



2014 NATIONAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALIST

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SEAN MCCOMB

2014 MARYLAND TEACHER OF THE YEAR
PATAPSCO HIGH SCHOOL
& CENTER FOR THE ARTS
BALTIMORE, MD

SCHOOL PROFILE: URBAN
DISTRICT SIZE: 108,442
SCHOOL SIZE: 1,473

SUBJECT AREA: ENGLISH
GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

YEARS IN TEACHING: 8
YEARS IN POSITION: 8

I. Educational History and Professional Development Activities

Collegiate History

1. Goucher College--Certificate in School Improvement Leadership (January 2007 -August 2013)
2. University of Pittsburgh-- Masters of Education in English Education (August 2005- August 2008)
3. University of Pittsburgh --Bachelor of the Arts in English Literature—Summa Cum Laude (August 2001-April 2005)

Teaching History

1. Staff Development Teacher--Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts (August 2013 -present)
2. Adjunct Instructor in Education and Writing—Towson University (August 2009 -present)
3. Classroom Teacher English/AVID—Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts (August 2006- present)

Professional Association Memberships

1. National Council of Teachers of English (2013-present)
2. Association of School Business Officers (2013)
3. International Society for Technology in Education (2013-present)
4. National Council of Teachers of English (2013-present)
5. Maryland Parent Teachers Association (2010-present)
6. Maryland Writing Project, Teacher-Consultant (2008 -present)
7. Teachers Association for Baltimore County, General Member (2006- present)
8. Maryland State Education Association, General Member (2006 -present)

Professional/Staff Development

Presentations on Classroom Strategies

- Presentation to full delegation of Maryland State Education Association at 2013 Convention focused on being a champion for students and developing a system that champions all students.
- BCPS New Teacher Orientation 2011 and 2012—Supported teachers new to English I 0 develop long-range plans, backward-map the first unit, become familiar with curriculum guide materials and texts.
- Numerous AVID strategy professional development sessions across content areas levels, elementary through high school.
- Towson University Write to Learn Professional Development Sessions 2008 --Presented “Envision Revision” writing strategies to lead students to deep and, reflective writing revision.

Sean McComb—Maryland Teacher of the Year 2013-2014

School-based Team Development

- Patapsco High School Instructional Leadership Team 2013 -- Led team in long-term study of New Teacher Evaluation framework and Charlotte Danielson's *Framework for Teaching*.
- AVID Summer Institute Professional Development Facilitator 2012 --Led sessions for Baltimore County sites, including composing site plans, AVID strategies and communicating year-long expectations for building successful programs.

Standards-based Professional Development

- BCPS Office of English Professional Study Day 2012 --Presented newly-developed curriculum guide including design philosophy, adaptability to various bell schedules, and alignment to Common Core tenets.
- BCPS Office of English Professional Study Day 2011-- Presented activity to familiarize English teachers with the Common Core State Standards and identify areas of change.

Awards/Recognition

1. Member of MSDE Advisory Group: Teacher Leadership Council (2013-2014)
2. Maryland Teacher of the Year (2013-2014)
3. Awarded assignment as Staff Development Teacher to Patapsco High School, a master teacher designation (2013)
4. Capital One Community Champion awarded by WNBA's Washington Mystics (2013)
5. Baltimore County Teacher of the Year (2013-2014)
6. Recognized by Baltimore County for outstanding leadership of AVID College Preparatory Program (2011)
7. Selected from Maryland Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute to present Professional Development workshop (2008)
8. University of Pittsburgh Student Government Board Student Leadership Award (2005)

II. Professional Biography

Many adults can speak to the truth of Richard Wright's observation that "men can starve from a lack of self-realization as much as they can from a lack of bread." I was experiencing the initial hunger pangs of self-realization that come with young adulthood when I walked into Mr. Schurtz's AP English II classroom in August 1999.

My life had become chaotic. My mother had developed a torrid addiction to alcohol; my father had recently lost another position after only a few years. Academics were not a priority; I did well enough that my friends didn't catch on to the fact that I wasn't trying very hard. When I wasn't escaping to extra-curricular activities or my more- than-part-time job, I hid in my room, insulating myself from my mother's downward spiral, which I was ill-equipped to halt. But when I walked into Mr. Schurtz's room that fall I was confronted with a new escape to the stories, experiences and perspectives offered through the study of literature. There was no option not to learn in Mr. Schurtz's room. He stalked a central aisle with the intensity of a spurred bull, unwilling to let students settle for mediocre analysis, and pressing us to further our criticism. One of my proudest moments as a student is when he read aloud to the class my introduction to an analysis of Huckleberry Finn as a coming-of-age story, drawing an analogy to a young brave venturing into the wilderness. He had recently derided our class for weak, effortless introductions and I had spent most of the night revising my familiar patterns in pursuit of something meaningful. If I am being honest, I spent that night in pursuit of more than an introduction. I spent it seeking to produce a feeling of pride in an adult I admired, my only positive role model. Mr. Schurtz continued to push me and I developed a passion for literature and put aside my home life hang-ups. When my mom lost her battle with alcohol the following year it was his face in the crowd that I turned to in order to find the strength to deliver my eulogy. It was his room where I sat quietly that first day back to school, having arrived extra early to avoid what I feared would be every glance and whisper directed at "that poor kid."

I entered the University of Pittsburgh through Mr. Schurtz's force of will, sheer luck, and God's grace. Once I was there, I decided the time for excuses was over and have seen only three grades lower than an "A" in any coursework since. I consumed literature and vigorously debated its analysis in class. And, as I read Jonathan Kozol and Ralph Ellison, I also developed a passion for being a change agent for injustice. After finishing my certificate program and student teaching in Pittsburgh Public Schools. I came to Baltimore County and asked to interview at any school where I could create opportunity for students who needed a strong role model. After interviewing at eight schools, I simply felt a tug in my heart drawing me to Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts. When at Patapsco, my immediate goal was to engage students by truly becoming a 21st Century educator who values what all students bring to the classroom.

I began my work as the full effects of the shuttered manufacturing industry hit the Dundalk school community. An auto plant had just closed and a steel plant was not far behind. Our Free and Reduced Meals population at Patapsco rose from 27% in 2006-2007 to 50% this past year. During that time, I was charged with developing an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) college-preparatory program aimed at helping students overcome the increasing challenges of our community to reach their college dreams. For the last six years I have recruited cohorts of students not unlike the student I was--students in the middle and, in need--designing a program to shepherd and support them through a rigorous high school course path and preparing them for college. We have built that program. In the program's last two graduating classes 98% of students received admission to a four year college. Each of those AVID senior classes of fewer than 30 students earned more merit scholarship money than the other 300 students in their graduating classes combined. As a whole, our students outpace their peers on standardized testing, attendance, GPA, college admission and college enrollment. This happened because of the lesson learned back in Mr. Schurtz's AP English—engage students and push them to excel. This work has been incredibly rewarding, whether that comes in seeing students gently serving meals to the homeless, or greeting them as they run into my room proud of a report card, or parents feeling a parent's tearful hug for supporting their child. It has also been rewarding to support school-wide achievement--Patapsco, despite its rise in FARMS population, was honored in 2013 as one of America's top high schools by both *The Washington Post* and *U.S. News and World Report* for the first time in its 50 year history.

Looking back at my brief but deep teaching career I take great pride in having helped to make the culture at Patapsco. Beyond the AVID program, my English students outperform their peers on state assessments and regularly delight in telling me how, “This is the first time I'm enjoying reading at home.” I also spent two months with 27 BCPS students living with families and attending school in Xi'an, China as part of an exchange program, and I have aided in the training of teachers at Towson University for four years and have been a leader in shaping our county's English curriculum. I have coached runners to the State Championships and novices to a life-long love of tennis. These accomplishments are important to me but pale in comparison to the sense of purpose I feel in finding students, many living lives of quiet anxiety, and providing them a role model who will be a rock in their lives and seeing them blossom with the right support and motivation. Mr. Schurtz invested in me and inspired my efforts to find more in myself than I knew was there. I have worked to engage my students and push them to achieve the excellence within them. Every child deserves nothing less, and my calling is to champion that effort.

