

# Public School Proud | Dear Public Schools, Here's Why I Love You

Dear Public Schools,

I love you.

I love you for who you are. Malala Yousafzai said, "One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world."

You are a place where people who look different and think different and act different and believe different can come together every day to be together and learn together and learn to be together.

Thank you.

I love you for what you do. Albert Einstein said, "If you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

You do not judge the fish by its ability to climb a tree. You teach the fish to be all it can be and do all it can do in the water, you teach the tree climber to be all it can be and do all it can do in the trees, and you help them grow in their ability to make the world a better place for all creatures big and small.

Thank you.

I love you because you gave me Lenyel.

He and his mamá fled to the mainland of the United States from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria destroyed their home and devastated their lives in summer 2017.

When he walked through the door of my classroom and into my life this year, I quickly learned that strong winds, hard rains and churning waters were still swirling around inside of him.

I tried to reach him, to board myself up against the wind, rain and flood until the storm passed and I could teach him the writing, reading, science and life skills that can help him become all he can be in and for the world.

But every day, he would come into the classroom with eyes afire with anger or quenched from depression and I did not know what to do.

One day, my co-teacher asked, "Could we do a reader's theater about the Declaration of Independence?"

I answered, "Of course!"

Lenyel got a part in the play.

He loved it! He spoke out with so much enthusiasm and animation; his classmates cheered for him. He raised his hands and head to the sky and shouted, "I love this school!"

Thank you for giving him to me.

I love you because you gave me Naomi. She and her family fled to the United States from violence and poverty in Honduras.

When she walked through the door of my classroom and into my life (after the school year had begun), she could not speak a word of English or understand a thing I said.

Every morning, she and my four other Spanish speakers read poems with me from a bilingual book of poems about a boy who comes to the United States from Mexico.

They practiced their English and I practiced my Spanish, and we learned to communicate with each other just fine.

One day, the whole class and I brought our lunches to the classroom to watch a story on our Promethean Board while we ate.

I stood behind my desk with my tray in my hand and noticed that my chair was across the room where I had left it after our morning read-aloud.

“Oh well,” I smiled and sighed to myself. “I’ll just stand and eat. A teacher’s life on teacher’s feet is the teaching life for me.”

Before I could raise my fork from my tray to my mouth, I felt a tug on my side. I looked down.

There was Naomi with her chair, making a sweeping motion with her hand and smiling a kind smile with her eyes to show me she wanted to give me her chair to sit down in and rest.

Thank you for giving her to me.

I love you because you gave me Jayden. He came to our school at the end of last year – the sixth school he had attended in the past two years.

His schoolwork and his behavior reflected the chaos of his life, but we provided order to his days.

We talked and taught and taught and talked with him about doing the best work he could do and being the best person he could be, and he started heading in the right direction.

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I have a picture of him running along the bases of Fluor Field, the baseball field of our minor league team here in Greenville, South Carolina, with his head up, a giant smile on his face, and the words “Live Fearlessly” on the fence behind him. It reminds me that he is headed in the right direction.

I was helping him create a graphic organizer in his writing notebook. We drew a giant heart on a page. “Write some things you love around the outline of the heart,” I said. “So you can always remember things you can write about.”

The first words he wrote were “Berea Elementary School” and “my 4th grade teachers.”

Thank you for giving him to me.

Where else could I be with immigrant kids and African-American kids if not in your classrooms?

Where else could I do my part in changing the life of a child, in changing the life of the world, if not in your classrooms?

Where else could my own heart grow bigger and my own mind grow broader if not in your classrooms?

Thank you. I love you. So much.

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Your friend and fellow teacher,

Trevor Barton

*Editor's note: This article is part of a series for Public Schools Week (March 25-29). Additional resources are available [here](#). The previous articles in the series are:*

*[Public School Proud | 5 Ways They Protect Religious Liberty for All](#) by Jennifer Hawks*

*[Public School Proud | Half-Full Ministry to Your Schools](#) by Suzii Paynter*