

Chicken Soup

for

Friendswood ISD

Teachers, throughout their career, strive to become “Great.” Regardless of their content area or the age of the student they work with they try hard to be caring, enthusiastic, warm, and accessible. They know they must respect the student to get respect in return. They set high expectations, create a sense of community in their classrooms, and model a love of learning. And they attempt to do all of this day in and day out because they love their students and know that in their classrooms, they are planting and nurturing seeds for a future crop – one they rarely get to see come to harvest.

It can feel like a thankless job sometimes. We spend a lot of time pouring ourselves into our classes, hoping we are making a difference but never really knowing. We question our scope and often never really know for certain we have made an impact.

Eighteen years ago, during my internship, my mentor teacher mentioned this aspect of the job. She told me to treasure the small gestures students make because they are critical to savor. So, over the course of my career I’ve collected these small acknowledgements, a post-it note left on my desk, or a thank you card at the end of the year, or an email from a student and I file them in my desk to reference back to on the hard days. The days where I feel like I am failing, or the days I question what I’m doing... the days I lose my “Why.” These small items restore my hope that I am, in fact, making a difference and I must remind myself that I won’t always see the fruit of my labor, but the work is still worth it.

And every once in a while, we get a big gesture that fills us to the brim and can keep us going for years. This last summer, after what was, very clearly, one of the hardest years I’ve ever faced as an educator, I was contacted by two students who had graduated years before. They had met in my AP Language class and started dating. They continued their relationship through college and were about to start their careers and they were getting married. I felt so honored that they were reaching out to let me know. But it got even better! They wanted to know if I would officiate their wedding?!?! Talk about an impact! I’ve never felt so flattered and privileged.

It was in that moment that I was assured that I am making a difference. All the work on creating a culture and safe environment, all the caring, all the late night planning, and all the questioning was, in that moment, fully worth it.

We’ve all seen the quote by Henry B. Adams: “A teacher effects eternity; s/he can never tell where her influence stops.” But every once in a while, if we are lucky, we will get to see a glimpse of this influence. It is these glimpses I treasure most in my career.

-Monika Whitsett, FHS English Teacher