“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you’ve imagined.”
-Henry David Thoreau-

All of the years of college prepared me for this moment. I read my education books, listened to my professors, and diligently completed my student teaching internship. I boldly and confidently made claims during my interview process. I decorated my classroom and sharpened extra pencils. I read my rosters and imagined a thousand times over what my students’ faces would look like when they entered the classroom. And, now, this was it. This was the first day of my teaching career. As I shut the classroom door to my first period on a hot August day in 2006, I will never forget the image of 30 ninth grade faces staring up at me. This was the moment that I became an educator.

Congratulations, teachers! You are about to embark on the journey of a lifetime. My name is Mariah Morris, and I am both humbled and proud to serve as the 2019-2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year. I want to personally thank you for devoting yourself to the teaching profession and believing in the power of educating our youth. Nelson Mandela wrote, “Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world,” and I applaud your commitment to making the world a better place. Beginning your journey as an educator is both exhilarating and scary. Nothing can quite prepare you for the moment when you take the reins and become the leader of your very own classroom. Soak in every minute, love the children with all your might, and forgive yourself when you make mistakes. You may not immediately see it, but you will make a difference this year. I applaud you for taking the leap and becoming a teacher!

As I travel the state and meet teachers and educators in diverse capacities, I have had the unique opportunity to see successful teaching from all different perspectives. Although great teaching looks different from classroom to classroom, great teaching always embodies what I have termed the Three Essential Es. Successful teachers cultivate empathy, engagement, and enthusiasm as they build their classroom culture and develop their curriculum. When empathy prevails in the classroom, students are able to collaborate and work together in real and meaningful ways. I implore you to make empathy the foundation of your classroom culture. Model and teach it explicitly. Give students a script for how to be empathetic. Likewise, the greatest teachers I have observed deliberately boost student engagement. When engagement is high, academic success skyrockets and classroom behaviors are easier to manage and maintain. Finally, enthusiasm is contagious, and I challenge you to enthusiastically campaign for your students, classrooms, and schools. Be excited, wake up your students, and teach them how to love learning as you cultivate these Three Essential Es to leave your mark on the classroom.

As I look back over the ten years I have devoted to the classroom, I realize that teaching has been a source of both joy and fulfillment as well as frustration at times. Teaching can be messy, and at times you will probably feel like you have failed. But, I guarantee you this: all seasons in life pass and this is the case with the tough times in teaching. You have the ability to craft your own story and reinvent yourself in times of difficulty. The aha moments, the love that pours from your students, and your powerful reach will outweigh the difficulties that you may face. Be bold, be confident, and live the life you have imagined as an educator. Friends, in the words of Henry David Thoreau, “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams!”

Positive Parent Contact Tips

Contacting parents can be difficult, but it is a lot easier if it is for a positive reason. Take time during the first month of the school year to reach out to your students’ families, share positive updates and let parents know that you consider them to be the most important part of their child’s learning experience. This communicates that you see their child as a value part of your class. Especially if you are new to the area, parents want to know who you are and most parents/guardian want to know how they can help their child be successful in school. Ask your mentor or principal to assist you with the best ways to plan your initial contact with your students’ families. Mentioning your classroom expectations during the initial call, can set the foundation of great classroom management throughout the year. You can also provide an opportunity for parents to be aware of future class projects/activities which may require time or financial planning on their end in order for their child to participate. This is also an opportunity to learn more about the what is important to each students’ family. Once you have established positive contact at the beginning of the year track and maintain a telephone log with information such as the phone number, date, time and person you talked. You may also use the log to document important details the parent/guardian shares with you about their child. Email, newsletters and school/district approved social media pages are also great ways to connect however a telephone call is more individualized and personal method that can yield results all year long. Read more at: https://blog.edmentum.com/9-tips-successful-parent-teacher-communication

Connect with Mariah Morris and other outstanding educators from across the state on Twitter for the first North Carolina Beginning Teacher Twitter Chat of the 2019-2020 school year! This interactive professional development is September 9th 7:00-8:00 pm. For more info sign up for a text reminder sign up at www.remind.com/join/ncht and follow #NCBTChat on Twitter.