

Chicken Soup

for

Friendswood ISD

As summer approaches and the school year comes to an end, this is always the time I ask myself, “Did I make a difference this year?” As most know, teaching is not always a profession where you immediately reap the benefits so answering this question can sometimes be difficult or may not have an answer until years down the road.

My first year teaching, I had a coworker suggest keeping a “Happy Folder” in my desk for those days that are challenging or times when I question if teaching is the right profession. Throughout the year I’ll place notes that the students write to me, pictures they draw and origami they create into the folder. I even received something in my box this year from a previous student. These little gestures are highlights of my day and are quick answers to my question - “Did I make a difference this year?”

However, the “Happy Folder” only covers a small portion of kids in the class. There are always those students whom I feel like my only communication with is to discipline them, or the quiet ones who only talk if they truly have to. These are the students that I leave the year wondering the most about. Until it’s the last day of school and they give me a hug or it’s the next school year and they come to visit just to say hi, catch me up on their life, or invite me to their game. Those intangible moments also answer my question - “Did I make a difference this year?”.

Then there are the students that I know had to overcome higher hurdles who I just want to embrace, help, and keep in my class because it took the whole year to get them to where they are now and I don’t want them to lose it. These are the students I worry about the most. At the end of the year, I always try to write each of my students a little note of encouragement for 7th grade in hopes that those, specifically, will recognize their worth - never knowing if they actually read them, keep them, or just throw them away. It’s when a parent emails the next year and thanks you for the note that their child keeps on their desk and still reads when they are having a bad day, do I realize - the notes are worth it. I’m still working on the life of those kids who may have moved on from my classroom.

With the last day approaching and the question of “Did I make a difference this year?” coming to mind, remember it’s not just about the grades or academics, it’s the items you would place in a “Happy Folder”, the hugs that are cherished, and knowing that it might not be until the next year (or years down the road) that you realize that yes, you made a difference! We all make a difference.

-Shelbie Darilek, FJH Math Teacher & Cheer Coach