

Reflection on the Retirement of Ken Westerman by Jonathan Glawe
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In hearing of the retirement of my friend and colleague Kenneth Westerman from Pioneer High School, I immediately felt the need to walk the 20 feet to his office next door, give him a big hug, thank him for what he has done for education, and wish him all the best in the future. Instead, as I arrived at his door, all of that changed as I saw how focused he was preparing for his 2nd hour choir class, just as he has done for the past 3 decades. Instead of having this emotional exchange, I simply asked him if he needed anything. He smiled, and said, nope I am doing fine, and continued to prepare for class. For many people, an interaction like this may seem strange at such a monumental moment, but for Kenneth Westerman, it is fitting of what his focus has been his entire career.

The priorities of Mr. Ken Westerman have always been to serve his students to his fullest ability with consistency and professionalism. I can't think of a person I have met in education yet who has demonstrated these qualities more than Ken. In July of 2008, I arrived in Ann Arbor with many questions about the massive job ahead of me and a few short months of summer to absorb my new surroundings. I figured I would be the only teacher at school in July preparing for the fall, but I was pleasantly surprised to find Ken at school bright and early each day preparing for his school year right along with me. Each day, we would chat and get to know each other as we prepared. I discovered right away, that he would be someone whom I could trust and always get advice from in tough situations.

Over these few years of working together, Ken has shared with me the history of the music program in Ann Arbor, his road to Pioneer, and has reminded me to not sweat the little things; make the student's education my number one priority. His advice has always been straight to the point and has proven to be right over and over again. Though he has taught for more years than I have even been alive, I have never felt like I was treated unprofessionally or inferior, even when I would approach him with a "rookie" question. From day one, I have felt that Ken Westerman would support the decisions I would make as Director of Orchestras at Pioneer if I were honest, straight forward, and if my decisions would enhance the education of my students.

How rare is it to find a teacher like Ken Westerman who fully demonstrates the ability to teach the process of making music as much, if not more, than working toward a performance product. His students often discuss how because of his instruction, they finally understand the intricacies of making music including detailed music theory knowledge, the ability to sight read, and how to maintain the voice properly. Many music teachers fall into the trap of teaching toward the performance. For students of Ken Westerman, success is measured in these day-to-day educational activities. In the end, the performances of Ken's choirs are of very high quality, and it makes me smile knowing the road that his students have had to the performance has been done in a comprehensive way.

With under two weeks left of teaching in this school year, I expect that Ken will continue doing what he has always done up until the last minute of the last school day. It is his character to finish what he has started and to be consistent to the end. As a relatively new teacher, I consider Ken Westerman to be one of the most important mentors I have had, and I am a better person and educator because he is now a part of my life. Ken, thank you for providing stability and meaningful memories to thousands of students, colleagues, and friends. You will be missed, and you will always be remembered.