

- What an inspiring presentation from James Lawrence. One might even describe following such a presentation to be “impossible,” ... but, since we in the education arena are faced with redefining the impossible, I’ll accept the challenge.
- I am Amber Shill a Canyons School District Board Member and President of Utah School Boards Association. I want to thank you all for taking time to be here with us today. I know how incredibly busy you are, and I hope you are able to draw some inspiration from today’s conference. I hope you are able to pause and reflect on the challenges you’ve overcome these past few years and the opportunities you’ve seized.
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- I hope you are able to see what **I see**: A room of skilled, passionate, and dedicated (I won’t say tireless, because let’s be honest, we’re all tired)...but incredibly committed champions of children.
- We see you. If you take anything away from what I say today, please let it be this: **We see you**.
- I say this as a parent of school-aged children and as a School Board member — as someone who has personally observed several of you doing whatever it takes to help your students feel seen.
- Everyone wants to be seen and heard, to feel included, recognized, appreciated, to know they have something to contribute — and I’ve seen the lengths you’ll go to give this validation and reassurance to your students and faculties.
- I’ve seen you greeting students (by name) as they arrive to school each morning with smiles, fist-bumps and high-fives. I’ve seen you harness community resources to make sure your students have clean clothes, nutritious food, and school supplies — even dipping into your own personal savings if necessary.
- I’ve seen you listen to students, because when we listen to teenagers, they’ll tell us what they need. If it’s a lack of transportation that’s keeping a student from arriving to school on time, our school administrators secure bus vouchers. They fight for accommodations and resources so students aren’t defined by their disabilities or their parents’ struggles...and so much more.
- I’ve seen you arrange personalized graduation ceremonies for students who, because of an illness or injury, couldn’t make it to school to cross the commencement stage.

I've seen you befriend those who are isolated and alone, stand up to injustice, dispense discipline when needed while also extending grace to boundary-testing students who need someone to believe in them. I've seen you ease burdens, keep the peace, and heard tales of some of you saving lives as you've rushed to deliver CPR to a parent, student, or colleague before first responders could arrive.

- The job of a secondary school administrator has always been difficult, but the pandemic has made it nearly impossible. Assistant principals and principals are the calm in the storm, the cheerleaders-in-chief for your faculty and staff, a listening ear for parents, and mentor to students. You manage the financial, disciplinary, instructional, and operational affairs of their schools — a job that not uncommonly requires pulling 65 to 70-hour workweeks. Now, add “health expert” to your mix of duties...and custodian...and lunch worker...am I right? In the past, I've known administrators to serve lunch as a way of connecting with students (now with the pandemic-related labor shortages, they're sometimes having to serve lunch on a semi-permanent basis) or (even more commonly) to substitute teach.
- The pandemic has tested all of us. Yet, at a time of great loss and fear — and amid a backdrop of ever-changing health guidelines — you have stayed positive, boosted morale for teachers, and kept students safe, healthy, and learning. It hasn't been easy. The work of a school administrator never is. But, I wager, if we pulled any of you aside, you'd confide the job is also incredibly rewarding.
- I know that, in times like these, it can be easy to lose sight of those rewards. I suspect there have been moments this year when some of you have reached a breaking point and wondered for how much longer you can do this.
- But I hope it helps to know you're not alone. I hope it helps to know that we see you, that we rely on your expertise, trust your professionalism, and are forever grateful for your light and leadership.
- Historically, epidemics have been followed by periods of civil unrest, and we're living it now. It's a new kind of challenge — a new kind of impossible — and, once again, there are no easy, one-sized-fits-all answers. But if past experience tells us anything, it's that we're up to the challenge. Amid all the noise dominating the airwaves, and social media, public schools still serve as a unifying force in the community and save haven for learning.
- History is long. We'll make it to the other side of this sprint of a marathon, and we'll be stronger for it. But no one can do it alone, so please: Don't ever hesitate to reach out to your District leadership and School Boards for the support and resources you need. Don't forget to practice self-care, and please, please, don't forget ... **we see you.**