CLASSROOM CHRONICLES

PROTECTING the PROFESSION

How Louisiana's Principal of the Year Advocates for Responsive Action on Teacher Retention

DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION
Louisiana Believes

2020

Louisiana Principal of the Year Jenny Carey, who leads KIPP East Community Primary School in New Orleans, has been part of the KIPP family for the last 12 years and has seen firsthand how important it is for students to have quality teachers. With teacher retention being an issue for many schools across the country, Carey has tackled this issue head-on and has achieved remarkable results, with many of her original staff members continuing to stand by her side.

"An important part of who I am and what we've done here is linked to teacher retention," Carey said. "We have much of our founding staff still; those people are now the leaders of this building. We created a community, and this community is achieving impactful academic results."

But that's not the case in most classrooms across the state or the city of New Orleans.

"An estimated 900 teachers, roughly 29 percent of the teachers in our district, leave New Orleans annually for reasons ranging from low pay to lack of support systems," said Carey, citing research from New Schools for New Orleans. "This means in many of our schools, students and families are not seeing the same faces year after year, and enduring relationships are never built. This also means school administrators and coaches are hustling to hire and train teachers each year, essentially rebuilding every August instead of raising the bar from the year before."

In addition, Carey said, a teacher's departure impacts the faculty's institutional knowledge–the breadth of information about the school, its operations, and its culture–and even student achievement results.

> **"WE HAVE TO KEEP OUR TEACHERS. TEACHING ISN'T A ROLE THAT'S REPLACEABLE."**

Asked what Carey has done in her own school to combat teacher turnover, she narrowed her approach to four key steps. In her own words, they include:

1. **PROFESSIONALISM.**
   Respect and value your teachers. Teaching is a dignified, respectable, honorable profession that is not a stepping stone. We need to change how we talk about teaching.

2. **SUSTAINABILITY.**
   Create a sustainable environment. This job can be emotionally draining. If we want people to be able to sustain this position, they need to have a life outside of the classroom. Across the state of Louisiana, we lose far too many teachers before their prime.

3. **CLEAR PATHWAYS.**
   Celebrate highly-effective teachers. The single most important thing for any child, in any classroom in the state of Louisiana, is the quality of teacher that stands in front of them. Support professional growth and development by providing different leadership opportunities, stipend work, and competitive salary bands.

4. **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING.**
   Care for your team. Foster relationships with your teachers and work hard to ensure that they are supported, appreciated, and celebrated.

Carey is passionate about fostering an environment in which teachers can thrive over time, and she hopes to spend her year of service as Louisiana Principal of the Year further exploring this topic.

She intends to open a dialogue about the issues surrounding teacher retention, share best practices for keeping teachers in schools, and collaborate with educators and educational leaders to support the profession of teaching.

If you're interested in learning more, follow Carey on Twitter at @JennyDCarey. Join the conversation by sending thoughts and questions to excellenteducators@la.gov.

JENNY CAREY
2020 LOUISIANA STATE PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR