

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast *Ronnie Sidney's Story: My Experience with Champions in Education* (June, 2015).

**[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]**

Butler **KNIGHT**: Mr. **SIDNEY**

Ronnie **SIDNEY**: Yes

**KNIGHT**: I am delighted that you are giving me time to hear a very powerful story that I was privileged to learn about through Mrs. Gross, who's the principal at Tappahannock Elementary School, and also Mrs. Roane, who's the current Director of Special Education for Essex County Schools (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and I learned that you'd done a--made a presentation to the school board in March in which you recognized teachers who'd made a significant difference in your life-- Some of them before you were identified with a learning disability in fifth grade, others during you're entire school experience, and how these teachers really have continued to impact you today. Your story is powerful and amazing. You have been to J. Sargent Reynolds Community College. You transferred to ODU, where you got a Bachelor of Science degree, and then from there you've gone to O--to VCU and gotten, um, your Masters of Social Work degree. So you've really accomplished and achieved amazing things in your educational career, and I'm sure that you've done that through the championing process. You recognized in that presentation one teacher, Mrs. Tobey, who was your sixth and seventh grade resource teacher when you were receiving services as a student with a learning disability (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and I'm really kind of curious--you chose her as a champion so I'd love to hear more about what was it about her that made her a champion? What did she do that supported you for example? And how did you feel when you were, when you were with her?

**SIDNEY**: Well. I think what made Ms. Tobey a champion was that it was a rough time for me. I was in special education. I didn't want any of my friends or anyone at school knowing I was in special education because I didn't want to get teased or made fun of for being there. So it was a very--it was a rough transition in that regard, but when I got to Miss Col-Tobey's class and I got to really know her-- even though it was special education she made me feel like I was no different than everyone else. She made me feel normal--made me feel very good. She accepted me. It wasn't about, you know, this--the deficits. It was about the strengths and how she could help me improve on some of the things that other teachers were saying that I needed to improve on. And she did it in such a positive, reassuring, nurturing way that even though I didn't want to be seen in her class and I used to kinda, uh, duck and hide to get in there, you know once I got in there I really felt warm, and I really felt welcome, and I really felt like she recognized something in me that I knew I had about myself, but I don't, doesn't think it was being expressed or the teachers had seen that so she was able to kind of reach me in that, in that way, umm, and they really encouraged me and motivated me to improve upon, you know, the skills that I already had.

**KNIGHT:** So, there was something special about her. She was encouraging. She was positive, and she tapped into strengths that you, that you had that maybe had been dormant for some time. In that presentation I think you alluded to, or in our conversations, the ways in which she provided you with opportunities or possibilities that helped you reconnect with those talents and those skills. Can you think about what it was that she did that did help you reconnect (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) with those talents and skills?

**SIDNEY:** I think one of the main things during that period of time, um, was the organizational piece. She encouraged me to keep a, uh, um, folder where I had to write down the different homework assignments that I had from each, each class and then get my parents to sign it to make sure that I was completing the homework, and just to organize myself, um, 'cause I did have some attention deficit, impulsivity. So I wasn't the most organized person. So I think one thing she recognized is that, you know, you can do the work, but you just need to make sure that you're organized, um, 'cause when you're organized you know what you've done, you know what you need to do (**KNIGHT:** mmmm) and that'll make your life less complicated (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm) so she was very practical in her approach. It wasn't really focused on a lot of the negatives. It was more focused on, you know, these are some areas of growth for you instead of these are areas or impediments, or you know, you have this learning disability, this insurmountable disability that you can't conquer. It was like, no you can conquer this--you can do this--just take these steps to do it (**KNIGHT:** mmmm)

**KNIGHT:** So, she kind of gave you a path (**SIDNEY:** yeah), you know on, how to, how to work around those areas that were kind of more impediments as you said, but in order to better express those talents and those skills for yourself, how did that change the beliefs that you had about yourself at that time? 'cause it was hard period at that time, you know (**SIDNEY:** yeah). You weren't particularly happy about the fact that you were identified with, um, a label of special ed. How did that provide some change in your own thinking about you?