III. Community Involvement

I aspire to model a sense of service to my students. I expect students to leave my room better readers, writers and thinkers, but I also hope they leave as better people. When a student asks about the blister on my hand and I can share that I got it doing some landscaping work at a local homeless shelter, they think of me--and the idea of being a “give first” person--a little differently. Working with the tenants of the Harford Family House to revamp their playground, or beautify their landscaping or to move a family to a different apartment is an opportunity to remember our shared humanity, to provide a kindness. It's also an opportunity to remember those less fortunate and the reality of a hard fall that may face my students if they don't mature with grace and compassion.

To this end, I strive to involve students in developing a sense of service. Some of my fondest memories are working shoulder to shoulder with my students as we pulled discarded shopping carts and stoves from a local creek bed, planted trees in the community and participated in a walkathon to raise awareness and research funds for retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye condition afflicting one of my students. Each winter, we adopt at least one family, raise funds and gather donated food to provide them with some semblance of the holiday spirit. These memories are each precious, but it is our five-year tradition of serving meals and delivering donations to Neighbors in Need at Middle River Baptist Church that has been most fulfilling. Graduates come back on break and continue to serve with us. I have had few prouder moments than watching two sophomore boys take some middle school students “shopping” through the donations of the “clothes closet,” convincing them that the best of what was available looked “tight;” or, when two girls I admonished as freshmen for whispering and giggling to each other about a disheveled student in class, served meals with a giving spirit to some folks who were living in the woods. These are the moments that arise when we allow ourselves the opportunity to serve the community in meaningful ways, when students step outside of their comfortable world to become “give-first” people.

The opportunity to model service has been presented again as I have answered the call to serve in launching a community center, the Epicenter, in a needy area of my home community. Here we have designed an after-school program where I will serve to support and mentor students of all grade levels with homework help, cooperative play and a safe environment. In addition to these programs the center will foster positive relationships with adults for many children who come from single-parent households.

IV. Philosophy of Teaching

Public education is the guarantor of the bedrock American principles of individual opportunity and collective responsibility. Our schools must provide the opportunity for any individual to become educated and economically competitive. For the collective, our classrooms are the soil in which the compassion and capability of our next citizens are sown. My teaching is built on the belief that relationships and engagement can turn challenges into opportunity for excellence for all students. As we embrace that truth, we create citizens who can live the American dream.

Just as we hope to produce fully realized, well-rounded young adults capable of enjoying all this world has to offer, teachers need to bring that humanity and personality to the classroom through building relationships with students. Walk into a classroom where that shared humanity, love and compassion does not exist between students and teacher, and you'll be able to tell that the air has left that room, and that the best chance for meaningful learning has left with it. Last week, one of my English students came in after school and asked, "What do you think of me becoming a teacher?" I told him—because I believe it—that I could see him doing almost anything if he set himself to it. Curious as to which subject he was leaning toward, I asked what he was considering. "It doesn't really matter," he replied, "I just want to have as much fun as you do every day." Relationships reveal the infectious joy of learning.

A strong teacher-student relationship facilitates the opportunity for deeper learning and more critical thinking. That combination results in an ability and determination to tackle more challenging work with real world application. When I think about my students, I imagine them as global citizens 15 years after leaving my classroom. What are my hopes for them? I hope that they are able to effectively communicate and work productively with an array of people- they must be able to collaborate. I hope that they can think independently about the ideas put before them by the media, politicians and mainstream culture-they need to think critically. I hope they will remain of agile mind in order to adjust, respond and contribute to a rapidly changing world-they must become lifelong learners. These hopes drive my teaching style to value collaboration and complexity.

Because the real world is collaborative and extends beyond physical space, that is also how my class operates. This semester one of my students put it bluntly when she said, following a debate, "I feel like I'm not learning on my own here; I learn from everyone." That learning happens consistently in my class, by design. Whether through face-to-face or digital learning, collaboration is a hallmark of my classroom. In our English classes the students bring the questions that drive our discussions of whole class texts. Students comment and critique one another's blog posts, students run their own book talks in literature circles and over Twitter and it's the students who own the revision process for phased writing. AVID students rely on

one another for positive peer modeling within a goal-oriented community but also very practically rely on one another in weekly content-based tutorial groups. Learning to work with others is a skill, and one we work to intentionally build in my classroom.

