

The Generous
Harvest

9/25/20

From The Principal's Pen

I rushed home ahead of the rain. I was on the clock. We had a field full of potatoes, and the rain was coming in just a few hours. The rain would make it impossible for us to get the harvest out of the ground this week and probably most of next week as well. I changed clothes and headed to the barn. I put the plow on the tractor and drove towards the garden. Three hours and twelve boxes full of potatoes later, we have the harvest in the cellar as night fell on the farm. I walked back home in the dark.

On April 8th of this year, amid the COVID lockdown, we planted two rows of potatoes. A single fifty-pound bag that I had acquired weeks before when the hardware store began stocking crops and seeds for the spring. Over the summer, we would watch and wait. Spraying for bugs. Tilling the weeds and allowing the leaves to get as much sun and water as they needed to grow and thrive. On September 22, we harvested more than 200 pounds of potatoes. Easily enough potatoes for us to make it through the winter and spring and into next summer. We keep the large ones in the cellar while canning the small ones and those cut by the plow during the harvest. Very little is wasted.

Small family farmers in the country get very few promises. They plant with the hope and belief that with the proper conditions and the right effort, their small investment will yield a crop worth the time and energy they put into it. Educators in the country make the same kind of investment every day, every week, and every year with our students. Educators control a small number of variables in a student's growth, yet, like the farmer, they bear the great responsibility for their success. Like the farmer, they can't control the weather, or in the case of 2020, COVID. But they continue to sow seeds.

What we do today matters. And like the farmer that sees rain coming on the horizon at the end of a long dry spell, educators see the conditions changing. Some students are starting to return to the building. Other parents are watching anxiously to see if this will work. They quietly ask themselves, "Can safely have school amid the waning days of the pandemic?" The answer will help them decide if they feel comfortable doing the same. A successful harvest depends on the work we will do in the coming days and months. I hope we can all agree after a six-month experiment with distance learning that the optimal place for student growth to occur is in the confines of the classroom, not the bedroom or the kitchen table.

To do this well, we will need the help of parents. I completely understand the temptation to send students to school when they don't feel well. We have dangled our feet in the grey space of "should we send them or not?" and decided that we need to work, and the only way to draw a paycheck is to send them to school. This year, when placed in that situation again, we must choose carefully. The decision could affect classrooms full of children, not just one. Some of our ability to successfully grow students will depend on the decisions made at home.

As I stood at the edge of the garden with the sun setting over the hill behind the barn, I thought of the last six months of work and was glad we had made the effort. It will soon be time to plow up the ground and begin preparing for another harvest, but for now, I can take a minute to appreciate the benefit of months of hard work. Eight months from now, we want to do this in our schools. We look forward to being able to stand back and appreciate the fruits of our labor. Tomorrow's harvest depends on what we do today.

We must give more in order to get more. It is the generous giving of ourselves that produces the generous harvest.

Orison Swett Marden