

'Those kids' deserve a chance at a successful future, too.

Education series: Karen Eller 1:25 p.m. EST December 16, 2015



(Photo: Supplied)

Editor's note: This week, The News Journal opinion pages will feature a series of essays written by members of the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission. Read the series at www.delawareonline.com/opinion. Submit your view to letters@delawareonline.com.

Each morning, I and hundreds of other educators travel to Wilmington schools to undertake the daunting task of teaching students whose lives reflect all the traumas of deep poverty and the dysfunctions of communities in turmoil. We are routinely asked why we would ever want to work in some of Delaware's toughest schools where there is a lack of resources in the classrooms, and where violence is prevalent in the surrounding community.

I do it because I believe schools can change lives.

Our students in the inner city deserve to have educators who believe in them. Our students deserve to have their community and their state stand behind them. Our students deserve a fighting chance for rewarding and fulfilling lives and it's our goal to help them reach their potential. It's our goal to give them the tools they need to

believe in themselves and to keep striving for greatness. We see where our students can go and the endless possibilities they have. When others give up, we keep fighting for them. Schools change lives.



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Rethink the chaos of school districts in Wilmington

(<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/16/rethink-chaos-school-districts-wilmington/77419758/>)

Being an educator in one of our inner city schools is difficult and challenging work. However, it's this hard work that makes it so rewarding. Educators see first-hand the effects that deep poverty can have on children and families. Some of our children tell us about the gunshots they hear at night. They experience hunger, homelessness, and fear. Some of our students end up being "window children" because it's not always safe to go outside.

Many inner-city educators face the continuous allegations made against our students and their families by those who do not know them. We have heard our inner city students referred to as a cancer, with the expectation that if these students move to other schools or districts the cancer would spread. We have heard our inner-city students referred to as "those kids" who are going to end up in prison, or "those kids" who can't learn, or "those kids" who don't have parents who care. In my classroom, I refer to my students as scholars. Imagine walking into a classroom and looking into the eyes of each of my scholars knowing some of the individuals in the world and in their own state around them have already given up on them and don't even want to give them a fighting chance. Sometimes as educators, we are the only advocate and champion for our students and their families.

My students are not "those kids." They are kids who were given life circumstances they did not ask for, with odds increasingly stacked against them. They are kids with overwhelming resiliency. They still show up every day, despite those odds, ready to do their best work. If you want to see the face of resiliency, then look at face of every one of my students. They are kids who have dreams like you and me. They are kids who have families doing the very best they can with what they have, and, despite the misconceptions, they have families who are involved and who care.



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The importance of a citizen voice in education reform

(<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/opinion/contributors/2015/12/14/importance-citizen-voice-education-reform/77292300/>)

We have an opportunity to change the future of our Wilmington schools. One of the proposals from the commission is to redraw district boundaries in order to consolidate accountability for student outcomes. Another is to target more dollars to schools with high concentrations of students living in poverty. These are important changes but by the commission's own admission, they are not the only answers. Comprehensive reform involves many things: improving early childhood education, having culturally competent and highly qualified teachers in our most challenging schools, enhancing

instruction and learning by streamlining best practices, updating our facilities, extending in-school and out of schools services, enhancing career and college readiness programming, and developing an effective way to measure the growth and success of our inner city schools and educators. And all of these areas are a part of the commission's work over the next five years.

A second-grader once told me he would never live to the age of 28. I was curious as to why a young child would say this. He said 28 was old and he would be shot before he ever was that old. Imagine being in second grade with this type of view of your future. We must change. The time is now to make the commission's vision of the future of Wilmington education a reality and to give our students and families a fighting chance.

Karen Eller is a fourth-grade teacher on the east side of Wilmington. She former a member of the Wilmington Education Advisory Committee and now serves on the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission.

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