

**Remarks Honoring the 2014 National and State Teachers of the Year**  
*May 1, 2014*

Well, welcome to the White House. Let me start off by saying thank you to a leader of unbelievable passion and expertise and dedication, somebody who every single day wakes up and thinks about three things—either his family, basketball—[*laughter*]*—*or how to give child a world-class education—our Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. [*Applause*] Hey!

I also want to thank our Members of Congress who are here today. I am thrilled to have them here and always encourage all Members of Congress to focus on education and teachers. And I am thrilled to be welcoming all our State and national teachers of the year. So give them a big round of applause. Good job.

This is a phenomenal group, in addition to being very good looking—[*Laughter*] the best of the best. And they'd be the first to say that they're only here because they're surrounded by outstanding teachers who give all to their students every single day. Today is a chance to thank not just the teachers on this stage, but teachers all across the country. We really can't say enough about how important their role is in making sure that America succeeds. So thank you for what you're giving our children and what you're giving our Nation.

Now, it's been a while since I was in school, but I still remember all the wonderful teachers who made me who I am, who opened the world up to me, who made me feel that maybe I had something to offer and maybe saw things in me before I saw them in myself. We all had teachers like that. Talk to anybody who's succeeded in business or written a play or invented an app or broken an athletic record, and they'll tell you about a teacher or a coach who inspired them and who challenged them and taught them values and encouraged them to be curious and ask questions and explore new realms and new ideas. Everybody has got somebody like that in their lives.

That's what great teachers do. They set us on a better path. And they do it even though we ask so much of them. Teachers don't get an off day, even when they're exhausted, even when you're up all night with your own kid, even if you've got bills or something personal on your mind. Once you're in front of that class, you've got eager minds depending on you. And what a lot of people may not realize is how emotionally taxing teaching can be, because great teachers really care about their students.

You carry their struggles with you well after the school day ends. You worry about them. You're often the ones they go to with their troubles and their fears. And sometimes, you can see that they've got something on their minds even if they don't talk to you about it. Sometimes, they even reach back after they've gone off to college and may need a little advice.

And it's that all-encompassing commitment, that love that you feel for your students, that makes so many teachers go the extra mile. It's why many of you dip into your own pockets to pay for classroom supplies. It's why you spend your nights and weekends thinking about new ways to make your lessons come alive and why you work hard to build relationships with your students' families, because you want to make sure they all have the support that they need outside of the classroom, as well as in it.

So being a teacher is a 24/7 job. And yet many say there's nothing in the world they'd rather do. And that's the kind of commitment that the guests we have up on this stage today

exhibit every day. We've got teachers here from just a few miles away. We've also got teachers who came from the Mariana Islands. They teach everything from biology to music to special education. What connects them is how they challenge their kids to reach their full potential; the creativity and passion that they bring to their work, instead of just going through the motions or teaching to the test. What separates them is the lasting impact that they have on their students' lives.

And that is the story of today's primary honoree, our National Teacher of the Year for 2014, Mr. Sean McComb. Give Sean a big round of applause. Now, I wish I could say this is the biggest thing that happened to Sean this year, but that little bundle right there is Sean's. [Laughter] So we clearly are ranked second or third in terms of big stuff happening in Sean's life.

But when Sean was a high school student, he dealt with some pretty serious problems at home and spent his days feeling apathetic and disengaged. And then he entered Mr. Schurtz's English class. And Mr. Schurtz was one of those teachers who changes everything. He made Sean want to work hard. When Sean's mom passed away, Mr. Schurtz gave Sean the strength to deliver her eulogy. When Sean went to college, it was, as he put it, through the force of Mr. Schurtz's will. So Sean himself saw the impact that a teacher could have in a child's life. And it was Mr. Schurtz's example that led Sean to become an English teacher himself.

Today, at Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts in Baltimore, Sean works with kids in a college readiness program called Advancement Via Individual Determination, or AVID. And it's aimed at the kind of student Sean was in high school: students who have the ability to do the work, but need that extra push to reach their full potential. Among the last two graduating classes in the AVID program, 98 percent were admitted to a 4-year college. And they earned more merit scholarship money than the rest of the graduating class combined.

It's a tribute to Sean that one of his students asked him, "What do you think about me becoming a teacher?" Sean asked him what subject he'd want to teach, and his student said: "It doesn't matter. I just want to have as much fun as you do every day." [Laughter]

And Sean tries to instill in his students a sense of respect and obligation to each other. As one of his students said, "I feel like I'm not learning on my own here, I learn from everyone." And I think it speaks volumes about the kind of example Sean sets for his students that, as part of his application for this award, the parents of one of his students wrote a letter on his behalf. And they wrote: "[Our daughter] had the typical teenage drama in school that at times really got her depressed about school and life in general. We reached out to Sean for help with getting her back on track. No matter his schedule load, if he knew one of his students was in need, whether [for] a shoulder to cry on or a calming word of encouragement, he'd be there to help."

And there's an image from Sean's application essay that captures what he and all the teachers here are trying to accomplish. Every child has an invisible chalkboard attached to their hearts and minds that they carry with them through their lives. Some people they meet write messages of love and support. Some leave messages of negativity and doubt. It's a teacher's job to erase the negative messages and fill those boards with caring words and inspire confidence and strengthen values. Now, some of today's students might not even know what a chalkboard is anymore—[laughter]—but they do know that what a teacher gives them stays with them for a lifetime, because teachers matter.

When Michelle and I talk to students, we often tell them education is a two-way street. It's our job to provide students with great schools and great teachers, and it's their job to do their homework and work hard and do their best. The people you elect have to make sure that teachers and school districts have the resources they need to do their jobs well. And investing in education has been a top priority of mine since the day I took office. And it falls on all of us to make sure that we're encouraging our kids and reading to them and teaching them healthy, successful habits that set them on a path to college and a career and a lifetime of citizenship.

Teachers who work hard to inspire their kids every day, they too deserve our support, because these are our kids that we're grooming for all the challenges that they're going to face throughout the next generation.

So I could not be prouder of Sean and all the teachers who are here today. Sean, I'm pretty sure Mr. Schurtz would be proud of you too. And to all the teachers who are out there, and the millions who are working hard in classrooms all across our Nation, we want to thank you as well. You're doing the Lord's work. And with that, I'm going to present Sean with his apple. *[Laughter]*

Thank you, and God bless you. God bless America. That's a good-looking apple.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:18 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Silas McComb, son of 2014 National Teacher of the Year Sean M. McComb; and Tom Schurtz, English teacher, Upper Merion Area High School in King of Prussia, PA.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : 2014 National and State Teachers of the Year.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Duncan, Arne; McComb, Sean M.; McComb, Silas; Obama, Michelle; Schurtz, Tom.

*Subjects:* Decorations, medals, and awards : Teachers of the Year, National and State;  
Education : Teachers; Education, Department of : Secretary.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD201400321.