**SIDNEY:** Um, well, one thing was that I didn't want to be in the class and I felt like I could perform at a level where I wouldn't need the class so I think she reassured that too. She made me feel like "Ronnie you don't belong here, you know, you--this, this class is not something that you need to be in" and she made me feel that, she, she kind of spoke to the person that was kind of quieted after just years of just teachers really not having a lot of positive things to say, but she was able to tap into that and kind of speak to like my inner, my inner, my inner self, and (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm) kind of gave that some reassurance and, and was ab-I was able to build upon that, but she just--she kind of gave individual attention because it was five or six of us in the room and we all had different ability level s of ability (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm), but she individualized her attention so it was almost she was building a relationship independent of everyone. Everyone had their own relationship with (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm) it wasn't like a blanket--everyone in the class gets the same attention (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm). It was more so individualized attention so it was almost like, uh, almost like an appreciation. And there was almost as if she recognized you as a person, not as your disability, or not as your deficits.

**KNIGHT:** Exactly. Yeah. So...every kid in that class was special.

**SIDNEY:** Yeah

**KNIGHT:** And everyone learned in unique ways and it sounds like she really knew (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) what those ways were (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) and supported kids in becoming more aware of alright, you're really good at this over (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) here. Let's look at the ways in which if you were to improve these particular skills--so in your case it was organizational skills--this would actually allow you to better express yourself and the know--and what you already know and what you've learned (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) in a more effective way, and in a possibly efficient way, especially when it comes to organizational skills.

**SIDNEY:** Definitely

**KNIGHT:** So she's one of your champions (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) right? But I'm sure you have more. Can you think of other people who've been champions for you who are still there, maybe not directly, but (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) influence you in terms of those beliefs that you have about yourself and the ambitions that you have for what you want to do in your current life.

**SIDNEY:** Mmhmm--Um I think one champion was, um, was Miss Rixey she was my science teacher, um, 'cause it was a really big thing in-in middle school 'cause NBC news had come down to Tappahannock to our middle school, and they had installed a thermostat so they can know the weather for Tappahannock and, um, she had chosen five students to go to be on TV--that was huge (UNINTELLIGIBLE)

**KNIGHT:** And in Essex County

**SIDNEY:** In Essex County. So she asked--she also included me so I was like "Really? (**KNIGHT:** Laughs) you like me that much that you included me to be on TV?" So I was really excited (**KNIGHT:** Yeah) about that. Once I got to high school I really had teachers who were really able to see--two in particular ones were Lillian Smith and Princess Dockery and they were my, uh, I guess kinda like a home ec. class. It was more of a, um, the group was called "Family Career Community Leaders of America" (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm), but they ran the organization and they were able to do work with me and they seen some things in me--some leadership skills and they encouraged me to run for president, and I was elected president and we used to have competitions and conferences in Virginia Beach that we'd go to and they encouraged me to participate in that. They encouraged me to compete on the state levels so they seen opportunities for me and they were able to put me in positions where I could learn and grow, but also be supported at the same time, um, and they really just, really just encouraged me, um, and really held me accountable and, you know, if you're in this leadership position then you need to behave a certain way. You need to lead a certain way because you have people who look up to you, and you're repre-not only representing yourself, but you're representing the school (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm) um, you're representing your family, um, and I think my family was huge because my family built the relationships with Miss-Miss Tobey, um, with Miss Dockery, and Miss Smith and my dad--he was pretty popular in the community so even now when he sees Miss Tobey he'll say "You know, Miss Tobey--I seen Miss Tobey. She asked about you" or "I seen Miss Smith. She asked about you." So I always make sure if I'm back in the area or if I'm at the school I seek out these teachers. Some have since retired, but Miss Tobey if I come around I would always just see if I can go to the school and speak with her (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm).

Um, it was almost like a light and like I'm the moth that's like (**KNIGHT**: Laughs) once you get, you know, that feeling from that light. That, that warmth and that, you know, that love and that nurturing then you're just attracted back to it even after you, you know, you graduated from school.

