

## **Testimonial (Stand Up for Students Lobby Day, Statehouse Feb 22)**

I am Kate McCann and I am the 2017 Vermont State Teacher of the Year, a 2015 recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching and a National Board Certified Teacher. Thank you (House/Senate Education Committee) for allowing me to address you today.

While we acknowledge the importance of Pre-K education for our children with highly trained teachers in Vermont's public schools, and strongly desire that the financial burden of post-secondary education be reduced for all qualified Vermont students, it is crucial to continue to invest in k-12 education. The high school years are some of the most formative for our young people. As a 19 year veteran teacher, I'm in the business of opening doors for students and/or keeping them open. High School students are in the trial and error stage and we, public educators, are here to help them make good decisions and in turn help them pick up the pieces when they make the wrong choice, which they will do.

A couple of years ago at U-32, I had a student named Shawn. He was a very respectful young man who appeared, as many of his peers, not very interested or engaged in mathematics education. He was notorious for not handing in work and not preparing for assessments. Through communication with Shawn, his parents, the paraprofessional, and academic support staff we worked hard as a team to turn things around with Shawn. I tracked him down on numerous occasions, he came after school, he began completing and submitting work and Shawn turned his grade around from barely passing to a B. Following graduation just last spring, he became involved in AmeriCorps and is currently tutoring **math** in Kansas City to struggling learners. This is remarkable for a young man that tested out of special education during his freshman year because of lack of adverse effect and placed on a 504 Plan for accommodations in math calculations. A collaborative team at U-32 opened a door for Shawn that would have otherwise remained closed.

Tony, is autistic, everything he writes has no spacing in between, not between words or between numbers. Reading his work and assessing his progress was a challenge. I recognized that the best way to assess his understanding was for him to walk me through his logic. I provided a lot of opportunity for Tony during his sophomore and junior year to come to the front of the class and present his solutions. This increased his confidence and allowed me to get a clearer picture of what Tony knew and was able to do. It became clear to Tony and me that he was capable of so much more if encouraged and supported. Again, a team of supportive educators along with Tony and his parents, decided to open the door for Tony. Skipping Algebra 2, he went on to successfully complete Pre-Calculus and AP Computer Science his senior year. In my letter of recommendation for Tony as he was applying for college I wrote "I'm going to cherish the memories of Tony leaving class frustrated by not knowing or having the correct procedure or calculation, but finding his way back to my room later to tell me how he understood where he went wrong in his thinking about the problem. It's a sign of a great thinker who walks away from a mathematical problem only to chew it over and work it out in his own time." Tony is now a member of the Champlain College learning community.

Devin took Algebra 2 with me during his sophomore year. He was so kind and was always so willing to share his work when he had completed it. I began to count on him to give a topic enough thought to generate good ideas and contribute to class discussion. During that year I nominated him to take part in the National Young Leaders Conference not understanding fully the sacrifices his single mom would make in order for him to attend, but together we opened another door for Devin. I pushed him to take AP Statistics with me the following year. He

worked hard in class but as the year went on, I noticed that he was completing fewer and fewer assignments. When I called him on that, he told me that he was having trouble staying focused on school when what he really needed and wanted was to work more hours so that he could fix his car. Well, you can't fault a young person for that. I imagine that each time he slipped along the way there was a good reason behind it. It wasn't that he demonstrated lack of effort; it's that he only had so much effort to give. Since we spoke about that I saw a marked improvement in the amount of school work completed in statistics class. I can only guess it was to not let me down even though it might have meant that he had to work harder to get everything done. In his letter of recommendation I wrote, "Devin is a leader, put here with purpose to inspire those he meets to live by a higher standard. I'm blessed to know him and I'll be sad to see him go, but the world awaits and we need more young leaders like Devin."

Reducing public education funding would jeopardize the team that we have in place at U-32 and in other high schools around the state and will not allow for these doors to open for our young students. Harry Potter fans, you may remember Dumbledore telling Snape that "you know, I sometimes think we sort too soon!" If we don't push every day, all the time, with everything we've got to educate our young people whether in mathematics or in gaining a better command of the English language or the many other lessons we have to teach, then we potentially seal one's fate at the age of 11 or 15. This is inherently unfair when it turns out badly.

Thank you for listening today as educators like me offer our concerns, our solutions, and our stories about Vermont's most amazing gifts, our students.