One of our society's greatest tenets is pluralism-tolerating more than one idea and perspective at a time. This is also the beauty and challenge of English content, because answers are more than right and wrong. Responses are nuanced, couched within our own interpretation and experiences, and are either well-supported and defended or soon proven inferior. When some students enter my classroom, they want nothing more than the certainty of one right answer, but that is so rarely the case in the challenges of the real world. As students uncover the complexity in pluralist thinking they grow into critical thinkers, and thus they can engage complex academic material and the challenges of their own lives with new tools. This comes alive when students learn to apply critical lenses to literature but also when they consider others' perspectives in personal situations. Given the tools of rhetoric and the opportunity to develop the power to apply them, students are shown that their voice and opinion matters. But students also need to apply those tools in a way fitting of their generation, who would sooner get a trending hashtag on Twitter for an injustice than write a letter to their congressman. The students I work with have flourished through the tools of technology, which provide new methods of inquiry, collaboration and products through cloud-based research tools, blog communities, documentary short films, twitter backchannels, and collaborative writing with Google docs. This empowerment will increase exponentially when we can put a device in each student's hands.

There is both daily joy and reward in seeing students achieve excellence by becoming collaborative and critical thinkers, in seeing them leave for the summer as more thoughtful people better equipped to face their world. Some rewards in this teaching show quantitative excellence through surveys, assessments, diplomas, admissions and enrollment. There are also meaningful anecdotal rewards in students developing a love of reading or choosing to serve others, a parent's tearful hug at graduation or a child arriving at the classroom door in a moment of need. As a teacher I know that my effectiveness is the greatest influence inside the schoolhouse on a child's performance. As a tested-area teacher. I have held myself accountable to those student-assessments. Under a new teacher evaluation protocol I look forward to adding measures of student growth that can assess student progress from a pre-assessment to a post-assessment. This will truly help me learn, as a reflective practitioner, what strategies and techniques are most effective in helping students meet the standards, and where I need to improve my practice.

V. Educational Issues and Trends

In his famous “This is Water” commencement address, David Foster Wallace tells the story of two young fish swimming along when they come upon an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How's the water?” The two young fish swim on and eventually one looks over at the other and says, “What the heck is water?” Wallace uses this story to illustrate that often the most obvious and important realities of our lives are the hardest to recognize and discuss. But as a teacher in 2013 this rings true in a different way. We create lesson plan templates, take courses, and attend professional development that explicitly focus on adding technology into the classroom. For our students, technology is not an addition to their world. It is as ubiquitous and assumed an aspect of their environment as the water in a fish tank.

In *Technopoly* Neil Postman wrote that certain technologies are not additive but transformative, like a drop of food coloring in a glass of water. The combination of having the whole of human knowledge available on the internet, the accessibility of that resource at each student's fingertips, and the new creative tools available is a transformative change for education. But the classrooms of 2013, when this technology exists, far too often and far too regularly resemble the classrooms of 1913 rather than the learning environment we owe to a 21st-century student. Technology is the context in which today's students' lives occur. They deserve to learn in a context that fully utilizes that resource. Their best learning environment is one that is learner-centered, personalized and blended between face-to-face and digital learning. A failure to move toward this best learning environment for our current students, digital natives that they are, is leading to a loss of the engagement struggle.

Courses and classrooms designed around delivering information that students know can be accessed in seconds from the device in their pocket and will lead to the question students have asked for ages—”Why are we learning this?” In this scenario, there is no good answer. Too often the material can be referenced in just moments. As students detect the insignificance of their learning activities, they will increasingly disengage. Imagine being a young, bright student, eager to learn, if only the teacher could meet you with the right mix of challenging stimuli. Instead, too often you confront questions with a single answer and content you cannot see being alive in the world. Because of respect for teachers and the cultural capital of the diploma among other reasons, most students still comply. But compliance cannot be our bar for success. We must utilize the instructional technology tools available to us to meet students in their context. Technology alone does not improve student achievement, but when it is coupled with a well-prepared and effective educator, implementing a student-centered curriculum based in best practices, it can be a game-changer.

This is the time for that change. We have adopted a modern set of well-designed standards that are focused on

molding students to be college-and-career ready in the 21st century, and through that lens lend themselves to encouraging real-world learning and student-centered lessons. The Common Core tells students that none of their learning takes place in a vacuum. Students are building skills that are cross-curricular and will train them to be problem-solvers. These standards are a bellwether, a call to our educational institutions to evolve. We must embrace an evolution to a modern and learner-centered curriculum, maximizing the abilities of technology to engage students in creativity, collaboration, and project-based learning.

