

We need more charter schools

Written by Fred Easter
Monday, 20 May 2013 13:08



Nobody asked me, but it is unassailable that charter schools are doing an admirable job with our kids.

They are empowering parents and teachers to expect and get high levels of achievement from young people from whom "popular wisdom" often expects too little. I do not offer this opinion as an indictment of any other schools, but I will share some evidence I've collected.

Last week at the Capitol I had the pleasure of happening upon the 2013 edition of the Minnesota Charter Schools Essay Writing Contest. Students, faculty, parents and grandparents and friends had gathered in the Capitol Rotunda to hear the contest's winning entries.

As much as I would like to share all of the winning entries in this space; I have selected two that I think exemplify the writing quality and maturity level of ideas expressed.

The essay question was, "What was your best day of school?"

Here is the entry of Vincent Smith, Jr. He is a 2nd grader at Urban Academy.

My best day in school was when I got suspended for punching a classmate. I (had) not been behaving well in school. I (had) been rude. I (had) been talking and fighting instead of working. I even stole candy. When my friends were bad, I would follow.

We need more charter schools

Written by Fred Easter
Monday, 20 May 2013 13:08

Getting suspended got me thinking. My Dad is in prison but he often calls me. He is good but he did something bad. I figured I was the same. I am good but I do bad things. Being bad is not cool.

The day I got suspended was the best day because it helped me change. Now, I stay away from trouble. I have become a role model. It feels great to be a leader and not a follower.

Here is Denisse Sanchez's entry. She is a 10th grader at Minnesota Transitions High School.

My best day of school happened when my English class had a discussion on the letter written by James Baldwin titled "My Dungeon Shook." The topic of the conversation was "what do we learn from other generations?" It got intense and it brought me back to the day when I realized my education was the only way out of the hood. I told the class that back in the day, I never went to school. I hated school and that I had all Fs. I never looked forward to going to school because everything that was going on outside of school then was my main priority.

My Mom and Dad never finished high school and now are living the life of poverty. That's all I've ever known. I soon learned that I had the strong urge to get out of it. My Dad told me "(T)he only way to get out of this cycle is to get your education." He's always told me not to be like him or my Mom; that they have to struggle everyday just to survive, because they can't live. Because they made the wrong choices, they are now paying for the consequences.

Truthfully, I do not want to be like them. I have already struggled myself and know how it feels not to be able to eat or get what you need because there is no money coming in. I want something better and bigger in life. I don't want to survive anymore, I just want to live. The only way to do that is to get my education, go to college and get a degree in something I love doing. I don't want to be trapped in the cycle of poverty and my education is the only way to break free. So now I go to school everyday, get good grades, and am now trying out different things. This day also made me realize how far I've come in life, and that me sharing my story to the class could help someone else who's struggling to make the same decisions I've had to make.

Listening to young people like these and the others I heard that morning took a bit of the sting out of growing old. Looking at the pride on the faces of the generations gathered there deepened my appreciation of the work charters are doing.