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Media Contact:
Maggie T. Reynolds
Public Information Officer
208-332-6976
mreynolds@sde.idaho.gov

A Simple Way to Express Gratitude During Teacher Appreciation Week

By Idaho CapEd Teacher of the Year Trent Van Leuven

(BOISE) – Like many, I owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers and mentors who have guided me from my earliest days in kindergarten to the present.

This gratitude deepens as I witness the dedication of teachers to my own young children. Their life lessons often stick better than my own attempts to impart wisdom, a fact made evident when my two eldest daughters insisted on having their photos taken at every exhibit at the zoo, each time requesting, "Now send that to my teacher." It's heartwarming to see how deeply they understand that their teachers rejoice in their discoveries and triumphs and want what's best for them.

In the various Facebook groups I'm part of, there's often a flurry of activity leading up to Teacher Appreciation Week, with individuals seeking ideas for gifts to express their gratitude. With all of the options, I firmly believe that the most meaningful gift to the parent, student, and teacher, is a simple note of thanks. Such gestures enrich the lives of everyone involved. The following story from last year illustrates this point:

It was mid-May and I found myself explaining to my wife why I needed to make a trip back to the school. Mrs. Day, our high school Spanish teacher and district librarian, was retiring after an astounding 37 years of service. I was tasked with crafting a commemorative plaque using the laser engraver in the shop. My inquisitive 9-year-old son overheard and bombarded me with questions: "She worked for 37 years? Why retire? What will she do now?" His curiosity led to a conversation in which he shared how Mrs. Day had always supported him with books, read to his class, and showed kindness. Needless to say, he wasn't thrilled about her retirement.

That conversation sparked an idea: I invited him to assist me in designing the plaque. Together, we selected fonts and ensured the design would be impeccable. He even helped load the plaque onto the laser, and with remarkable precision, he delicately removed the tape after engraving, ensuring not a single scratch marred its surface.

At the graduation ceremony, we witnessed the presentation of the plaque. Later, my son presented Mrs. Day with a heartfelt thank you note. In return, she sent him a gracious note, expressing gratitude for his contribution to the plaque's creation, making it all the more special.

Reflecting on this experience, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to instill in my son the value of gratitude, the importance of acknowledging the efforts of others, and the readiness to express appreciation. Teacher Appreciation Week serves as a prime occasion to impart these invaluable lessons to our children, nurturing empathy and gratitude in the next generation.

To all the teachers out there, I extend my heartfelt thanks. Thank you for your unwavering dedication to shaping the minds and futures of the next generation. Your work is truly invaluable.

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Teacher Appreciation Week runs May 6 through 10. National Teacher Appreciation Day is May 7.