

I am excited and feel privileged to be conducting my first Representative Assembly of the Louisiana Association of Educators. This is a special time; a time for us to reflect and to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of LAE. We have accomplished many things, but we still have much to accomplish. With all of us pulling together and using our “One Voice,” there is no limit as to what we can accomplish. Deep down in every one of us, there is “Something From Within” that allows us to have the strength and the courage, everyday, to walk into a classroom and utilize our talents to educate the children of Louisiana.

One issue that I want to discuss today is teacher’s Professional Pay. In our system, we, as educators, are constantly being under-valued. However, as individuals, we must realize our contributions and the contributions of others to the field of education. We must value ourselves as we should be valued by others. We must all hold that standard and work towards showing our communities, our state, and our nation the reasons that we are so valuable.

Our average teacher’s salary begins at \$29,000 and over time increases to \$40,000. We have 68 parishes with 37 of those parishes achieving the \$40,000 benchmark. That represents just over half of our Louisiana parishes achieving that benchmark. We all need to work to get 100% of our Louisiana parishes up to a beginning salary of \$40,000. Believing in ourselves, individually and collectively, will strengthen our resolve to achieve all of our goals. We need to speak with “one voice.”

Let’s not be so humble as to not speak of the good that we and others do as educators. When we are humble, the good is not reported or circulated within our ranks and within the community. I want you to “Toot your own horn and of those around you.” Tapping into your strength and your power within, can also help to strengthen the LAE.

Let’s talk about some of the educators who have exhibited power from within. These people have accomplished great things and it is important to recognize them.

Let’s talk about Grace Sibley who was St. Landry parish’s first nationally board certified teacher. She recently returned to Evangeline Parish and helps to recruit membership while being the Title One Supervisor for the Evangeline Parish school system.

And what about Rachel Gifford, who is responsible for writing grants and teaching students through the use of current technology. She is a true ambassador of education and continues to teach innovative ways to teach that technology to both students and her coworkers. She is presently one of the five finalists to receive the NFIE 2008 award which recognizes her vast accomplishments in the field of education.

And what about Joel Hilbun, the first candidate for a NFIE award for teaching his students to become entrepreneurs in technology. Joel was our first LAE Vice-President and has served as our parliamentarian Board of Directors and for the LAE Representative Assembly.

And of Pat Thomas, an ESP who has excelled through doing her own instruction in an After School program and was recently selected by NEA's president Reg Weaver to be on the NEA's resolution committee.

And finally let's talk about Cheryl Abshire. A true trailblazer in the teaching of technology as she started with a modest old modem and a telephone. She has a true love for the LAE/NEA and she is involved at both the state and the national levels. As she has evolved through her use of technology at the LAE & NEA levels she became the chairperson of the Teacher Retirement System of Louisiana and will be receiving her doctorate in December. She will be known to us as Dr. Abshire.

Many of these same accomplishments are in each and every one of you. The level at which you operate, whether you are a teacher, an administrator, or an educational support professional, there is something within all of us that keeps us doing what we do everyday; preparing our children for the future.

There are many ways to compare educational employment to things that we experience every day in society. Let's consider comparing educational employment in this way; let's use soap operas. I'm sure that you can think of a few to describe our lives as educators.

Many of us still remember what it was like that first year we started in the classroom. We were ready to unleash our talents into the world. Then reality quickly set in as we faced a room full of students that instinctively knew we were rookies. But we all dove in head first and persevered. We are the **BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL** educating the children of Louisiana everyday.

We face students everyday that have personal or family problems. Many of them come to school hungry, hurt, and scared. It is up to us to nourish, heal, and build confidence and courage in our students. As educators, we face a classroom full of the **YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS** everyday.

We need to remember that each student that enters our schools is unique. We have to deal with a variety of personalities and learning styles. It is up to us to deliver a quality education to every public school student. No matter what difficulties and joys the students present, we must remind ourselves that, "They are **ALL MY CHILDREN**," and accept them as such.

Many people believe that they are educational experts. They have an answer for all of the problems that educational employees face everyday. Many of them

have never spent time in a public school, much less a classroom. They won't "walk the walk" but they can "talk the talk." We invite them to come to be a part of the true solution; be a part of the DAYS OF OUR LIVES.

