

A Pocket Full of Chalk



My teaching experience began early. I loved hearing my mom's stories about the first grade class she taught in Provo after graduating with a degree in education from BYU. I wanted to be a teacher too. One of my favorite childhood gifts was a homemade chalkboard with my name on it. Wearing a flowered apron my mother sewed—with pockets stuffed with chalk and eraser—I lined up my little brothers for "school." I only hope they enjoyed it as much as I did!

Nearly twenty years later, after graduating near the top of my class, and completing my student teaching at Moreland Elementary and Snake River Middle School, I earned a bachelor's degree in education from Idaho State University. Soon after, my husband and I—now parents of three boys—moved to remote Heppner, Oregon, where he'd accepted his first post-graduate job.

Heppner was an hour from the nearest real grocery store. At night, with no surrounding lights, the stars were breathtaking. But when our oldest turned five, I couldn't send him on a long bus ride to a school in a community I hardly knew. So I taught Kindergarten myself.

One of my most memorable college classes had been educational philosophy with Dr. Gates, a professor with white hair and horn-rimmed glasses who relished challenging students to think. He taught that our beliefs about the purpose of education, the nature of learners, and the role of teachers shape every decision in the classroom. Studying diverse educational philosophies increased my appreciation for the way varied perspectives enrich both learning and society.

In that little ranch house, teaching my own sons, I reflected on what I believed education should accomplish. We loved learning together, and when we returned to Idaho a year later, we continued home educating.

As we raised eight sons and two daughters, we pursued opportunities that fit each child's needs: co-ops, online classes, a private microschool, and public education. One son, born nearly three months early, suffered a severe brain hemorrhage and faced significant challenges. With intensive intervention from a private organization specialized in brain development, he reached grade level in reading and math by age eight. Many of my children later attended BYU-Idaho, several on academic scholarships.

When I ran for office, I discovered that my openness to educational alternatives concerned some people. It's natural to prefer what feels familiar. But one purpose of great education is to explore ideas from multiple perspectives, recognize truth, and apply it wisely. Treating new ideas as threatening undermines that mission and sidelines families who need options.

We all want kids to have positive educational experiences—but children and families differ, and so do their needs. A non-verbal child must first learn to communicate. A gifted artist or mathematician may thrive in a program that nurtures their talent. A child with anxiety or autism needs a calm, predictable setting above all else. Parents, who know their child best, must be empowered to choose what works best.

Great education honors the uniqueness of every child and places families—not bureaucracy—in the drivers' seat. It supports success without demanding sameness and welcomes approaches that help students thrive.

Educational choice doesn't threaten public education. In fact, even where other educational opportunities exist, most parents choose public schools. But for the child who needs something different, having options can be life-changing.

As a legislator, I have supported both strong public schools and educational choice. I've worked to ensure school districts can offer competitive benefits, strengthen pay and retention policies, expand alternative paths to teacher licensure, and direct state resources into classrooms rather than supporting bureaucratic bloat. My goal has been simple: champion Idaho kids and the families who know them best.

I no longer wear an apron with pockets full of chalk, but my time in the classroom, as well as my experience as a mother, have given me deep appreciation for the work teachers do and the challenges they face. I'm profoundly grateful for exceptional educators—in public schools and other settings—who teach Idaho's next generation to think clearly, reason wisely, collaborate with civility, and build a brighter future for us all.