**KNIGHT**: Wow. I love that image. Yeah. So she's really such a light that continues to draw you and also your family (**SIDNEY**: Definitely) in as just sort of a, a kind of a natural network of appreciation (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and she continues to take an interest in you to such an extent that you sent her a commencement invitation (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and then she wrote you a note back, um. I guess that really meant a lot to her for you to remember (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) her as one of those pivotal people that was instrumental when you look back (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) at being--at helping you get where you got (**SIDNEY**: Yeah) you know?

**SIDNEY**: Yeah, definitely. She was, I mean, she was extremely instrumental. Um, and I think it was 'cause--it was at that time in my life where I could've made...I could've went either way or the other. It was just one of those times where I could've just quit and gave up on myself, lost complete interest in school, misbehaved, and just gave up or the time for me to really buckle down and realize what opportunities I had and to improve--and know it was, it was like--and I wouldn't even expect a teacher to play that role, but it's almost like it was, almost destined that I would get to her, have her as a teacher to help me through that period in time (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm) because now thinking back if I didn't have her, you know, would I have graduated high school? Would I have went to college? Would I have had the desire to work on my Masters? So, you know, I really felt like she came in my life in a time where I really needed her, um, and I wanted to recognize her, and I wanted her to be a part of my graduation. I wanted her to be there if she could, but if not just know that hey, your kind words, the relationship that we built was a part of me getting this far, and, you know that I didn't forget about you, and that, you know, I-I appreciate you.

**KNIGHT**: Yeah. So what was it about you? You talk about that metaphor of the light and the moth, and that there's something about you I'm sure that invites teachers to see that promise--to see those possibilities and those talents. So if you were to give kids (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) some advice on how to take advantage of those opportunities that you saw that Miss Tobey was kind of there at that--at that time that was so really a critical time for you. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) You were not happy your life changing in the way it did. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) You had close friends and being, um, in a resource class moved you out of traveling with friends (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) through your ordinary classes that you would have been with them through (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and yet there was this opportunity that she presented to you, but there's something about you. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) What is about you that you think if you were to say to other kids, "Look inside yourself and see what it is that you can bring forward (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) to those opportunities that the champions in your world are offering to you." (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) What would you say to them? What was it about you? What would you invite them to do (**SIDNEY**: Um) too?"

**SIDNEY**: I would defin--I would invite them to kind of unleash that gift that, that bright, that intelligent, that knowledgeable person inside and not be afraid. Um, I think I had that person the whole time. I was sheltering it because I didn't want that person to get hurt. I didn't want that person to get labeled. I

didn't want that person to, to go out there and make a mistake, and you know, feel like they failed. So I kinda kept that person inside. Um, so what they did is they seen that person and they gave me the courage and the support to let that person, you know, shine and to, and to bring them out. So, you know, I just would a--I would let them know, you know, just to be resilient. You know, there's gonna be times where people are going to say things. They're gonna label you. You're not gonna feel like you're gonna meet the, you know, challenges that are ahead, but just to be resilient and work through it and understand that there are people at the school, your parents that you can go to for support. There's one time where I really felt alone and by myself, and I didn't have enough courage to talk to someone about how I felt. So I kind of internalized it and just dealt with it, and I don't think that's the healthy way to go. Um, just know that you do have people out there to talk to--to people that have experienced it, um and just to have a network of people to go to for support and just know that you're not alone and, you know, that you do have people that-that can help you.

**KNIGHT:** That sounds great. And I know that that sense of courage certainly comes from having a teacher that makes it safe to reconnect with who you really are in terms of those talents and that-that brightness and that intelligence that you just (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) referenced, too. But also form enough of a trusting relationship with you (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) so that it becomes safe enough to, to trust those qualities within yourself (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) that never lacked, but you just protected (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm).

