

Thank you very much, I am honored and humbled to be selected by CASE as the Colorado Middle School Principal of the Year for 2011-2012. While it is a great honor to be recognized for my efforts by my colleagues, in reflecting on this award I am struck by the work that has yet to be done.

I believe as President Obama does that education "is the economic issue of our time.

It is the economic issue of our time when the unemployment rate for people who've never gone to college is almost double what it is for those who have gone to college.

Education is the economic issue of our time when nearly eight in 10 new jobs will require workforce training or a higher education by the end of this decade.

Education is the economic issue of our time when over a third of America's college students, and over half our minority students, don't earn a degree, even after six years.

Education is the economic issue of our time when in a single generation, we've fallen from first to 12th in college graduation rates for young adults.

We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow. To accept the status quo is morally reprehensible and economically indefensible.

I believe that our education gap is an expectations gap. We need to believe in the brilliance of all students. We also need to truly believe that all students can succeed regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, economic status, sexual orientation, native language, or religion.

It is not enough to believe in all children, we must take action. Every one of us must do our part. Read to your kids every day, read to your neighbor's kids. Go to your local school and volunteer, if you do not have time to volunteer make a donation. Take an interest in the kids in your community. Volunteer at big brothers/big sisters. Visit the local preschools and read to the children. Stop and have a conversation with the kids you see in the community after school. Ask them what plans they have for college and careers.

If we all do our part and invest in our nation's youth we can regain our status as the world leader in education. That is the sustainable and lasting answer to our economic issue as a nation. We can do it, but it will take all of us putting aside our differences of politics and opinion to work together to truly believe in our kids again. When we take action investing in our youth we are investing in our future. But we must invest in all kids. Not just the kids we know but also the kids who challenge us. They are the ones who need us the most, and believe it or not, we need them as well.

I believe in you, I believe in us, I believe that together we can make our nation great once again.

Receiving this award has challenged my thinking and inspired my action. I hope I have, in turn, challenged and inspired you!

Thank you!!!

Martha Gustafson
Walt Clark Middle School, Loveland (Thompson School District)
CASE Middle School Principal of the Year