This shift must be collaborative across stakeholders. We cannot afford to get this wrong for students. We must carefully examine what works in schools based on evidence and not assumption. Our curricula need to be revamped to engage students through inquiry with exemplary schools, classrooms and projects highlighted as models. Teachers already in the classroom need to be trained and supported during their individual efforts to evolve their delivery of instruction. Teacher-preparatory programs should be more selective, champion the blended learning model, and place pre-service teachers in classrooms throughout their higher education experience. Education agencies must be communicative to remove uncertainty and fear from the public. Parents must demand the funding from local governments that will allow all students access to the tools and resources of modern learning. As a society, if we want to ensure equity in opportunity, we must ensure a basic level of equity in the conditions of learning. If technology is allowed to be for the “haves” and denied to the “have not’s” then we will expand our nation’s largest achievement gap, that between students who are low-income and those who are not.

In making this change we must be vigilant not to succumb to the belief that throwing technology into schools will guarantee achievement. We are not changing the mission to be “focused” on technology. Learning should still be based in sound pedagogy and effective teachers, helping students develop the skills and habits that will serve them for a lifetime, particularly when those skills make up the ability to continuously learn. But we cannot sacrifice that mission with the medium of an archaic classroom focused on knowledge acquisition. Gone are the days when the best way to educate students was with a teacher standing at the board at the front of the room. The technology, therefore, must be a seamlessly integrated element of collaborative, student-centered, personalized learning, as unseen, yet imperative, as the air in the room or the water in a fish tank.

VI. The Teaching Profession

My work to strengthen and improve the teaching profession spans support for pre-service teachers, transitioning new teachers and supporting the work of classroom veterans. Towson University trains more educators than any other college in Maryland. As an adjunct faculty member, I teach a section of an Education Writing course that is required of all education majors. Through this course, I support pre-service teachers to develop some of the habits of effective teaching -- being a listener, being reflective, and being openly communicative. These students respond to the blog entries of my English 10 students. This provides an authentic audience and helpful feedback for my 10th graders and real-world practice in giving feedback and supporting student growth for the Towson students. I have also had the opportunity to foster candid conversation around burgeoning educational topics and bring students to the Towson classroom for candid discussions about what they believe works and what does not in the classroom. I have regularly heard that the way I run this course brings an authenticity and real-world connection to the course that pre- service teachers find lacking in much of their other coursework.

Though now single orientation can prepare a new teacher for the rigors of the classroom, my own new teacher orientation experience was woefully inadequate. Since that year, I have worked, first at the level of my own schoolhouse and since at the district level, to improve that experience for teachers. I have learned to provide practical tips and resources to make establishing a classroom culture more successful. We also focus on establishing the practice of backward mapping or using “Understanding by Design” to create a first unit plan. I also support the work of classroom English teachers in Baltimore County by writing curriculum and presenting professional development.

This year, the role within my school has expanded to support other teachers in my building as they develop as instructors. In the morning, I observe and give feedback on instruction in classrooms, co-teach or demonstrate lessons and plan professional development as needed for our faculty, and in the afternoon, I teach. Though I have only been in this Staff Development Teacher role for a few months, it has offered me the ability to provide direct one-on-one support to over 30 faculty members in my building. Additionally, I have worked with my principal to design a professional learning program in our building grounded in the foundation of andragogy--self-direction, direct relevant application, and flexibility. Our program, “Patapsco University,” has been so well embraced upon implementation that it has already been presented at the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals and will be shared as a model for professional development statewide through a webinar with the Maryland State Department of Education.

In 2013, an outstanding educator is not limited to supporting the profession within his district or even his state. As a connected educator I regularly interact with teachers across the country and the world to share best practices, resources and ideas

through Twitter's #edchat and #engchat discussions, connecting through blogging networks as well as attending webinars virtually and edcamp “unconferences” in person. There is a building network of connected educators who are working to end the practice of teaching in a silo and I am glad to count myself among their number.