**SIDNEY:** Yeah, 'cause I mean we--we do have-we do experience having bad relationships with bad teachers, and sometimes we let it jade us (**KNIGHT:** mmm) and we think that all teachers are a certain way, but I never took that perspective. I've always-- I always felt like that I could learn from anyone whether it's through a situation or through some words so I never closed myself off to receiving what other people were giving me. So that's one thing that I'm thankful for not doing, (**KNIGHT:** mmhmm) because I would've missed on a lot, you know, a lot a good things from teachers if I were to just close myself off and kind of just shut down, um, and live to low expectations. I think when people set expectations that are high or something that the student can achieve they will achieve them, but when you set the expectations really low or, you know, just below a student or a little bit above, it doesn't challenge them to change. It doesn't give them anything to work towards--anything to want to improve on. So just to have teachers that have a different expectation whether it's behavior-wise or academic-wise is almost, um, refreshing for someone, and you know what I had teachers that do that--it really changed my, um perspective and it really changed how I looked at education and, you know, as far as what I wanted to achieve for myself.

**KNIGHT:** Well, it sounds like you took that bar and you kept raising it higher and higher (**SIDNEY:** Yeah) and now--I mean here you are sitting here with me and you have a master's degree in social work. (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) You've taken your education further than, my guess is, than you imagined that you would (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) you know, and I know that you said to me in a previous conversation that this master's degree is really a degree that you really earned for yourself. This was a very important achievement (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) to you. So, I'm curious to think about the champions that you've had in your life and the--you've made some recommendations to students to trust their own talents, their own skills, (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) their own intelligence and not to miss the opportunities that champions are--

are providing for (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) them by becoming jaded or example (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm). So I'm wondering in terms of your wishes for future--what are your wishes if you were to have more of that experience of being championed, but also championing others. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) What would your wishes be for having more of that?

**SIDNEY**: Um, I think my biggest wish is that we meet students where they are first because I think as educators--as professionals we want---we see people for where they can be, where they're going, but we sometimes forget to meet them where they're at, and I think that's what it--that it--that relationship and that trust is built--when you can meet a kid where he at--where he's--where he--he or she is. Recognize what they're experiencing 'cause a lot of these kids experience really rough times. I learned that being a mental health counselor--that a lot of these kids come from really rough backgrounds and just making it to school takes a tremendous amount of courage (**KNIGHT**: mmm) so once they get to school, you know, we have to work with them and encourage them. Some of them need--need people telling them positive things 'cause some of these kids don't hear "I love you's" or...that's not something that teachers probably feel comfortable doing, but they don't hear people just encouraging them to do positive things. They don't hear people just believing in them--believing that they can do anything they want--to be anyone that they want. So I think we have to kind of meet the kid where they're at, build their--build their rapport, build their relationship and then set the expectation for them, because I think kids want to achieve. They want to be great. They just don't know how. So, you know, with me being in mental health, you know, I want to--I want them to achieve, but I also want to know this is where you're at. I see--I see you. I understand you. I know you. Then I can make that...'cause we talk--we call it "joining" in counseling (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm) and it's very important to the therapeutic relationship this joining. When you join with the child and join with the family and you make suggestions, they're more likely to take those, but if you never quite join with them or you never build that relationship you can suggest anything that you want--they won't receive it. So I think this joining--me knowing where they are and then taking-taking them to where they want to go is--is the best route.

**KNIGHT**: Well that story reflects your story, and Miss Tobey met you where you were (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and there was a lot of trust that you described and a lot of safety that was created so that you could believe her (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and believe yourself at the same time.

**SIDNEY**: Definitely. Definitely--'cause we give mixed message and being the kid---now that I'm older I can go back and conceptualize it and make sense of it, but as a kid while you're experiencing that and experiencing the dozens of other things being a teenager--being a young person. Experiences--things get confusing and you don't understand certain things and then you know, you just--it's just really hard to make sense of stuff so I feel like as adults our job is to make less confusion. We should make things less confusing as possible, um , and to really, you know, reach out to the child and--and--and--and build that relationship because you'd be shocked at some of the things students come to good teachers--teachers they trust with, whether it could be sexual abuse, physical abuse, not having food at home, and those are the real things--the real problems that these kids experience--the real problems that they face (**KNIGHT**: mmm) um, and to have someone they can trust and share all those things with is unbelievably important. I think sometimes teachers underestimate that, 'cause these kids have experienced relationships where they couldn't trust anyone and, um, people disappointed them or let them down.

