A Message from the 2019 NC Charter School Teacher of the Year, Douglas Price

In this present moment, you are experiencing unknowns that are unprecedented by any group that has stepped foot before you. In this time of COVID-19, you -- like I -- are experiencing such a vast array of emotions and feelings that it is difficult to put into words what you are feeling-- at least with the general public. But I know what you are feeling; our Teacher of the Year team knows what you are feeling. If there is one piece of advice I may offer to you in this great time of uncertainty, it is grace.

I live by grace; it is an attribute that has shaped both my personal and professional life in more ways that I could ever count or imagine. To the educator sitting on this side of the keyboard, it is the greatest blessing that you can offer another human, and it is also the greatest blessing you could give yourself, especially in this time.

In my first year of teaching 6th grade (where I still teach today, eight years later), I assigned a take-home science experiment. Students needed to construct a figure that could withstand 40 lbs. or more of pressure using only five index cards. I gave students one set of index cards (the firm, stock card type; not the flimsy ones that tear and evaporate so easily) and stated that these were the “final cards” that must be used when they submitted their work. Unseen by many of the students were my initials on the cards. After five weeks, one of my students turned in their project. It went unnoticed by me that he had used his own set of index cards, but it did not go unnoticed by him. The weekend came, and within an hour of him leaving school, an e-mail apology came to inbox.

It was rather humorous, as there was no subject line, and all it said was “I’m sorry for what I did.” It took roughly six e-mail exchanges for me to procure precisely what the apology was for. “I cheated and used my own cards,” he finally informed me. To be clear, the purpose of using the cards I gave them was to make things equitable and because the firm stock cards would hold more weight. It wasn’t because I wanted to be strict on students nor make the process difficult. “Can you meet me on Monday morning before school starts?” I inquired of him. He came, and we chatted.

Through a nervous smile, he explained why he felt like “he cheated” and why he felt the need to apologize. He promptly proceeded to ask me to give him a failing grade for his “lie.” I simply sat back and listened as he poured out his emotions. After he finished, I informed him that I wasn’t upset with him, and that, in fact, I didn’t even notice the card situation. I explained to him why I provided the cards to students. When I had finished, and told him he needed to think nothing more of it, he asked me again to dock his grade. “I’m going to leave this post-it right here, and you write down what grade you actually think you deserve. It can be a number or letter.” I excused myself and alone to consider. When I returned, he had placed in one bold stroke of a marker: “D.”

I looked at it, and then took my own marker and struck through the “D” and wrote “A.” “This is the grade I’m giving you today.” He looked stunned. I said, “Your project was well done, and your experiment worked and held the weight that was needed, but I am giving you the ‘A’ because I’m more impressed with your integrity and the honesty.” There was more to this conversation to end it, of course, but that remains for that student’s ears only. Grace.

Grace for your students: I know your principal is most likely hounding you about reaching out to each and every single one of your families every day. But in the back of your mind, you know that several -- or many -- of your students are lacking the basic resources they need to get work completed. Maybe more importantly, they are lacking some of the basic living necessities that are required. Offering your students grace can come in many forms, but maybe the greatest form of grace you can offer them right now is to be their biggest advocate. You know your students inside-out; you know their histories, their backgrounds, their stories, their needs, and their struggles. In this time of great unknowns, what your students need from you right now is to know that you are still there for them -- not to collect their work and assignments, but there to recognize their humanity.

“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”

- Arthur Ashe
This crisis may have taken your students out of their physical school environment, but it did not remove them from their needs. Advocate and fight for them, and give them grace by being a voice for them.

**Grace for yourself:** we, as teachers, have an overabundance of responsibilities on a daily basis in normal circumstances. We no longer reside in the normal, and these responsibilities have been multiplied. For most of us, there is an innate desire to solve the greater problems that have been exacerbated. The reality is that we will solve very few of the problems in this current context. Allow yourself grace: grace when you fail, grace for when you do not have a successful lesson plan, grace for when you need time to rejuvenate and recharge so that you can be successful, grace for when you need to shift focus from one situation to another out of necessity.

As we complete this unimagined version of a school year, go forth with grace toward all and yourselves, so that we may continue to be as effective as we can be.

Add these resources to your remote learning toolkit. Begin with video lessons from district, regional, and state teachers of the year from across the state, on The Teaching on Your Time (T.O.Y. Time) Channel. T.O.Y. Time can be accessed at this bit.ly link [https://bit.ly/2RkS4e8](https://bit.ly/2RkS4e8). Be sure to like and subscribe to get alerts for new videos each day. Also, click and bookmark the following:

- NC DTL Remote Learning
- NC Office of Early Learning
- Free digital books
- NC State Remote Learning Webinars

NCDPI’s Educator Effectiveness Division created courses listed here: rt3nc.org. These online professional modules are only available in NCDPI’s Home Base/NCEES system. Access to online PD in the Home Base system is managed through an active employee ID number, so only current employees of North Carolina public school districts or charter schools can access Home Base. There is no mechanism for others to access and use the educator resources housed in the Home Base system.