

Confidence, Patience, Perseverance, Encouragement



I had the pleasure of spending summer vacation with my family including five great nieces and nephews under the age of six. The oldest nephew, Max, will start first grade in a few weeks. He absolutely loved kindergarten but there was one thing he didn't accomplish - tying his shoes. His goal during summer vacation was to learn to tie his shoes because he didn't want to go to first grade, in his words, "As the only kid who can't tie his own shoes." According to his mom, he'd been working on it all summer but with little success. On Day One of our week-long vacation, he promptly told me that he'd chosen ME to help him accomplish his goal. The challenge was on. I had one week to teach him to tie his shoes -- new shoes, nonetheless! Max was determined. He patiently listened and watched as I made rabbit ears out of the laces, crossed them over each other, had one ear go in between the other, and pulled the ears tight to tie the shoes. His tiny hands repeatedly tried to replicate my motions. Max was having little success and becoming frustrated as Day One, Two, Three and Four of our seven-day vacation came and went. I kept encouraging him as he was getting oh-so-close. Day Five arrived and Max had conceived a different plan. By this time, he'd concluded that Aunt Di may not have been the best choice as a teacher of shoe tying. He'd also been soliciting help from other family members during this time and, believe it or not, there's more than one way to tie a shoe! After watching others, Max decided that one of his uncles had a better technique which required only one rabbit ear. A couple tries later and Max tied his own shoes! For the remainder of the vacation, Max tied and untied his shoes at least a hundred times. He was proud of his accomplishment, as was the entire family. Max will go to first grade in a few weeks with confidence that he can tie his own shoes.

My experience with Max learning to tie his shoes came at a perfect time for both Max and me. For Max, he was truly nervous about going to first grade without knowing how to tie his shoes. Having that extra boost of confidence as he walks through the door of his first grade classroom was important to Max and will be extremely important as he learns new things in the coming year. Experiencing success is vital to lifelong learning. Having the patience and perseverance to keep trying for five days was the key to Max's success. Having people he trusted who were encouraging him and teaching him in a variety of ways also helped.

Whether learning to tie a shoe or solving a complex math problem, let's give all of our 450,000 students in Kansas the confidence, patience, perseverance and encouragement they need to be successful. Welcome to the 2013-2014 school year!



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

Dr. Diane DeBacker
Kansas Commissioner of Education