I believe in accountability for teachers. The teacher is the most important in-school factor for student achievement and as a system we need to ensure students are getting the best educators possible. Currently, the basis for accountability in the teaching profession is a combination of qualitative assessment through classroom observation and, in many states, some level of quantitative assessment. In Maryland, that quantitative element is a combination of student assessment data when appropriate and student learning outcomes (SLOs). This model is newly implemented for this school year.

As a high school English teacher I often teach students who take the state assessment and thus their scores on that assessment would be part of my evaluation. Without more information about how those test scores factor into my evaluation, using them is a challenging prospect for me. Without an aligned pre-assessment, student scores are not showing academic growth within the same group of students. Instead, scores would be comparing one group to a target likely identified based on an entirely different group of students from the previous year. In my career, I have been asked to teach sections of our most challenging students because the students I teach are traditionally more successful on state assessments than their peers. In the past I gladly took the challenge, grew a great deal as a teacher, and helped many students score proficient on the assessment, but not at previous rates. Without an aligned pre-assessment and post-assessment for the same students, I worry that taking an assignment such as this, which is in the best interest of students and our school, would be counterintuitive in light of the evaluation model. I believe many teachers could support a model that fairly implements a valid pre-assessment and post-assessment and that covers a wide range of skills and allows students to demonstrate their learning and abilities.

The other piece of our quantitative component are SLOs. These outcomes are set through a conference between administrators and the teacher and allows for the selection of a specific target population and targeted area of growth. This system appeals because it allows for flexibility in aligning to areas for teacher growth, areas of student deficit and can work across content areas.

This discussion of the quantitative elements is not to dismiss the qualitative, with which many are more familiar. This is an imperative element of evaluation because instructional delivery and classroom culture are more directly in control of the educator and something they have more autonomy over. They are truly assessments of the teacher designed for the teacher, rather than using assessments of students to reflect on the teacher.

VII. State/National Teacher of the Year

Every child needs a champion. Every child needs an adult in their life who values them, believes in them and expects great things from them until the child can come to expect those things of themselves. This was true in my life and has proven true in the interactions I have had with young people throughout my career as an educator. I believe that author Wes Stafford is correct when he says that every child has an invisible chalkboard that is attached to their hearts and minds, and that they carry that chalkboard with them. And as they interact with people, their chalkboards fill with the messages the world gives them; some fill with support and confidence, some with doubt and negativity. As they fill, each child begins to walk down a path in life. And as we educators come into contact with our students it is imperative that we author messages of hope and belief onto their chalkboards; that we erase negativity and fill their boards with value, high expectations, care, and empathy. As we conduct our work, as we deal with challenges, each student learns from us. They take notes on the other side of that chalkboard about our conduct, about how we deal with disappointment, how we hold expectations and how we care for every child in our classroom. Because every child in every classroom deserves a champion who will stand with them and for them and shine the light of hope into their lives.

Just as every individual child needs a champion, our public school system must champion every student. We must adopt and embrace standards that afford every student the opportunity for a 21st-century education that will prepare them to be globally competitive. We must demand early-childhood education access so that students can enter Kindergarten on equal footing, and access to broadband internet for every child to employ a bank of learning resources limited only by their own determination. Most educators are familiar with hearing someone lament in frustration that “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make them drink!” While we cannot force a drink, we can certainly put some salt in the oats. We can increase the appeal of learning with an eye to inquiry and innovation. Learning can align with the natural curiosities and digital native culture of the children we serve. Our curricula and lessons can be driven by the call to answer challenging questions and solve real-world problems. We can provide students with blended teaming that aligns the best digital content and creation opportunities with the irreplaceable value of personal interaction with an effective educator. Most importantly, we cannot champion every student by educating in little classrooms of isolation. We need our classrooms to be connected to the great work of other educators and our schools to be connected to the world for which we are preparing our students. In order to foster school systems that champion every student we must collaborate to leverage our best practices and best resources.

To Maryland Teacher of the Year Selection Committee,

Teaching is something to aspire to. Being able to lead and inspire your pupils is not a mundane ability, but one that is fostered through compassion and dedication. After being taught by a mediocre teacher in my AVID college preparatory course during my freshman year in high school, I had very low expectations for my sophomore instructor. Little did I know that this teacher, Sean McComb, would possess the dedication and passion that positively changed my life forever.

