

Steven J. McAuliffe

March 6, 2008

Dear Dr. Bush:

Thank you for your kind invitation to attend the formal dedication of the Christa McAuliffe Charter Elementary School in Cape Coral, Florida. I regret that I am unable to be with you, but I do appreciate your equally kind invitation to offer a few thoughts on this happy occasion.

First, let me assure you that Christa would be very proud, indeed, to have your new elementary school named in her honor. I can think of no recognition that would be more pleasing to Christa she would be thrilled to know that children will experience the excitement of learning in a school that carries her name.

Through the coming years, I hope your students, their parents, and the teachers and administrators who comprise your school community, will appreciate what Christa herself repeatedly stressed: that she was an ordinary person who had been given an extraordinary opportunity to fulfill a dream. But, her primary goal in pursuing that dream - that unexpected opportunity to fly and teach in space - was not personal fulfillment. Her first obligation was to credibly represent her fellow classroom teachers, and draw public attention to the fact that every school is populated with heroic teachers who, day in and day out, in countless ways, touch and inspire the explorers, the scientists, engineers, doctors, religious leaders, journalists, men and women in business, laborers, and solid citizens of tomorrow - and, yes, the teachers of tomorrow. Christa very much wanted to inspire a renewed appreciation and respect for the indispensable role teacher's play in sustaining our society, this great democratic experiment of ours.

She also hoped students would see her own experience as evidence that dreams can never be too large. I think she showed us all that heroes come in all sizes, including ordinary, and that they can be found in every town on every block. I think, by her example, she also taught young people that being true to you, whoever you are and with whatever distinct talents and traits you were given, is the most promising road to real happiness and a successful life.

Of course, in my mind Christa was not ordinary at all. She was most extraordinary, and a real-life hero, because she understood and lived by principles that most of us barely can see. She knew who she was, and she was comfortable with who she was. She was happy to make the best of the opportunities all around her with what talents she had been given. She really did treat everyone, and I mean everyone, just the way she herself would want to be treated, and she made time for anyone who needed her time. Christa was one of those terrific people who saw the good in everyone and took genuine pleasure in the success of others. She loved and supported her family and friends, always tried her best, and never let failure or frustration get her down - she just tried harder the next time. And Christa completely understood that, as a teacher, she did touch the future, so she worked very hard to touch it in the most positive way possible. She was an enthusiastic, joyous and fun person. Her easy laugh was infectious. You all would have loved knowing her.

If the students who pass through the hallways and classrooms of this new school can learn to see just a little bit past the icon -the teacher-astronaut - and appreciate why Christa was truly an extraordinary person, they will be very well served, throughout the rest of their lives, by the name on their school.

Thank you.

Best personal regards,

Steven J. McAuliffe