

Call and Response: What Keeps You Coming Back?



The students keep me coming back to the classroom—not always the ones sitting in front of me each day, but students past who are now pursuing exciting challenges with passion and perseverance. The Dreamer who is now a celebrated pediatric nurse, the first-generation college student working toward a doctorate in biostatistics, the English-language learner performing summer research at CERN: they keep me coming back.

-MANDI KRAEMER, SENIOR FELLOW

Teaching doesn't feel like a job; it's fun! Every day is an adventure filled with learning for my students and me. Having former English-language learner students hang out in my classroom because it's a safe place, getting emails from current and former students sharing something physics-related and seeing students get excited about what they're learning and keep trying when it's tough have all kept me coming back for 20 years. It seems like just yesterday I was starting my career, full of excitement, enthusiasm and hope, believing that I could make a difference in students' lives. I still have that belief, so I keep coming back.

-LISA SITEK, SENIOR FELLOW

I keep coming back to try to make school a place where I'm excited for my future kids to go. I keep coming back to try to make all schools a place where students WANT to spend seven plus hours a day for 13 years of their life—a place where they can explicitly see its purpose.

-MADISON PARK, SENIOR FELLOW

Whenever the going gets tough, this student quote pops into my mind: "I have never before had a teacher who genuinely cared about how I felt. In my 8 years of living in America and going to American school, you have been one of the best teachers I have had. Thank you for being awesome. Your effort motivates me. Thank you!" That's all I need.

-ALLISON KIPPING, 2015 TEACHING FELLOW

After a series of lessons about air pollution in the Salt Lake Basin, I regularly hear students talking about how they hate it when it snows, but at least it clears out the inversion. They now understand their everyday world a little bit better than they did before!

-JAMIE MELTON, 2016 TEACHING FELLOW

Last month, one of my students came out as a lesbian. After a particularly rough day, she collapsed in my room, crying, and said, "I'm so glad to know you're here for me, even if my parents aren't." Last year, I had a student commit suicide. When his best friend finally returned to school, he hugged me for a very long time and whispered, "Thank you for being a genuinely caring teacher." These little moments remind me, for a brief second, that the work I do is impactful and powerful. These little moments are always in the back of my mind, and they are what keep me coming back.

-MANDI DEAN, 2016 TEACHING FELLOW

What keeps me coming back to the classroom is the ability to develop excellence in the minds and hearts of students!

-CRIS CHACON, 2017 TEACHING FELLOW

What keeps me coming back to the classroom is my ability to advocate for and support my students. Today I did some research on future college science and math classes that I'm going to share with a student since he wants to be an aerospace engineer; I plan to encourage him to challenge himself since I believe in him. I helped another student navigate a difficult interaction with a fellow classmate and turned it into a teachable moment—I was faced with this issue myself in the past, and I want her to be better able than I was to handle this situation if it happens in the future. I care about my kids and want to help them learn in a supportive environment where they can develop the skills they'll need to succeed in life. I also want to be a part of making a better world for them. This is what keeps me coming back to work.

-KRISTIN MONGELLI, SENIOR FELLOW

Every year, I meet ninth graders who enter my classroom with high math anxiety. Too many young people do not see themselves as mathematically (and academically) capable in my school. I listen to their stories to gauge why learning math has been a struggle, then use their experience as a guide to be a better math teacher for them. I LOVE watching students grow into confident mathematicians, and I LOVE watching them learn how to support one another. No other role in a school positions you to witness this beautiful human transformation. I come back to the classroom because I want to continue watching students, old and new, grow. I come back because I need them to inform my growth as a math teacher.

-LIZ SMITH, SENIOR FELLOW

What keeps me coming back to the classroom are opportunities to be creative. I love spending time thinking about new ways to introduce/reinforce topics and how to help students see connections between topics. It's exciting to be able to dive into a new course, or work on improving what you have done in the past. It's also fun to connect to more people and resources each year in person and through the internet.

-SUJATA GANPULE, SENIOR FELLOW

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