Another Great Adventure Begins!

It’s the start of another school year, a time for new beginnings and new opportunities. The boy down the street is working to be the first person in his family to graduate from high school this year. Your granddaughter is so excited to be in kindergarten, she visits every day with a new story about what she learned. You’re hoping the youngster who spent the summer hanging out with an unsavory looking group will find direction now that he is involved in middle school football. The teen ringing you out at the neighborhood grocery store might write the next great American novel, compose a symphony, take a gold medal in the Olympics, or design a magnificent office tower. Just imagine what’s possible!

School is a grand adventure, perhaps the grandest adventure that a community undertakes. It represents our collective hope for a bright future for our children and community. It is an adventure we experience together, from the neighbors who watch out for the kids on their way to the bus stop to the business owners who support extracurricular activities and speak about careers in our classrooms. It takes dedicated teachers, bus drivers, maintenance workers, administrators—all the people actually working in the school system who contribute to its success. It takes parents who guide their children, make sure they do their homework or get enough sleep, eat a healthy breakfast, and wear clothes that keep them comfortable in the ever-changing Kansas weather.

And it takes all of us as tax payers who provide the resources for schools, ensuring that books are up to date, playgrounds are safe, classrooms are clean, and the lights are on. Those resources help our school boards recruit the great teachers and administrators our colleges produce. The entire community is involved in this grand adventure. Some pay it forward before they start their own families; others pay it back to provide for the next generation. In community after community, neighbor helping neighbor.

While some adventures are spontaneous, most are well planned and coordinated by people who have the needed expertise. This summer, I went on an amazing helicopter glacier tour. I may have had a different idea about how to fly the helicopter through the valley, but I put my faith in the pilot. A different part of the glacier may have appealed to me as a landing site, but I deferred to the planners who knew the glacier and the terrain we were exploring. When we were told a specific weight distribution was necessary in flight, we didn’t question that judgment; we followed the professional advice of the pilot. We all had a wonderful experience. Using their expertise and listening to their customers over the years, the professionals designed a grand adventure for us all.

We should approach the adventure of school in the same spirit. Most definitely we all must contribute. Schools rely on the community for support and guidance in decision-making. Schools rely on the community to help individual kids who need a role model or someone to push them to realize their potential. In turn, communities rely on the educational professionals to guide the adventure. They rely on educators’ professional judgment to plan instruction and programs and to strive for continuous improvement. The community and educators can bring our best ideas and best expertise together to design great educational adventures for all of our children. So as we begin a new school year, let’s embark on a grand adventure and make this the best one ever.