

# Keeping Kids First: Our Legacy for the Future



*Renée Rongen*

I have been thinking a lot lately about children—my children and the children we see in society. My oldest just graduated from high school and is quickly on his way to the halls of college academia. I am so proud of him and look so forward to what his future holds.

As I look back on his life and his experience with the education community, I am so grateful for teachers who spent the extra five minutes teaching him about life—along with reading, writing and mathematics. I am so thankful for his school administrators who created a balanced and vibrant environment for his learning. I am

honored to know that the school board and various administrators for the school system in our area placed an incredibly high value on his holistic educational experience. I am so thankful for a team of people who worked collectively with me to get him over the educational “finish line.” Above all though, I am thankful for each one of these people who have played a role in his education because they all were focused on the same thing: creating a learning experience that allowed him to grow and flourish as a well-rounded young man with a great future ahead of him. Each one of these people has

understood one key fact: Our children are our legacy for the future; they are our hope and our certainty that things will be better in the future.

## Back to the Basics

In the midst of political changes and funding problems, mandatory testing and performance-based evaluations, and the ongoing challenges that each of you face on a daily basis, I want to challenge you to “get back to the basics.” Getting back to the basics is ultimately allowing your work to be driven by the simple statement I made in the previous paragraph: Our children are our legacy for the future! When you allow your work to be driven by this simple statement, you realize why you got involved with children in the first place!

At some point in your career you decided that it was profoundly meaningful to make a difference in the lives of children because doing so would make the world a better place. I wonder, though, if over time you have become discouraged by the current state of affairs in education today. Are you discouraged by the fact that school boards, superintendents, administrators, teachers, and staff do not hold the same authority in the lives of children that was once held? Do you constantly feel like you have to do more with less and there is no end to the problems on the horizon? Do you feel like so many people are involved in the educational system and communications are breaking down more frequently and becoming more difficult? Have you thought about the legislative issues that seem to be driving your work in directions you would not have chosen? With all of this on your mind, how in the world can I suggest that you “get back to the basics?” Am I crazy?

## Tips to Build Your Legacy for the Future

Some folks would say I am crazy, others would say that I have a salient ability to boil concepts down and invite people to a more simple way of thinking. So here goes my attempt to encourage you to get back to the basics and remember that our children are our legacy for the future!

**1.** In your daily interactions with fellow board members, administrators, staff people, teachers, parents, community members, take five minutes more to really hear! We have lost the ability to really listen to each other because we are mired in our own perceptions. Margaret Wheatley, noted social consultant and thought leader, challenges us to turn to one another and have simple conversations that restore hope in the future. I agree with Wheatley about the power of conversations and the restorative nature of truly listening to each other! When we listen, we find commonality with others which allows us to drive toward a legacy of hope! Furthermore, if you have the privilege of working directly with our children, realize that five extra minutes to hear the young person well might just change his life!



**2.** As you approach your work, I want to encourage you to look at all the significant gifts each person brings to the table. Each one of us thinks differently, sees the world through different lenses, and offers insights and different perspectives. Regardless of your position and responsibilities, if you take a step back to honor the unique gifts of others, the future might just change!

**3.** I want to invite you to join together to drive our children throughout society to get out of their comfort zones! Let’s look for ways to create small moments of success for each and every student because success breeds future success! Let’s look for every way to praise kids and to praise each other for the unique gifts we all possess. Let’s honor each person in the “education” mix as vital to the overall success of our legacy!

**4.** Finally, I want to challenge you to think about how we can collectively “color outside of the lines.” We all know the education systems in America are in the process of being redefined! So if we are all investing in the legacy of our future—our children—we might need to draw the lines differently.

## One person can make a difference

I was recently thinking about a person who made the boldest difference in my educational experience. It was Ms. Tykeson, my first grade teacher, who understood her role in my life the best. She listened, challenged me, explored my gifts, and created moments of success! Ms. Tykeson knew one fundamental fact about all people: We all have the need to be known, loved, accepted, and given the opportunity to make a difference in the world. Regardless of your position, you too can make a difference in the lives of all people in your communities, especially the children, if you remember the simple needs of all people that Ms. Tykeson understood so well!

Thank you for joining me and all the others around the country in keeping kids first, because our kids are our legacy for the future! Thank you for the great work you do; and above all, thank you for making a difference in our schools and communities! By the way, thanks, too, for allowing me to share a few simple thoughts about getting back to the basics!

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