Being in Sean McComb's class for the preceding three years was an invigorating experience. The high expectations he had for us led me to become more academically motivated because I did not want to disappoint him and in effect, learned to become more self-regulated. I realized that when I was not putting forth my best effort I was not only disappointing him but I was disappointing myself. I started to really care about my education, not only to receive good grades but also for the actual knowledge I was receiving from it. By knowledge I do not mean just equations for a math problem or the definition of an SAT vocabulary word, I am referring to the knowledge in life that shapes and forms one's morals and ethics.

Sean McComb was always testing us, trying to discover what we cared about, what really mattered to us in and outside of the classroom. One of the units, from his tenth grade English class that really stuck with me was when we were discussing topics of race and reading *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. I knew all about the racism that African Americans faced in the 1950's and I believed that I was not a racist person. However, I had never learned about the prejudice that many Muslim-Americans faced post 9/11 and after reflecting on it initially, I knew I was not overtly racist but subconsciously I think I had some resentment toward people of Arab descent. Mr. McComb changed these ignorant thoughts. We learned that al-Qaida took up a very small proportion of the entire Muslim population. He gave us the analogy, The KKK is to Christianity as al-Qaida is to Islam. We discovered that we had been generalizing the Muslim-American population based on a small minority group and condemning them for actions that they had absolutely nothing to do with. In order for us to really care about the concept and its effects on the Muslim-American population we read *The Kite Runner*. I learned about Amir's trip to America and the adversity he faced once he arrived. I cared about Amir and I started to resent those who were so closed-minded to judge him based on his ethnicity--people like me.

This is just one of the lessons that Mr. McComb has taught me, but there are countless others. I learned to care about my education, which drove me to college. I found passion in the idea of opening the minds of young adults, as Mr. McComb had done for me. I am now entering my senior year at the University of Pittsburgh, studying English Literature on the track to become a high school teacher. I can honestly say that Sean McComb has been the most influential person in my life and I cannot imagine any teacher that deserves to be recognized for his accomplishments more than him because he changed my life and I can never thank him enough for that. Without his guidance throughout high school I have no idea where I would be academically or ethically. He always demanded the best from us and now after being mentored by him I can say I always demand the best of myself.

Sincerely,

Scott Taylor
University of Pittsburgh Class of 2014, English Literature
Sigma Alpha Mu Fraternity, Psi Chapter, Vice President
Vokols A Cappella, President
Undergraduate Teaching Assistant, Englit 0562

Maryland Teacher of the Year Selection Committee,

Distinguished Members, today we write to you to recommend Mr. Sean McComb, winner of the Baltimore County Teacher of the Year and now a candidate for Maryland Teacher of the Year for 2013, be recognized for that statewide accolade. He has gone above and beyond the standard expectations of a teacher in today's education system. Our daughter, Catelyn Jansen, was fortunate enough to be a part of the AVID Program at Patapsco High School from 2009 through 2012. During that time, Mr. McComb was not only the Director of the program but Catelyn's AVID teacher for all four years.

We've been involved volunteers throughout our children's schooling and during that time have come to know many fine teachers. After Catelyn's success in the program, we reflect back on a statement made by one of her previous teachers, "the program is EXCELLENT but will only be as good as the Director that runs it!" Undoubtedly, Patapsco had the BEST Director for the program and Catelyn would not be where she is today without him!

Here are some examples why Sean McComb should be Maryland Teacher of the Year:

- Sean McComb is not only a teacher but a mentor, often pushing his AVID students to exceed their own expectations, extolling the virtues of hard work, determination, and never giving up. His genuine interest in wanting all his students to succeed was clearly evident in his daily interactions with his students.
- Sean would talk about his very tough childhood openly to his AVID students hoping to inspire them, that with hard work and effort, no matter how bad things are you're faced with, you can make it through and be successful.
- He would make it a point to have lunch with his students at least once a week so they would get to know each other more on a personal level. Sean genuinely cares for all his students.
- He writes inspirational letters to every one of his students at the end of the school year, telling them how proud he is of them and points out all their amazing qualities. Catelyn took these letters with her to college and reads them from time to time when she feels a little down or needs some motivation.
- Sean would host the AVID Olympics game day to not only educate his students but have fun doing it.
- Every year he would help the students accrue volunteer service hours by organizing work at food kitchens and/or clothing drives. He would even provide transportation to those who otherwise would not be able to participate.
- He made it a point to attend all his student athletes' games throughout the school year.
- In 11th grade, Catelyn knew she wanted to pursue a degree in nursing. Sean e-mailed information that he came across about a local hospital looking for high school students interested in the nursing field to work during the summer. This was typical of Sean, always giving all his students every opportunity that he could think of to better themselves and their chances for the future.