They see teachers as--as almost parental figures as--as a--as adults kind of reflecting some of things that their parents reflect, and when teachers are able to be positive role models and give them a positive experience I think they respond to them in--in ways that I don't think any of us could believe. I mean, almost like magic (**KNIGHT**: mmm) you know for a child so... (**KNIGHT**: mmm)

**KNIGHT**: Well you're describing how you build bridges (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) you know, so the story that--that you've shared of yourself is a story of critical teachers in your life helping to build the bridge to your future (**SIDNEY**: yeah, mmhmm) and you're describing your wish that adults in kids' lives, especially kids that are having very, very difficult and challenging lives (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) do the same (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) you know, step in there and listen to these kids. Meet them where they are, and build bridges to a future that's quite different than where they currently are, but also a bridge that takes them where they want to go.

**SIDNEY**: Definitely. (**KNIGHT**: yeah) Definitely. I mean, because I have some experiences where the bridge was taking me to a place I didn't want to go to, and I think, it's not just teachers, but administrators have to recognize students with self-determination and respect that. Um, because some students don't want to be on a track where they're going to get just a high school completion certificate. Some students want to be on a track where they want to get a high school diploma or some students want to be on the track where they're going to be in situations where they're taking classes that can help them go to college. So I think we have to first ask the students what they want, not just give them a bunch of tests and say this is what you're going to get, but allow the student to self-determine what they want, and then, once you understand what they want, to put a plan in place to help them to get what they want, and I think with me, when I decided to self-determine for myself, and I felt I was more invested, or more vested into this track. This is where I want to go. I don't want to go over here. I want to go over here. How can you all help me get there? Instead of, you're going to go over here and this is what we're going to do for you. You know, I--I wasn't invested in that, and I think we need kids to be invested in their future. Be invested in their education and be invested in their decisions. Um, I've sat in IEP meetings where the kid didn't say anything. Sometimes it's almost like the kid didn't need to me there or the parent **KNIGHT**: mmhmm) so I think we need to really let the parent and child really self-determine, um, what they want to do and help support them along their journey.

**KNIGHT**: Yeah, and within the child then learns to be self-advocate (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and we become the advocate to support that child in those aspirations (**SIDNEY**: Definitely) yeah, which is truly the power of championing (**SIDNEY**: Definitely) is when you can meet that person where they are, help them identify where they want to go (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) and then help shape that path (**SIDNEY**: def--mmhmm) for that to happen, and be that bridge that we want to be in education. So are there any other wishes that you would have that you'd want to share before we end our conversation today?

**SIDNEY**: I also feel there's a big elephant in the room, and it's dealing with race (**KNIGHT**: mmm) which I feel like is really important because when I was in school my school was probably half--half Black, half White, but we didn't have a lot of Black teachers, a lot of Black staff members and for me being a male and being African-American the teachers that you have to identify with are typically females, White females and sometimes there can be some communication blockages whether it's from the student or

from the teacher. Sometimes there can be some, um, challenges building that relationship like you said-- building that bridge and crossing it. Sometimes there's some challenges in setting limits on behaviors and students getting sent to the office for, you know, little things and I feel like that's something that we have to acknowledge, especially in today's age, and not just race now, but also sexual orientation (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm). There's clients now that, or students now that's transgendered (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm) you know, how are we meeting the needs of that population? We have a lot of Hispanics--how are we meeting the needs of that population? And hav-have-being more culturally competent. I don't think there was something when I was in school that was something that was either taught or something that was appreciated, but I feel like, you know, now I think teachers really have to be culturally competent and really understand the culture and the environment and, you know the place where these students come from. I talked to a friend last week, and he was telling me about a student he's working with who's transgendered, and he was able to have the student bring his grades up from F's to A's and B's simply by identifying the student as the gender that they wanted to be identified w-as. So, he identified them as a female, even though they were male, and just that alone was enough to get them to buy into what he wanted to do, which he wanted to help him improve his grades. So he had the student sit in his classroom with him and all the student's work came to him in that classroom, and the student was able to improve his grades, and it was like we talked about earlier it was a safe place. He knew this teacher would not let anybody pick on him or hurt him, um, he knew this teacher had expectations that "OK, we do this you're going to achieve at this level." So he had that, and the student felt like this teacher could identify with him. This teacher, you know, believed in him. The teacher saw him for who he--who he wanted to be and who he was (**KNIGHT**: mmm) and I think that's what we have-- we have to be competent and we have to understand cultures. We have to understand the dynamics because, you know, kids need to know and need to be identified with as who they are, not, you know, who we want them to be or who we think they are.

