

## **Our City - Why I Teach Where I Teach**

As a State Teacher of the Year I was asked not long ago by the Education Trust and John King, the former Secretary of Education under President Obama, to write a post for their blog called, "Why I Teach Where I Teach."

We, you and me, are each a sum of our life experiences. Opportunities chosen and those passed up. Chances taken, or not. Risks accepted. Fears overcome. And, passion found. Beyond my family, my passion is kids. Kids specifically who may not think they have a voice or a choice in their future. Kids who are marginalized and filled with self-doubt. Kids who bury and hide their dreams for they see no way to make those dreams a reality. Kids who come to school every day cold, hungry, scared and at best uncertain. Kids who have the ability to do and be anything they dream, but deep inside lack self-confidence, hope and belief.

Upon graduation from the University of Idaho in 1984 I had several job offers from well-established Agricultural Education programs with multiple teacher departments in thriving communities but I chose Raft River High School, a very small, very rural program that was in a total state of decline. Six years later after many State and regional recognitions for my students and me I was asked to start a new program in the community I call home. My goal was to build from scratch a model of excellence.

Our School District demographic today has 40% of its students living in poverty, 70% are socio-economically disadvantaged, 50% are English second language learners and a bit over 10% are Native American. Many students lack basic life skills, English language proficiency and literacy, role models, and even the means to basic necessities. More than would be expected live in fear that they and/or their parents will be shipped like cattle back to where they came from.

Yet, as grim as that sounds there exists in American Falls a vast silver lining due to the unparalleled support of the farmers and businesses within the community. No student in this program has to worry about the means or availability of opportunities to build a better life. Our combined promise to each student is that the opportunity to build a fulfilling and successful future is limited only by his or her own efforts. It is that equity to opportunities for all students and their commitment to work harder that has caused them to be recognized as a top 10 National Model of Excellence and Premier FFA Chapter by the National FFA Organization for the past two years.

This April seven English second language learners won the State FFA Ag Issues event; they will be the first all Hispanic team to represent any State in this event at the National competition in October. Earlier this month the demographically diverse four member

Agricultural Communications team won their State event and earned the right to compete at the National level as well.

While the wins are welcome and the National recognition appreciated I teach where I teach because the kids who were once marginalized and filled with self-doubt, who buried and hid their dreams and who still on occasion come to school cold, hungry, scared and uncertain know that because they live and go to school in American Falls, their dreams and the promise of a better future is indeed possible.

Each of us is a sum of our life experiences. Opportunities chosen and those passed up. Chances taken, or not. Risks accepted. Fears overcome. And, passion found. Thirty years ago I found my passion in American Falls. I am proud to call it home. It is without doubt the very best place to live and teach.

Until next week...