

In the neighborhood for May

I have had many different careers in my life. From radio, to retail sales, newspaper reporting, publishing and advertising, public relations, real estate, health care and now education. Each of these careers was demanding and had its own set of challenges. I come from a long line of teachers, but when I was in college, I wanted something different for my life, something exciting that paid well, so I rejected the idea of becoming a teacher. Apparently you cannot escape your destiny. After 30 years of other successful careers, here I am, a teacher.

After my children graduated from high school and left home for college, I realized that I really needed children in my life. I completed required classes, enrolled in the alternative teacher licensing program, got a job at a charter school, and began a career as a teacher. After a lifetime of doing many other types of complicated, demanding jobs, I have found teaching to be the most difficult and most all consuming career I have ever known. I came into this thinking, "How hard could this be? My siblings and father were teachers, many of my friends too. If they could do this, get summers off and make a decent living, surely anyone can do this job." How wrong I was. Teaching is a sixty or seventy hour a week job.

I was completely overwhelmed the first year. I told friends that this job was like writing a three act play every night, then not only starring in it the next day but directing it also. Elementary teachers plan for at least six subjects everyday and have to be well qualified in all. In addition, they are managers, data and systems analysts, counselors, social workers and communication specialists. Being a new teacher is more than overwhelming, it is poorly compensated insanity. Yet there are many intangible rewards.

It is with mixed feelings I ponder passage of SB 191. I agree, that the system needs adjusting; it just is not working for many students. Studies show that teachers do have the greatest influence on the

academic success of children; however, they are not the only thing, and so many variables for which teachers have no control play a huge part in how children succeed.

Now teachers are mandated to be more accountable for students learning than ever before. To that, I offer a quote my father used to say, "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink, You can send a fool to college, but you cannot make him think." Lawmakers have made this bill out to be a sure fix for all that ails the education system, and teachers have had little or no say in what's been proposed. From my observations, I can predict that this bill will not be a panacea to fix student performance or raise graduation rates. Tenure has been a sore topic for many for a very long time but I hope this proposal doesn't backfire and cause more problems than it solves. It may be difficult now to attract and keep teachers in the profession. I am not sure many will risk going to an inner city or title one school, knowing that despite best efforts, students may not succeed as quickly, so then you may be out of a job. I've read that it takes at least eight years of teaching to become a truly good teacher. This bill might not let any new teacher stay around long enough to become a master teacher, and that would be a loss for everyone.

Beverly Wallace: A Greeley native, old broad and new teacher can usually be found at home grading papers; mindful of the prophesy, " Old teachers never die, they just lose their class."