



Everett High School

"School of Champions"

Everett Public Schools

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www.everett.k12.wa.us/everetthigh

Mission

To inspire, educate and prepare every student
to be career and college ready.

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I'm fired up. So, I will admit at the outset that what I have to say may ruffle some feathers. I welcome the possible conversations.

This past week, Dr. Joyce Stewart came to our school to share updates about the upcoming bond and levy, which will be a topic of later staff bulletins. Right now, I want to talk about graduation rates. It seems standard now that whenever we begin to talk about the Everett Public Schools graduation rates there is a required caveat that is posited before the data is revealed. It goes something like, "Now we know that some of you have questions about how far we go to help students graduate." I've heard it since I started here, and I know the conversations continue. I'm here to say that what we are doing requires no caveats. We do whatever it takes to support students who otherwise lacked many of the supports that other students have at their beck and call.

Allow me to mention the supports that some other students and other adults have had in their lives that we sometimes forget about, or conveniently forget to bring up in the first place.

We are not the only district that has high graduation rates. In fact, many affluent districts across the country often achieve similarly high rates. The correlation between the level of affluence in a district and its graduation rates has long been known. What is often not mentioned are the myriad supports that are in these districts that remain hidden and out of conversation. The supports are those that are available to people with means. For example, there is a cottage industry of tutors for hire that run hourly sessions that range anywhere from \$50 an hour to over \$200 an hour. There are many families that not only can afford those tutors, but who use them on a regular basis. There's nothing wrong with that, as every family wants to do whatever they can to help their child succeed. However, that is somehow seen as *more acceptable* than a teacher coming in during the middle of the summer to sit side-by-side with the student who perhaps needs only her algebra credit in order to graduate. To ignore one support while questioning the merit of the other seems odd.

Another cottage industry available to people of means are the "college guidance specialists." These are people who know the application and college system deeply, and who work with families to ensure that students have the right resume that will get them into exactly the college they wish to enter. I briefly worked with an English teacher who recognized this opportunity. She left the classroom and within three years was making more than the district superintendent because these specialists often charge between \$1,500 and \$5,000 to "counsel" the students and their families on what exactly they need to do to get where they want to go. Again, I am not

arguing against this kind of support. I am merely suggesting that it is an example on the other end of the spectrum of how far people will go to help their student find success.

To bring in a larger and more serious example, one only needs to look at the people with means who are in power. We have a number of staff members who served in our Armed Forces proudly, and many have been on the Everett High staff who served in various conflicts, including Vietnam. If you know your history, you also know that more than one president who was of the appropriate age during the draft was able to avoid serving in the military by accessing highly paid doctors and specialists who found sophisticated medical issues that precluded these individuals from being drafted. Those who came from poverty were unable to find doctors to get them out of the draft.

Some of those affluent men even went on to tout elite university credentials when discussing why they deserved to be in positions of power. One wonders if they would have had access to those institutions if they were on the same playing field as the many people who were not afforded the same support systems. I imagine that if my father had provided funding for a new library at Princeton, even *I* might have been invited to attend there.

We live in a culture in which those who have access to wealth also have access to supports that the rest of us simply do not share. My point is this: at EHS we have a staff that works hard to try and mitigate the imbalance that is in our culture that, at its root, rises out of these inequities. We are doing great work, and we are changing the trajectory of the lives of students whose only support lies in the classrooms in which they sit, with teachers who refuse to ever give up on a single kid. Thank you all for the hard work you do every day to make Everett High a place that proudly does whatever it can to make sure that equity and access to the promise of the American Dream is afforded to all.

Sorry for the length, but remaining silent was not an option.