerns, or . . . whatever. Fortunately, this happens so naturally that our policy remains informal. It is easy to spot the staff members that each student connects with by the classrooms that get their attention before and after school and during lunch.

This has allowed us to not only find the skateboarders bound for Stanford, but the musicians who are cutting demos, the burgeoning broadcaster who becomes our sports announcer, the budding filmmakers, the students devoted to youth groups, as well as the kids who like comic books and the one writing a screenplay

for a TV show. We can chat, with a history, about the kids’ summer activities and upcoming events. We can also maintain connections with the students whose circumstances are less fortunate, those whose home lives aren’t as

stable and who are more concerned about their next meal than the assignments due tomorrow. Are we free of the negative elements that tend to foster the general stereotypes of teens? Of course not, but we can also identify them early and do whatever possible to ease their situation. Sometime, oftentimes, it is those struggling kids who linger in our hearts the longest.

It is unfortunate that everyone can’t, at some point, spend time in a small high school. They’d find a wealth of creativity, humor, intelligence, talent and potential that would boost their confidence in the promise of the future generations. So, rather than get defensive when people apologize for my profession, I’ve become apologetic right back, because I get the opportunity to really know, develop relationships with, and learn from, hundreds of the coolest, smartest, cleverest human beings that I’ll ever meet. So, no, I’m the one who is sorry, because I’m the lucky one.

---

***The myths surrounding teens make it hard to convince anyone that the skateboarder could be putting in volunteer hours in preparation for heading to an Ivy League college.***

---