



# 20/21 REFLECTIONS

## Chapter 18 - Passing the Torch

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*As one year closes, and another prepares its grand entrance, I'm reminded of a story about torches getting passed, the power of youth, and the endless ripple effect of our work.*

It's a story about a chance encounter. You know the kind I'm talking about. The kind of chance encounter we educators hope for all the time.

A few years ago, I was at the California Endowment, visiting a resource fair sponsored by SHHS. As I journeyed through the booths loaded with sparkle, resources, and friendly faces, a young woman came up to me and asked, "Did you work at 20th Street Elementary School a long time ago?"

"Yes!" I said. "How did you know?"

"Because," she replied, "you helped me there when I was in the fourth grade."

As she recounted, I had been her PSW when she was a student at 20th Street Elementary. The fact that our paths had even crossed was a beautiful alignment of

the stars. In the early 1990s, PSWs had become a line item that schools could budget for the first time. I was the first PSW to be purchased by two champion principals who believed in the power of our work.

Although I had served at 20th Street Elementary only two days a week, I had formed powerful bonds with students. I had pulled this particular student out of class several times when she was going through difficult times. She remembered those conversations, as well as the support that the whole school community had provided. With that support, she had been able to follow her dreams, graduate, attend UC Berkeley, and...become a social worker in SHHS.

It nearly brought me to tears to learn that she was now having the same conversations with LAUSD students that I had with *her* all those years ago.

It was a poignant reminder of the ripple effect of our work, and how our impact is magnified across generations. A single student that I had supported years ago is now changing the lives of countless youth. How many of *those* youth will *themselves* go on to become world-changers? And on and on. The magnitude of this exponential ripple that we all contribute to is almost overwhelming.

I think about that as the year 2020 closes, because the impact of our efforts will live on—and continue to magnify—in 2021, and the year after that, for generations to come.

Think back on the impact you had this year: the hope you gave to those who called our hotline; the lives you saved through COVID tests and contact tracing; the food, diapers, and other basic needs you routed to families in crisis; the families and staff you consoled during their most painful moments; the students you reengaged by taking the time to listen to them; the immunization efforts you led; the love you showed to students in foster care, experiencing homelessness, and involved in the juvenile justice system; the ways you practiced anti-racism in your daily work; and so much more.

As our generation passes the torch to the next, all of those students you helped inspire will become the leaders of the future, who themselves will impact countless more, and on it will go.

So, get ready for 2021! It will be a year when all of the hard work that we put into 2020 begins to take root, in preparation for that exponential expansion of our

impact that will begin manifesting in the next generation.

Thank you all, thank you all, *thank you*, for planting these seeds of kindness, compassion, and connection when our world has needed it the most. And please refuel, nurture, and be compassionate with yourself and loved with ones this break. You deserve it immensely.



Oh, and one more thing. To that former student from 20th Street Elementary: if you're reading this, please send me a note :-). I regret to admit that I no longer have your contact information, but I would love dearly to connect, as you moved me more than you will ever know that day at California Endowment.

To everyone, thank you and happy holidays!

*Sincerely,*

***Pia***