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Meg Freeman

Jersey City Public Schools

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More Than a Dollar

by Meg Freeman

I find that most educators understand an important principle about life: the more we give, the more we receive. Educators are true servant leaders who understand that in serving the children of this country, they are doing something that no dollar amount could fully compensate. Educators are not only tasked with teaching students to read and write (skills which are critical to their survival in the "real-world"), but also with creating responsible citizens who will one day contribute to our society and build a brighter future.

While I am thankful that the majority of my students have achieved academic success, when I think of my greatest accomplishments as a teacher, I am reminded that success is often something very different from performance. Teaching is rewarding because of the value that one is able to add to someone else's life. Such success is impacting a child's life and changing it for the better. Success was the day that Troy* came to me at lunch to pick up his next independent reading book, *A Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, because he could not wait to start reading it. Success was taking Jalissa on a field trip and hearing her tell me that, at 24 miles away, it was the farthest she had ever traveled from her home. Success was when Allie stayed after class to tell me that she had connected to our reading of Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken," because she wanted my advice on a personal problem. Success was seeing Jason, a former student of mine who had spent time in jail, and having him tell me on how much he had enjoyed reading *Romeo and Juliet* and how much my class had meant to him.

It is amazing how in serving others, we become more of who we are supposed to be. Teaching changes us, as our students change our hearts and our beliefs. I am more flexible, creative, loving, and spontaneous than I ever would have been otherwise. In giving to others, my heart has expanded to become more accepting. I am continually humbled by the lives my students lead and the perseverance that they show. I am further blessed by constantly being the learner as my students teach me about aspects of society and life that I never knew existed. Their successes and failures are a constant reminder of what it means to be human, a species destined to make mistakes only to triumph over them. My life is enriched by being able to give to others, to influence others, and to impact society and the community in which my students live. And that is something that no dollar amount could ever compensate.

*All names and identities have been changed.

Margaret (Meg) Freeman is dedicated to helping to close the achievement gap. She spent the first seven years of her career teaching English, leading professional development, and mentoring colleagues in Jersey City, New Jersey. She was the 2014 Hudson County Teacher of the Year and is an America Achieves Fellow. Freeman is currently in her third year as a Vice Principal, where she supervises the Humanities and Guidance departments.