

State Board of Education
Statement on the Importance of Public Schools
February 9, 2021
Ohio's New Educators (ONE)

In recognition and celebration of the upcoming Public Schools Week February 22-26, Ohio's New Educators (ONE) is writing today to share our deep pride for and the importance of public schools and the work we do. ONE is a group of early career educators in the Ohio Education Association (OEA). We believe in and know the power of public schools. We see it firsthand every day.

We chose to become educators to be a consistent, encouraging adult presence in the lives of our students who appropriately challenge them to look at themselves, see both the greatness within and potential for further greatness, so we may help them develop on that path. We specifically made the choice to work as educators in Public Schools so we can serve and create more equitable opportunities for *all* students.

This past year has been an unprecedented challenge for educators, parents, advocates, and communities. It is a credit to Ohio's strong system of public education, and the people who make that system work, that learning has not stopped.

There have been countless examples of how educators continue to leave lasting impacts on public school students. ONE leader Chris Williams wanted to share one such example today:

On January 23rd, I received a phone call I'll cherish forever. A former student of mine called and immediately, enthusiastically shared that it was a "VERY special day!"

It was my birthday. This student I now call a friend was in my class 4 years ago, and he couldn't wait to call me to celebrate. He told me he bought a calendar specifically to mark my birthday. He has since moved to another district and is in middle school, but we keep in touch often. I had the honor of playing a very special role in his life- his first teacher.

My friend is a refugee from Somalia and has profound orthopedic impairments. He has fled war, been separated from his family, and faces challenges daily from his disabilities. Crossing paths with him- let alone calling him my student- is an honor of a lifetime. It is a role I don't take lightly, and his story reminds me of what we should prioritize.

I think about my friend's journey, how he went from a war-torn country, to a refugee camp, to airports, to new homes, and ultimately into my classroom. His first classroom. Within a few months, he was translating English for his mom and reading near grade-level.

Chris's story about this student reminds us that public education is the great equalizer in a competitive and inequitable society. Public education insists there is a seat at the table, there is an open classroom door, there is a place that welcomes all. No requirements needed, no prerequisites to belong. Welcome.

Support of public education must be the number one priority for a society that seeks to create opportunities and ladders of success for all children. It must be the heartbeat of a nation that wishes to embody radical solidarity and an open-arms approach to all of its inhabitants. There are children counting on us to build and maintain strong public schools for the sake of their futures. Students like Chris's, who

deserve everything they need and more, are counting on us every time they enter the sanctuaries we call schools.

The story of Chris and his friend is just one of many stories of how public schools rise to the challenge of being a safe haven and pillar of strength supporting all families and students, including the most disadvantaged. Over 90% of Ohio's students attend public schools, and public schools are working for the best interest of all of our students--to keep them safe, learning, and growing. Public schools are the foundation of excellence in American education, the best hope for helping children grow in and towards their greatness. This is why our work for our students and for public schools cannot and does not remain in the four walls of our classrooms or stop at the doors to our school buildings. Our advocacy for public schools seeks to not just prepare our children for the world but to make a world worthy of our students, something that we know can only be accomplished together through strong public schools. We invite the State Board of Education to join Ohio's New Educators in our continued and renewed commitment to public schools during Public Schools Week 2021 and always.

Thank you for your time and dedication to education in Ohio.