**KNIGHT**: That's really powerful because when I think about you and I think about your story of someone seeing you. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) Someone accepting you where you were. Well they were needing to accept all of you. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) You don't just show up with somebody who's interested in or becoming interested in learning again. (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm) You're brining all of who you are into that classroom. All of your identity. Your racial identity, your cultural identity, your-your religious identity. Everything that comprises who you are you're bringing into the classroom (**SIDNEY**: mmhmm).

**SIDNEY**: And I think one--and with Miss Tobey, with different ages by far (laughs) (**KNIGHT**: laughs, yeah), different races by far, (**KNIGHT**: yeah), different genders (**KNIGHT**: yeah) but I think at the end of the day kids just want to be accepted. (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm) They just want to know that they're worthwhile people. That they're able to be who they want to be and develop who they want to be, but they really just want to be accepted by parents, by, and by teachers, um because teachers are parental figures whether we like it or not. (**KNIGHT**: mmhmm) You know for some of these kids they don't have parents. Some of these teachers I identify with almost like a parental figure. At the- at the March school board meeting I identified Mr. Wright who was my fourth grade teacher. He was one of--he was my first African-American male teacher, and when I had his class, even though he was my teacher, he was an

older adult. I almost identified him as a father because he was an adult that was in a role of authority (cell phone rings).

**KNIGHT:** Maybe for schools to be more thoughtful about how they build those relationships (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) you know, your fourth grade teacher was--Mr. Wright was really important in your life as somebody who was a male (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) so you had the same gender, but also was African-American so he was your same race (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) so you had a certain connection there, and we know that relationships are borne out of a range of different kinds of connections (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) so if we were more thoughtful about how we did that in schools it would be functioning as a facilitator as opposed to a barrier.

**SIDNEY:** Definitely, definitely

**KNIGHT:** Anything else in terms of wishes? I really appreciate your courage (**SIDNEY:** um) in bringing that out.

**SIDNEY:** It also...I-I just wish that teachers know that, you know, they are appreciated and that students do care about them (cell phone rings). There were so many teachers that I wanted to buy things for and to recognize and to support. I mean I don't...I--I--I picked seven teachers in particular, but I can think of dozens of teachers right now who--who supported me along the journey, um, who were positive, you know, motivators in my life and had a positive influence, and I just want you to know that, you know, just keep doing those positive things and that you do make an impact--a lasting impact on a student's life that goes beyond those 12 years of--of formal education even to when, you know, they're adults so just make a positive impact. Give them positive statements, positive things to build on. Try to be strengths focused, um, 'cause I think the kids know what they're not doing right, what they're doing wrong, but sometimes they just need to know, you know, what they're doing right, what they continue to do right, and not just being focused on the negative.

**KNIGHT:** Thank you for (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) that, and thank you for reminding teachers of the big impact they're having on--on children's' lives, not just in those 12 years that they're under their instruction and (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) responsibility, but into the future as well. And to stay positive, not just for kids' sakes, but also for their own sake (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) it's--it's--you know, being in the field of education today is--it's hard work (**SIDNEY:** yeah) to be sure, so to have you come back (cell phone rings) and say thank you (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) to teachers I'm sure--I know in the case of the teachers you (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) recognized on the school board meeting in March it made a big difference for them.

**SIDNEY:** It did.

**KNIGHT:** and I understand that there are more teachers who you want to say thank you to (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) and are looking for opportunities to say thank you to you, too. So a thank you from a teacher myself (**SIDNEY:** laughs) for sharing your story (**SIDNEY:** mmhmm) and, um, I really appreciate your time and your willingness to share that.

**SIDNEY:** Thank you.

**KNIGHT:** Thank you Mr. **SIDNEY**

**[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]**