

## **1-26-2017 SOTY Speech- Rob Glass- MASA Midwinter Conference**

Thank you so much, Chris for this award and for your kind words. And thank you Michael, for sharing your inspirational experience (of the past year) with us.

I was incredibly surprised to receive the news about this award back in my home district, on a snow day of all days. This award is very humbling for me for at least a couple of reasons. First, because over the years I have come to know and deeply appreciate the amazing work of so many of you-- my superintendent colleagues. And the more I learn and understand the work of colleagues, the more I am inspired to persevere, to grow, and to take on new challenges. So I thank you. And second, because we all know that our profession is a people business-- we help both the students and adults around us grow their potential-- and we do it at scale-- this kind of work cannot be done alone. Success comes only through people working together as a team toward shared goals.

And so today, it's my honor to introduce to you some special members of my team who made the trip to celebrate with me today: My lovely wife, Cynthia; my mother Carole, My aunt Barb, and Board Trustee Howard

Baron. As you all know so well, the superintendency is not a job, but a calling-- and it demands so much, not only of us, but of those closest to us who support us in countless ways. So thank you for being here and thank you for your years of devoted support. There are a number of others I need to thank, who could not attend today due to other commitments, these include my four sons, Paul, Andy, Jordan and Callan, my administrative team members, our teachers and support staff, our PTOC, our community leaders and our incredible Board of Education. I want to give a special shout out to Board President Ingrid Day, who not only provides exemplary leadership, but who also was the architect (perhaps I should call her the instigator) of an incredibly thorough and moving nomination document. Absent the support of so many special people, I would not be here today.

And so as I started thinking about the remarks I might make this afternoon, my mind ironically shifted from thinking about successes to thinking about some challenges-- perhaps because one cannot be had without the other. We in Bloomfield Hills Schools have had some wonderful success, but we're also struggling right now through some issues around facilities and scheduling, inclusion and equity, curriculum and innovation-- and we're in the process of some administrative change. And

while those are just some of the things we're grappling with back in my home district, I also thought about the common changes and challenges we're experiencing in Michigan.

After all, change is the only constant. And while we strive to create powerful, purposeful, transformational change, we don't get control a great number of the changes we, and our students, experience day to day.

I think we all know what it feels like to not be in control and how scary that can be. As humans, we strive for control our whole lives. The children in our preschool programs struggle to control a game, their behavior, and even the adults taking care of them. And in middle school, students certainly struggle with the feeling of a lack of control. We know this can impact them greatly, even into high school.

And while we try to help our students in their own struggles for control, we are waging our own battle for control over public education. We are fighting for what we know to be right for our students.

I'd like to share just one recent example of this kind of change that my school is experiencing. Like many other communities, we've more recently experienced an influx of

refugee families. Often the families come to us with very little. The students have missed whole portions of their education, speak very little or no English, have experienced indescribable trauma. Some have no winter coat.

When these students first arrive at school, we assess them and place them in our English Language Learners program, which is an incredibly supportive learning environment that will ultimately help them transition into a general education class. For most students, this is highly effective. Still, other students are coming to us requiring significantly more support and this makes for an even bigger challenge as we attempt to assess, despite the vast language barrier, what additional supports may be needed to help each student be successful.

In the meantime, while all this is happening on our end, their parents are concentrating on navigating our American grocery stores, finding a job, and watching the time tick down on their government housing. These factors, in addition to all of the other necessary tasks that consume their waking hours, leave precious little room for navigating our system in order to support their children academically.

Situations like this are by no means unique to Bloomfield Hills Schools. In fact, I know districts across the state that serve many more refugee families than we; and I also recognize daily how fortunate we are to have so much local support from our families, service organizations and the faith community. I also know that Michigan's public schools are supporting parents who are simply trying to put food on the table tonight. With layers of competing priorities, the science fair and music concert rightly fall to the bottom.

We've all shared the common experience of wondering how we might be able to do things differently in order to better support families or support a greater number of families. We've all looked at the numbers and thought about how we might shift things around, allocate staff differently, or use district resources in a new way.

Unfortunately, our options are often limited by constraints put in place by lawmakers and policymakers who-- however well intended they may be-- have their own ideas and their own agendas about how things should be done. And these ideas are usually formed from a position far removed from sound educational theory and absent the informed practice of skilled educators in the field.

So today, I'd like to share with you a basic principle I'd like to convey to our policy makers and those who seek from afar to control many of the factors that greatly impact our ability to direct our own districts: We as an educational community, when given reasonable levels of resource and autonomy, can and will produce amazing outcomes for our students. We can and will nobly rise to the many challenges before us. We can and will develop to high levels the vast human potential of our students and the adults who serve them. We can and will Lead, Innovate and Inspire. So to the extent our legislators and policy makers believe education is broken and needs to be fixed, I say:

Education will fix education.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power."

Again, I say to our legislators, education will fix education.

We, the people, *the educators*, are more than capable of arming our students with the skills and tools required for the modern working world. We are more than capable of supporting students and families with disabilities, socioeconomic challenges, language barriers, and unique family situations that can make day-to-day life excruciatingly difficult to navigate. We are more than capable of uncovering the hidden talents and abilities in every student and supporting them to achieve their personal best. We are more than capable of loving children who need to be loved and hugging children who haven't been hugged enough.

If the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power is education, then let us educate you, our public servants and lawmakers, on what we need. We need local control. We need flexible, stable, and appropriate levels of funding for *every child* across the state. We need family support programs and family education programs. We *need* more counselors.

We need you to focus on capacity building more than carrots and sticks. We need you to stop pitting schools against other schools and recognize that each supports a vastly different student population - even if they stand just five miles apart. We need you to make statements in

support of teachers, most of whom could readily leave the state for other employment opportunities. We need help recruiting talent. We need help recruiting and developing a more diverse workforce so the students in the classroom can self-identify with at least one member of the school staff. We need funding for innovation and funding to support core instruction. We need robots and technology and partnerships with local businesses to help our students get jobs.

We need you to genuinely listen to, and care about, our students' needs and the needs of the families we serve. We need you to seek our advice before creating something new or making a change. We need you to thoroughly read the proposals placed before you and judge them not by potential political capital, but by the effect it will have on the students in our seats, in our classrooms, in our schools.

We need your support in both statement *and* action.

We, the educators, are more than capable - and education will fix education.

Thank you.