Today marks the last student day of the ’19 – ’20 school year!  We are going to look back on this year and wonder about all of the successful and semi-successful moments.  We might think about what we could have or should have done, but that is not where I want to focus today.  My focus is on what you have achieved that no other group of teachers has ever done.  In 8 short days, you converted from an established system of education to a totally new format that families, students and ourselves had never done!  What an accomplishment!  Of course there were high and low moments, but how couldn’t there be with such a rapid expectation of change.  Our whole delivery system was virtualized overnight……and it was an expectation that it would be a success.  You made it happen!  There will come a time for reflection, but today stand proud and take the time to recognize your achievements.  Spread the wealth by not only congratulating yourself, but also a colleague, an administrator or a child’s teacher that made this possible.

I want to spend time congratulating our class of retirees today as well.  All the years of service and time developing curriculum, serving on committees, mentoring staff and reaching out to students and their families will not be forgotten.  One of my favorite functions is the REA Celebration we have every spring to celebrate those staff that are retiring.  This year, due to our circumstances, that celebration didn’t take place.  I looked at all the faces of those leaving and wished I could reach out to shake their hand and thank them for everything they have done.  Unfortunately, like everyone else, those options were taken away.  So we celebrate however we can these days.  Next spring, all of those retiring will be invited to attend our banquet if they are available.  I don’t want them to miss a chance to be celebrated as they should be.

This leads me to my last thought for this letter.  There are many mixed feelings about ending this academic year.  We, as educators, are used to having our colleagues and students around when we close out a year.  We look around and see how our students have changed and grown.  We tend to feel secure in knowing we have done the best we can to move them forward to the next level, whatever that maybe.  It was hard to get that sense this year.  I missed seeing you in your buildings, wishing our retirees Congratulations and seeing students excitedly get signatures in their yearbooks.  I am sure you have experienced the same with your classrooms as the last google chats came to an end.  We need human connection.  That is such an integral part of the education process.  I don’t know about you, but I miss it.

So, back to where I started in the beginning of my letter.  Congratulations to all of you on your successes in trying to make this year as normal as possible for our students.  You didn’t lose your focus and our students are better off because of that.  Congratulations to our Retirees!  Never in your wildest dreams could you have conceived a year like this to retire from the teaching profession.  That being said, I am glad you were there with all of your skills and expertise.  Thank you all for everything you have done to support one another and our students to make this chaotic time meaningful.  Be well and take care of yourself and your families!

Congratulations!

 Dan Kuhlman

President, Rochester Education Association

dan.kuhlman@edmn.org

507-319-7321