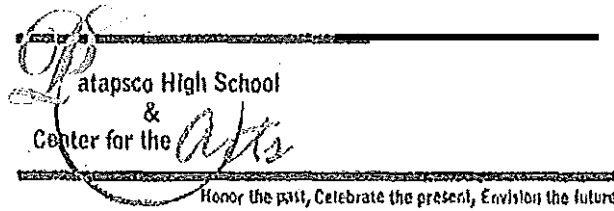
On a more personal issue, Catelyn had the typical teenage drama in school that at times really got her depressed about school and life in general. During her senior year, due to a soured relationship with another student, Catelyn decided she was not going to play lacrosse her final season. We reached out to Sean as we did on many occasions for help with getting her back on track. He was very attentive to our concerns and would speak with Catelyn before the end of the day, relating his own personal regrets from his high school years of things he didn't do, etc... No matter his schedule load, if he knew one of his students was in need, whether it be a shoulder to cry on or a calming word of encouragement, he would be there to help his students.

So when you think of great individuals who inspired their people to excel, Sean McComb is one of those great examples, a role model human being and teacher for all to emulate. We feel that Sean's dedication to his students is the reason Catelyn graduated in the top percentage of her class, was a member of the National Honor Society, the English Honor Society, a multi-sport scholar athlete, and scholarship recipient. She attends Salisbury University and completed her freshman year on the Dean's List. Sean was the first person she notified of her being named to the Dean's list because of the profound impact he's had on her life. We believe that the aforementioned has clearly depicted why he is truly the best candidate for Maryland Teacher of the Year 2013.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to bring this matter to your attention.

Sincerely,

Mr. & Mrs. Onas Wm. Jansen III



May 21, 2013

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with confidence that I highly recommend Mr. Sean McComb for Maryland State Teacher of the Year. When I nominated Sean for the Baltimore County Teacher of the Year I had no doubt that he would be chosen because, simply put, he is completely deserving. The same confidence in Sean's state teacher application accompanies this letter of recommendation. Sean is the embodiment of what it means to be a public servant. His unending passion and commitment to student success sets him apart from other educators.

Dan Rather once said, "The dream begins, most of the time, with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes, and leads you onto the next plateau, sometimes poking you with a sharp stick called truth." Sean is passionate about believing in the students he serves. As coordinator of our AVID program he has built a program from the ground up. Last year our AVID program graduates had over \$2.3 million in offered scholarships. This total is more than all our other graduating seniors combined. Sean has also shown his commitment in service of students beyond the classroom. He chaperoned students to and hosted students from China for the Baltimore County Chinese Exchange Program, he has given up his Spring break to take students on college bus tours, and he also finds time to coach and mentor students.

Sean has demonstrated excellent rapport with all his students at Patapsco. He is by far one of the most loved faculty members at the school, yet maintains extremely rigorous standards for performance. He is that "sharp stick called truth," but he provides the truth in a way that demonstrates love and care for his students. Sean also loves what he does for a living. His story is one that reminds us all of the impact one teacher can have on someone's life. Every day he attempts to be that one teacher for his students.

I arrived at Patapsco four years ago and immediately realized that Sean not only was a gifted educator, but he also possessed an ability to see the bigger picture. Sean joined my leadership team and since that time he has continued to bring an insightful classroom perspective to every discussion. Most recently, Sean educated himself and then provided professional development on the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching. Sean's ability to breakdown the framework and provide the needed scaffolding has allowed our team to easily transition to the new teacher evaluation process.

I believe Mr. Sean McComb is the natural choice for Maryland State Teacher of the Year and I highly endorse his application. I'm confident once you meet this extraordinary educator you will see why we're so lucky to have him at Patapsco. He would be an exceptional ambassador for Maryland!

Sincerely,

Ryan Imbriale
Principal
Patapsco High School & Center for the Arts