

An Open Letter to District 7,

I have just begun my college career, and I am much more prepared than all of my peers. I hear constant complaints of reading 10 pages from an anthropology textbook for homework, writing a one-page reflection on a speech played in class, studying for a math quiz and having to memorize two formulas. Everyone seems to be complaining here while I sit here complaining about everyone complaining.

I graduated from Spartan High this past May. Until now, I had no idea how fortunate I have been to receive the education I have. I transferred in as a sophomore because of all the dual-enrollment courses and Advanced Placement classes that I took. I am a Secondary Education in English major and am in the very prestigious Teaching Fellows program, which essentially recruits, sculpts and publishes future educators for the great state of South Carolina. I am in a course with other Fellows, who are first-year students, where we discuss education issues and personal experiences throughout our academic careers. After only two weeks of this course, I have come to realize how academically affluent I truly am.

I hear stories from my classmates telling of teachers who didn't try or only saw their students as test scores. I heard a story about a teacher who told one of her students that he was not smart enough to comprehend the material. I hear stories of instructors who are indifferent to a student's emotional state or socioeconomic condition. I heard of one teacher voicing a gender stereotype in front of a class.

I can confidently say I do not have a story in any way as vicious as what I've heard. From kindergarten to 12th grade, I was in District 7. I spent seven years at Pine Street, two at McCracken, and four at Spartan High. I never once had a teacher who did not support me or make me feel worthless. I never had a teacher who neglected me. I never felt unwanted by a teacher. I never witnessed racist or sexist behaviors. Perhaps I had only the best teachers, but something tells me that's not the case.

I remember Mr. Thompson being at Brown Roof's Open Mics cheering me on. I remember Dr. Epps telling me that my writing was full of potential. I remember Mr. Stokes, the former principal at Pine Street, talking to me after my grandfather died. I remember Mrs. Richard reading my short stories and helping me select which to submit for competitions. I remember Mrs. Stevens listening to my own music and giving me the most genuine feedback that I've ever heard. I remember Mrs. King telling me that I had a special gift for public speaking. I remember Mrs. Dunbar suggesting that I take calculus (I did and I loved it thanks to Mr. Alexander). I remember talking about Motown music with Mrs. AJ on my eighth-grade New York-Philadelphia trip. I remember searching for tickets to a Rolling Stones concert with Mr. Maddox. I remember Mrs. Laney teaching me multiplication tables. I remember Mrs. Gowdy teaching me how to write the number "8." I remember shaking Mr. Steven's hand one morning in the Atrium and telling me to have a great day. I still have the card Mrs. Clinch wrote me and I'm reading the book Mrs. Copley gave me.

I remember it all.

Most of my peers want to become educators because they had a bad experience with their teachers and they want to be different from their former teachers. I want to be an educator so I can be like my teachers. I want to be like Mr. Brooks, Mrs. Plonski, Mr. Doyle, Mrs. Holmes (who when I had her for second grade was Ms. Boswell). I want to inspire like Dr. Epps. I want to love like Mr. Thompson. I want to be fun like Mr. Pruett. I want to be effective like Mr. Foster. There are so many names that I haven't included in this letter, but I remember all of you.

I just wanted to thank District 7 for everything that I am today. I wouldn't be in college if it wasn't for District 7, I wouldn't be an education major if it wasn't for District 7, I wouldn't be much at all.

Sincerely,

John Sterling Poole '16
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