

# In what other profession...



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I'm going to step out of my usual third-person writing voice for a moment. As a parent I received a letter last week from the Kansas State Board of Education, informing me that my children's school district had been placed on "improvement" status for failing to meet "adequate yearly progress" under the No Child Left Behind law.

I thought it ironic that our schools were judged inadequate by people who haven't set foot in them, so I wrote a letter to my local newspaper. Predictably, my letter elicited a deluge of comments in the paper's online forum. Many remarks came from armchair educators and anti-teacher, anti-public school evangelists quick to discredit anything I had to say under the rationale of "he's a teacher." What could a teacher possibly know about education?

Countless arguments used to denigrate public school teachers begin with the phrase "in what other profession..." and conclude with practically anything the anti-teacher pundits find offensive about public education. Due process and collective bargaining are favorite targets, as are the erroneous but tightly held beliefs that teachers are under-worked, over-paid (earning million-dollar pensions), and not accountable for anything.

In what other profession, indeed.

In what other profession are the licensed professionals considered the LEAST knowledgeable about the job? You seldom if ever hear "that guy couldn't possibly know a thing about law enforcement – he's a police officer", or "she can't be trusted talking about fire safety – she's a firefighter."

In what other profession is experience viewed as a liability rather than an asset? You won't find a contractor advertising "choose me – I've never done this before", and your doctor won't recommend a surgeon on the basis of her "having very little experience with the procedure".

In what other profession is the desire for competitive salary viewed as proof of callous indifference towards the job? You won't hear many say "that lawyer charges a lot of money, she obviously doesn't care about her clients", or "that coach earns millions – clearly he doesn't care about the team."

But look around. You'll find droves of armchair educators who summarily dismiss any statement about education when it comes from a teacher. Likewise, it's easy to find politicians, pundits, and profiteers who refer to our veteran teachers as ineffective, overpriced "dead wood". Only the rookies could possibly be any good, or worth the food-stamp-eligible starting salaries we pay them.

And if teachers dare ask for a raise, this is taken by many as clear evidence that teachers don't give a porcupine's posterior about kids. In fact, some say if teachers really cared about their students they would insist on earning LESS money.

If that entire attitude weren't bad enough, what other profession is legally held to PERFECTION by 2014? Are police required to eliminate all crime? Are firefighters required to eliminate all fires? Are doctors required to cure all patients? Are lawyers required to win all cases? Are coaches required to win all games? Of course they aren't.

For no other profession do so many outsiders refuse to accept the realities of an imperfect world. Crime happens. Fire happens. Illness happens. As for lawyers and coaches, where there's a winner there must also be a loser. People accept all these realities, until they apply to public education.

If a poverty-stricken, drug-addled meth-cooker burns down his house, suffers third degree burns, and then goes to jail; we don't blame the police, fire department, doctors, and defense attorneys for his predicament. But if that kid doesn't graduate high school, it's clearly the teacher's fault.

And if someone – anyone - tries to tell you otherwise; don't listen. He or she must be a teacher!



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