

# A Newsletter for Beginning Teachers in NC

Regional Education Facilitators – NC Department of Public Instruction

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## A Message from the 2018 Northwest Regional Teacher of the Year, Lisa Wall



### Growing into a Great Teacher

Spring is just around the corner, and it brings the excitement of growth and new beginnings. The wonderful thing about teaching is that every day is a chance for a new beginning--a chance to try a new lesson, to tweak an activity and do it a new way, or to make a renewed effort to support and encourage a struggling student. As we

enter this season of change from winter to spring, let us also remember that great teaching requires a commitment to grow and change on our part sometimes as well.

The needs of our students today are greater than ever before. Many need emotional support, extra academic help, a warm and nutritious meal, a stable living environment, guidance on future career paths, assistance navigating family difficulties, and a safe school environment. These needs require a willingness to change--to change policies, to change teaching methods, and even to change our perception of education so we can change lives. They require unfaltering determination to discover students' strengths and weaknesses, to find creative ways to challenge them to learn, and to push through the difficulties to give them the best education possible.

Often, growing as a teacher requires sacrifice--of time, of our comfort zone, and sometimes of our old way of doing things. I have always believed that teaching is a calling, not just a profession. Because of this, during my 20+ years as a high school English teacher, I have embraced this growth mindset in different situations many times. Recently, I had to adapt my approach to teaching to help a struggling student succeed. "Betty," a high school senior living on her own, had incredible potential, but she hid it away behind high walls of apathy, sarcasm, and anger. She had many absences, and at 18 years old, she seemed determined to drop out of school and give up. Instead of letting her abrasive attitude frustrate me, and rather than using her class cuts and missing assignments as evidence for a discipline referral, I decided to reach out and build a bridge toward her instead of a barrier around myself.

She needed an adult in her life to hold her to high expectations and make her accountable, so I contacted her each day she was absent, kept her after class to check in with her, complimented her positive behaviors, and found creative ways to help her make up her work from absences. I let her know that failure was not an option. By helping her see the value of working hard for her future goals, I continued to show her that

I believed in her--not accepting excuses or complaints. We even persevered together through her personal struggles.

She needed food to make it to the next paycheck at her part-time job--I brought things from my pantry. She needed gas to get to school--our staff pitched in to provide gas cards to help her get to class. I focused on the work she needed to complete for my class, but I also made sure she knew I cared about more than her grades in my classroom. As a result of this shift in my mindset to teach and reach the "whole student," Betty graduated from high school, got a better job and a stable living situation, and 6 months after she graduated, sent me a Christmas card thanking me for never giving up on her. Her success is my success--I grew as a teacher by finding new ways to connect with her and make learning relevant in her life.

We must remember that our influence on students goes far beyond the classroom walls. So "spring" into the last part of the year with renewed energy and determination to have a growth mindset to make a difference in students' lives. We have such an important task to complete, and no matter how demanding it may sometimes appear, our students deserve our best effort in our classrooms but also our dedication and support to encourage them as they grow in confidence and pursue their dreams for the future.

### Growing Successful Students

by Lisa Wall

Great teachers know great teaching can't be learned  
In books or even from advanced degrees.  
By hard work and reflection it is earned,  
By teachers with commitment to succeed.

Great teachers know that students' needs come first.  
They craft their plans with effort, time, and care.  
They dedicate their lives--through best and worst.  
Their love of learning they will always share.

Great teachers feel excitement, joy, and pride  
When students reach their dreams and find success.  
They offer wise advice and help to guide  
Their students to achieve their very best.

Great teachers embrace change because they know  
That new perspectives help their students grow.

NC BEGINNING TEACHER TWITTER CHAT

#NCBTCHAT

MARCH 6TH 7-8 PM

CHAT WITH EDUCATORS ACROSS THE STATE!

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