

# Center for Inspired Teaching

*The following is a transcript from Aleta Margolis' speech at Chocolate Inspiration, hosted by the Embassy of Italy - February 7, 2008.*

Thank you, Paul, and welcome everyone. I speak for all of us at Inspired Teaching when I express my deepest gratitude to all of you for helping to strengthen our organization – 12 years young and growing -- and for blazing the trail that will allow our revolution to take root.

A special thank you to everyone at the Embassy of Italy including Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta and especially Donatella Verrone and Sylvia Limoncini who have made us feel so welcome. We are grateful to our guest chefs Chris Blume of Christopher's Confections; Peter Brett of Circle Bistro; Michael Hanratty of Meinyu; David Shan of Il Mulino; and Jason Tepper of La Miche. And a very special thanks goes to Jayne Nochumowitz from Occasions Catering.

Heartfelt thanks also to the incredibly talented Claudia Ades of Eventfully whose vision and precision have made tonight our most beautiful event yet.

Thank you also to all of tonight's sponsors and our colleagues from the DC Public Schools.

And where would we be without Inspired Teaching's board of directors and, especially our staff—my colleagues who give every day of their hearts and minds to make our organization strong. In particular, thank you to Andrea Dettelbach, Eneida Alcalde, Mike Dalious, and Jenna Fournel, without whom we would not be here tonight.

At Inspired Teaching we believe a good teacher can take any subject and turn it into an engaging and relevant lesson. Let's see what we can do with the story of chocolate.

Centuries ago chocolate was a delicacy enjoyed only by a lucky few. Chocolate's evolution into a standard item in restaurants and grocery stores is filled with examples of social problem solving, innovative scientific thinking, and political decision-making.

Chocolate shows up in the history books in connection with the abolition of slavery, the industrial revolution, and today's globalized economy. Thoughtful, innovative, creative people had to figure out profitable and socially responsible ways to grow, trade, process, manufacture, and distribute chocolate to make it widely available...and aren't we glad they did!

In some ways the story of education in our country is similar to that of chocolate. Access to schools was once the privilege of a lucky few. Today, it is a guaranteed right of every American.

As you can see tonight, the chocolate keeps getting better and better each year. The question is, can we say the same thing about our schools?

Today's school's are based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century model that was designed to churn out farm workers and factory workers. Today's schools still emphasize skills like memorization and recall of facts. But today's economy demands employees with the ability to seek and find information, make connections, and anticipate and solve problems. We are challenging our workers, but are we challenging our students in the same way?

- *It's not enough* for our students to learn the mechanics of writing if they haven't also learned the value of writing to express what is inside their minds.
- *It's not enough* for our students to fill in the right bubble on a multiple choice algebra exam if they don't understand why they need to know algebra in the first place.
- *It's not enough* for our students to be able to list the three branches of government or recite the names of the Presidents in order if they haven't had the opportunity to develop the analytical skills they'll need when it's time for them to cast their own votes and, for some, to enter public service.

We don't have to settle for schools that value complacency over intellectual curiosity.

Any educator will tell you that the worst thing we can do when it comes to educating our students is to settle...to settle for students not reading or achieving basic math skills because they get lost in the system. Our teachers don't have to feel limited by old fashioned ideas about teaching that force them to settle for less than their full potential as educators.

At Inspired Teaching, we don't settle.

Because of the work of the Inspired Teachers and principals here tonight (wearing Inspired Orange roses) and many more like them throughout the city, we are changing the way DC's children are educated one student, one school at a time. And they have shown that we have the potential to do so much more.

Here in DC, in Ms. Vee Lindsay's classroom, students are researching their neighborhood by interviewing residents, traveling to the city archives to uncover old maps and planning documents, conducting surveys, and learning how to use web-based information tools. They're turning their findings into presentations that they will share with a historical preservation organization. They are learning by doing. (Biers)

Inspired Teaching is rooted in the belief that every student possesses the ability to think critically, learn and understand information, and solve complex problems—and that students should spend their time in school doing just that.

We believe teachers and principals can be the agents of change who can make this happen.

And the approach works. Our results show that teachers are spending less time dealing with discipline problems and more time teaching. Their students are engaged in more challenging, meaningful work. Not only do test scores rise and attendance rates go up, but students and teachers report that they like school better.

This year, we are working with over 1000 teachers citywide, through our courses, mentoring, and whole school partnerships. And the demand continues to grow-with a waiting list of schools that want to become Inspired Teaching partner schools. We are exploring opportunities to bring Inspired Teaching to students, teachers, and principals outside DC and we're working alongside the DC school district to help a number of schools slated to merge build a positive culture and build their students' achievement.

Our GOAL is to see to it that one day soon, every child will have an Inspired Teacher.

I look forward to seeing you all next year to let you know how far we've progressed toward this goal. Speaking of next year, it's my great pleasure to announce that Chocolate Inspiration 2009 will take place at the Embassy of Switzerland. When we gather together then, we'll have a new president, more chocolate to enjoy, and, with your continued support, some serious progress toward ensuring that every child has the opportunity to experience Inspired Teaching.

Thank you.