



News Release

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K-12 Teachers Struggle to Make School Meaningful and Relevant, Speaker Tells Century Audience

Lifelong high school teacher Mary Beth Blegen, the former National Teacher of the Year in 1996, told a Century College audience on Feb. 19 that K-12 teachers are struggling to make school meaningful and relevant.

“We are dealing with high school kids who send 150 text messages a day,” said Blegen, who served as the first-ever Teacher in Residence at the U.S. Department of Education during the Clinton administration. “It takes marvelous teachers to teach these kids. They need to meet kids where they are and teach them what they can understand. We can’t hold anything back in our effort to reach this spectacular and challenging group of kids. They deserve to be learning something relevant to their lives.”

Speaking to an audience of K-12 and college educators as part of Century’s ongoing K-12 luncheon series, Blegen said schools need to craft a curriculum that is centered on what kids need. Too often, she said, kids are bored by classes that seem disconnected to their world.

“Education is our single greatest need in this country,” said Blegen, who taught for 30 years in the Worthington Public Schools and is now a consultant with the St. Paul Public Schools. “But teachers are

not a part of this conversation. They often don't see themselves as peers with those who are making the decisions for our schools. I believe that teachers do the most important work in the world. But I am not convinced that they believe it."

One of life's great injustices, she said, is that the greatest teachers often teach the privileged students while the most inexperienced teachers teach the disadvantaged students. Teachers need more time to openly and honestly discuss with each other what is working in the classroom.

She noted that the single most important factor for students' success is the relationship that the adults in the school building have with one another. If teachers are feeling hurt, angry, cheated or betrayed, it deeply affects student success. "No one teacher can do it alone," said Blegen. "Teachers need to collaborate, and they need unwavering faith that they can teach these challenging students. Teachers do the most important work in the world, but I am not convinced that they believe it."

Blegen said in the best classrooms, the teacher is in charge, learning is interactive, students have predictable routines and patterns, students understand why they are there, humor is present and students have experiences that develop skills that allow them to feel successful.

"We can get it right for kids and schools," said Blegen. "My only fear is that we can't work fast enough."

The public is invited to attend the next Century College K-12 Luncheon Series event on Thursday, April 23, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the East Campus Lincoln Mall. The speaker will be Supt. Mark Wolak of the Mahtomedi Public Schools. A complimentary box lunch will be served. Please RSVP to [Sue Klecker](#) at 651-773-1792.



Photo: Mary Beth Blegen, third from left, with St. Paul teachers Tess Peese and Mary Tinucci, and Dr. John O'Brien, acting president of Century College