

Remarks by Councilmember Tim Burgess, Seattle City Council
Teachers United Workshop
Seattle, Washington

May 31, 2014

Good morning.

Each of you has the power to change a child's life forever. That's a fact and as teachers I think you know that.

You have the power to lift a child out of poverty.

To change the trajectory of her life.

To awaken her creativity.

To inspire her to capture a glimpse of what's possible.

I know this is possible because that is exactly what happened to me.

I was raised here in Seattle. My family was poor. There was lots of conflict in my home, even violence. From outside the family, there was sexual abuse. I didn't do very well in school because of dyslexia and attention deficit disorder.

As a student in Seattle Public Schools, I was labeled "not college bound." In my senior year of high school, I was rejected for admission to the University of Washington. And then something very special happened.

My high school journalism teacher pulled him aside in May of 1967 and said, "you don't write very well, but you can talk. I want you to do an assignment for me. This weekend, go out and cover some event as if you were a radio reporter and come back on Monday and present it to the class."

And that's what I did.

That teacher was Lucille Chapin at Lincoln High School in Wallingford. Ms. Chapin did what teachers everywhere do . . . She pushed me. She encouraged me. She corrected me . . . she was brutal with her red grease pencil. My papers would come back with red markings everywhere.

Lucille Chapin loved me and she made sure I knew it. She helped me defy the barriers. After two years in community college, I transferred to the UW, all the while working as a radio journalist at KJR Radio, which was, at the time, Seattle's number one radio station, home of the legendary DJ Pat O'Day.

I overcame the barriers, and one of the reasons I was able to do so was because Lucille Chapin believed in me. She helped change my life.

And now we have the opportunity to do exactly the same for hundreds and even thousands of Seattle children by bringing high-quality preschool to all of our three and four year-olds.