

## Whose Circle Are You In?



Last month, I had the opportunity to participate in a project sponsored by Kansas State University titled "Circles of Influence - Influencing the Future: Educators Through the Years." As part of the project, the university is reaching out to some of its graduates to ask them who influenced them to be educators. As a proud graduate of Kansas State University (2002), I was honored to be included in the project and, more importantly, to be able to share about the remarkable people who have influenced my career and my life.

I was able to talk about and recognize the incredible Maxine Carver, my high school business education teacher, who discovered my passion for everything business. Mrs. Carver inspired me to become a teacher by her words and actions each and every day. I was amazed at how she managed a classroom full of teenagers, how she could type and take shorthand at what seemed to be lightning speed, and that she did all of it with laughter that filled the entire room. She was my role model during my high school days and is a very dear friend today. And, yes, I know I've dated myself by mentioning "typing" and "shorthand!"

During the taping of the Circles of Influence project, I was caught off guard when, after sharing my stories, I was asked whose circle of influence I was in - who was I influencing today? The question brought home to me the opportunities we all have to be an influence in the lives of those around us. Educators especially are blessed with this opportunity. Every day, educators are surrounded by young people forming their views of the world and their place in it. The choices we make influence how our students view us, and how we influence their view of the world. Ours is an awesome responsibility, as well as a tremendous opportunity.

In reflecting on the question about who I've influenced, it brought to mind a conversation I had with a former student a few years ago. I was eating breakfast with my family at a local restaurant when a young man approached our table. I immediately recognized him and called him by his first name. He seemed genuinely surprised that I remembered his name, but what happened next was completely unexpected. He proceeded to thank me for kicking him out of high school! He

said that he knew he was at the lowest point in his life when I, the one educator who tried everything to keep him in school, had to give up on him. It was a bittersweet moment for both of us. For me, it broke my heart that he thought I'd given up on him. For him, it was admitting that his choices had consequences. My influence on this young man has had lasting impact. He turned his life around and is now enjoying fatherhood and nearing completion of a college degree.

It's very easy in the course of our busy lives to forget the lasting impact we are making on the people around us - whether intentional or not. I encourage each of us to be cognizant of our own circles of influence and to strive each day to leave an impression that will spur those in our circle to be and do their best.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane".

Dr. Diane DeBacker  
Kansas Commissioner of Education