



Want to Believe

Educators can encourage students and faculty to aim higher

By Kyle Rhoads

"Kyle, you will never last a semester in college!" my chemistry teacher, Doc Brown, yelled out in class during my junior year of high school. The class laughed as I slumped into my chair. At the time, I wasn't planning to graduate, and Doc made it clear that my future was not bright.

Later that year, one of the guidance counselors, Mr. Frank Miller, poked his head out of his office and asked me to come in. He got right to the point: "What do you plan to do after high school?" he said. "I'm not even sure I am coming back next year," I said. I was "just fine" with cooking

full time at the restaurant where I worked after school, I added.

"Kyle, what is it going to take to get you to graduate?" he asked. He was determined to see that happen, and he helped me develop a personalized learning plan long before education had coined such a phrase. I cooked at the restaurant every morning during my senior year, while completing the two classes I needed to graduate and taking calculus at the community college in the evening.

This turned out to be a theme in my career. I graduated from high

school because Mr. Miller believed in me. I attended college because someone believed in me. I taught young learners because someone believed in me. I became a principal because someone believed in me. The common thread among the people who motivated me to believe in myself? They are all educators.

Belief in Education

The summer after I graduated, my best friend's mother, Marge, a special education teacher, found me watching television on her couch one afternoon. She asked about my plans

for the fall and reminded me that most of my friends were going off to college. I again said that I planned to work full time at the restaurant. She asked me why college wasn't an option. My excuse was that I had no time because I worked the breakfast and lunch shift every day.

She told me how she had completed her degree at night as a mom with three children and encouraged me to give college a try. After enrolling in a couple of night classes, I transferred to a state university and graduated cum laude in three years with a bachelor's degree in business.

I graduated into a recession, and jobs were scarce. I got a temporary job as a substitute teacher, working one-on-one with a student. During that time, teachers came up to me and said things like, "You are really good with kids. You should get a teaching certificate." They wrote a letter to the principal endorsing my abilities, and he asked me to return the following year full time.

After my second year there, I got my certification and was offered a kindergarten teaching position at another school. I sensed that the principal, Cherie White, thought she was taking a risk by hiring a male kindergarten teacher, but she changed the course of my career.

After several years, I felt as though I was in a rut, and I visited Cherie's office to chat. I explained how I felt a moral imperative to reach students better and have a broader impact. After listening to my complaints, she responded, "Kyle, you need to become a principal!"

The notion had never crossed my mind. My initial shock dissipated as Cherie, a respected educational leader, explained why my actions, skills, and knowledge would befit a principal. I earned a master's degree in administration and landed an elementary school principal position. Cherie mentored me for several years, providing wisdom and encouragement that has made me the effective principal I am today.

Share Your Belief

As principals, we face many challenges: government mandates, political uncertainty, Common Core demands, high-stakes testing, tight budgets, and a heightened focus on teacher and principal evaluations. But we still have an amazing and powerful influence over students and teachers alike. We can use our words to discourage ("No, you can't!") or encourage ("I believe in you!"), and my hope is that this story inspires you to believe in someone who needs you. I thank goodness for educators such as Frank and Cherie, who believed in me and helped me improve my position in life.

Think back on your challenges and successes: Who believed in you so you could accomplish something great? And who are the students you can influence today through your belief in them? Tell them that they matter, listen to them, help them set and reach a goal, connect them with a peer or mentor, and invite them to lunch. They need to know they matter and can make a difference beyond today.

No test score or educational reform is more important than showing people that you care and believe in them. Tell them! 📌

Kyle Rhoads is principal of Windham Primary School in Windham, Maine.

We can use our words to discourage or encourage, and my hope is that this story inspires you to believe in someone who needs you.

Statement of Ownership

Principal (ISSN 0271-6062) (Act of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39 United States Code.) Date of filing: September 13, 2018. Frequency of issues, 5 issues per year. Annual subscription price \$235 with membership. Publication and general business offices, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483. Editor-in-Chief, Kaylen Tucker. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, none. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of the National Association of Elementary School Principals and its exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. During the preceding 12 months, the average number of copies printed for each issue was 18,593; the average number of copies distributed, 18,178. The figures for September/October 2018: 18,510 copies printed; 17,734 total paid circulation; 400 copies for free distribution; total number of copies distributed, 18,134.



National Association of
Elementary School
Principals