

Editorial: In praise of teachers, support them

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My mother-in-law was a public elementary school teacher when my wife was a young girl.

Every year, she bought school supplies and snacks for children in her class whose parents couldn't afford to buy these things. She never made an issue of it.

Her husband—my father-in-law—was the pastor of a smallish country church. They had three daughters of their own, and there were times when they themselves didn't have enough money to buy meat.

Even so, my mother-in-law gave what she had to care for and teach her students—whoever they were, wherever they came from. It was her calling.

My mother-in-law was and is a Christian—and not in name only. She was a follower of Jesus during all the years she taught in public school, and the way she cared for and taught her students was directly related to Jesus' love for her and her love for him.

She was nowhere near the only Christian serving in our public schools. Still today—though you might not know it, the way some lambast our public schools—dedicated followers of Jesus serve in all areas of public education. They see it as their calling. We need to support these brothers and sisters of ours.

The 2024-2025 academic year is underway. It's not too late to encourage and support the teachers pouring themselves into our children. Nor is it too early.

Appreciating teachers

When my wife and I were self-supporting collegiate missionaries, we were blessed to get to spend our days with our son throughout his infancy and toddlerhood. We got to witness and experience all his development during those short years. So did the college students in our ministry.

When it was time for him to start school, the hardest part for me was giving him to someone else for the bulk of his waking hours. I really had a hard time with that ... until I saw how much his teachers cared for him.

Many of his teachers in the early years were Christians, as were our daughters' teachers. They took teaching seriously, and they cared about their students. We appreciated them and supported them as much as we could on my small, country-church salary. This amounted mostly to us giving them encouragement, time and holiday snacks.

You might be amazed at how far a word of encouragement, a snack or an hour of your time can go with a teacher. Don't assume someone else is giving that support and encouragement. Assume no one else is. And that doing so is your responsibility.

I still volunteer at a local public elementary school on a regular basis to encourage teachers and help them care for their students. Not everyone can do this—frankly, not everyone *should* do this—but more people who can should.

Supporting teachers

When I was a pastor, I made volunteering at our local public school part of my—and by extension, the church's—ministry. My ministry context made it possible for me to give an entire school day either once a week or every other week.

I functioned as a teacher's aide in the elementary classrooms. It didn't take me more than the first day to be in awe of teachers. At the end of that first day, I was exhausted. I mean, plumb worn out.

I said to more than one person, "I was worn out after just one day, and teachers do this day after day for an entire school year."

"Do this." By "do this," I mean corral and herd as many as a couple dozen cats—I mean children—for about seven hours a day five days a week.

I mean maintain discipline and order in the classroom while responding to a myriad of behavioral and personality issues.

I mean teach subject matter in a way that every child in the classroom—regardless of learning ability or style—can learn it to the satisfaction of the TEKS, the STAAR, the TEA, the SBOE and whatever other acronyms there are in the Texas educational firmament.

I mean deal with difficult parents, guardians, coworkers, administrators and others in a professional and productive way. Thankfully, not all of those people are difficult.

I mean hold the knowledge of trauma, tragedy and trials going on in their students' home lives, sometimes while holding their own ongoing trauma, tragedy and trials.

I mean doing all of this while being criticized regularly and while continuing to provide the same level of care for the students in their classrooms.

Oh, and more recently, doing all of this while also rehearsing active shooter drills.

If you aren't convinced yet that teachers need our encouragement and support, you might not be paying attention.

Encouraging teachers

Teaching always has been a challenging profession. If you ask veteran teachers today, though, they are likely to tell you it's become far more than challenging. Many veteran teachers have left the profession or plan to leave as soon as possible. Young teachers are watching this.

If we want first- and second-year teachers to become 20-year veterans, we Christians must encourage and support them now—especially when so many, still, are our sisters and brothers in Christ.

We can encourage and support them in small ways and large. We can write them notes, take them snacks, buy supplies for their classrooms, champion them during school board meetings and, in Texas, advocate for them before and during the 2025 legislative session.

I've focused on public school teachers, but private and homeschool teachers also need encouragement and support as they teach and care for students.

Teaching—public or private—always has been and still is a high calling. It's not too late to encourage and support the teachers pouring themselves into our children. Nor is it too early.

Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at eric.black@baptiststandard.com. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.