Students deserve a quality education and educational employees deserve a reasonable salary in a safe, compassionate environment. In the fog of turmoil and confusion of everyday life, let us not forget the tenets that constitute our guiding principles, or that these tenets provide our GUIDING LIGHT.

You and I know that none of us would be in the classroom unless we had the PASSION to do our jobs. That "something from within" ignites our PASSION for our jobs and in turn we can ignite the students PASSION for learning.

Educational employment and working with children is a calling. I have known many who thought they needed to get away from their educational job and do something else, only to return. They have found as we have found, that we have but ONE LIFE TO LIVE – and that life is teaching.

Many of us ask for the care and compassion that we as educators deserve, but all too often our pleas fall on deaf ears. Sometimes as educators, we need to seek the shelter of caring and compassion at our own GENERAL HOSPITALS.

Finally, we all experience the trials and tribulations of the day. We get through that day just to face another. AS THE WORLD TURNS, we know that we can weather the bleak times and appreciate the times of our success.

While these parallels are true, we operate in reality, not a fictional TV world. Our reality is dealing with children that have been forgotten or abused, and those with social and emotional problems. Our reality comes in the form of many different learning styles and those with hidden "disabilities." We face students with all types of individual differences and it is up to us to teach these children to succeed in life. We have no assumptions and we are left to solve the tough problems. All of these things and more make our classrooms the ultimate challenge.

We must go beyond the distance to teach them. We must go beyond testing and be accountable to the system. We must have the courage to acknowledge when performance is poor. We must define and refine what will work in today's classroom. We must focus on student learning and guiding instruction. We must make decisions about our data collection and the use of that data to improve our teaching strategies and testing skills. We must ask ourselves, "How do we adopt new approaches to professional development?" Some type of sustaining reform must be utilized so that we may be accountable to the children, the profession, and the community.

My friends, what lies at the base of all of this is political maneuvering and lobbying. Here are some “action points” that we need to consider:

1. We must improve classroom instruction and garner the support of the board, superintendents, parents, and community leaders.
2. We must use a system-wide approach to improving instruction and make all stakeholders accountable for that improvement.
3. The system should offer relevant professional development, creating instructional leaders that can form a support system for new educators.
4. Make sure that all stakeholder roles are clearly defined and that they are doing their job. This includes unions, principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders.
5. In order to carry out a new vision, we must explore ways to expand the traditional school day and school year.
6. Make district, state, and federal funding a priority to improve professional development.

There is a recurrent theme in these action points. Get Political! Do not let this intimidate you. If you don't politic, you will end up with a pile of tricks! Mobilizing our political will is essential in moving the system forward. We must redefine our district leadership and insure all stakeholders engage in roles that are best positioned to move us forward. Remember our ultimate goal is to prepare the children of Louisiana for the future.

Something within us makes us teach, lobby, fight for rights, assume leadership positions, support LAE, and better our workplace and working conditions. All of this is not only for ourselves, and our students, these efforts also work for the greater good of our society.

We have just had American Education Week recognizing everyone that has a stake in educational employment and volunteerism. All have been recognized in a unified effort to create great public schools, remembering our ultimate goal of preparing children for the world and their future. This effort takes all of us uniting in “one voice” and using the “power from within” each and every one of us.

Our first challenge is giving the basic right of a quality education to all of the children of Louisiana and the accountability for that outcome.

The second challenge that we face is improving membership in LAE / NEA in order to continue working to offer a great public education system. We need you in a grassroots effort to take the challenge of increasing our membership. This challenge is about action. Stand up if you want to be about action. Name someone on your school campus who is not a LAE member. Perhaps someone that has asked you about politics, salary, or what is happening within our organization. Can you resign yourself to talk to that person about them taking action and joining us in our fight?

It's hard to change people's minds, but it is time for you to brag on LAE / NEA and to "toot the horn" of LAE / NEA and take a step further. I challenge you to go out and get that member that you talk to everyday. At this time next year I want you to turn to your neighbor and ask, "Did you get members to join?"

If we can all meet this challenge, the great power of LAE will be recognized in this state, and you will move this organization forward. Do it for the students' future; do it for our future. Let's speak in the "One Voice that is Within" to share the responsibility in gaining the membership in LAE where we will have mutual respect and together produce results that will give us the power to help both students and the education profession to succeed.