

**THE PRETTY TRUTH
ABOUT EDUCATION**

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INTRODUCTION

TO MY FELLOW TEACHERS

Hey, teacher friend. Let me tell you a little bit about where all of this started, because you might be wondering why I'm no longer in the classroom and why you're holding this book in your hands.

The answer is not simple, and it's not short. But it is honest.

Teaching has always been in my blood. It runs deep in my family. I come from a long line of teachers and natural caregivers who believe that helping others grow is one of life's greatest callings. That calling found me early, and for a long time, I never questioned it.

I got my first teaching job at twenty-two years old, bright-eyed and ready to change the world with bulletin boards and enthusiasm. I spent nine years teaching first grade, surrounded by tiny humans full of potential. Those years in the early 2000s were some of the happiest of my life. School felt like home, and for the first time, I felt certain I had found my purpose.

I taught in the same district where I grew up, walking the same hallways where my own teachers once encouraged me to dream big, while others gently reminded me that math might not be my greatest strength. They were right, by the way. But hey, I can write.

Around my ninth year of teaching, everything began to shift. My district went through major changes, and I was moved into special education, where I would spend the next eleven years of my career.

Working in special education changed me. I taught students across multiple grade levels and learned more from them than any textbook. Those years were some of the hardest of my life. I gave every ounce of time and energy to my students each day until I felt burned out in a way I had never experienced before. Yes, it is okay to say that out loud. I know people call teachers superheroes, but the truth is, we are human.

Balancing my school family and my family at home felt nearly impossible for a perfectionist empath like me. I felt as though I was failing in both places at once. If you have ever felt this way, I wrote this book for you.

There came a point when I was simply exhausted. Not just tired, but the kind of tired that seeps into your bones and blurs the edges of who you are. I was trying to do it all and be it all: the dedicated teacher, the supportive wife, the present mom, the loyal friend, and the woman who occasionally pretended she had a hobby.

I stayed late making lesson plans, then came home to laundry piles and mom guilt. My mind never shut off. I woke up in the middle of the night thinking about IEP goals and students who needed me the most.

Somewhere between lesson plans and lunchboxes, I lost the spark I once had. I still loved teaching, but I was running on caffeine, adrenaline, and the hope that someday life would feel balanced. The Pretty Truth is that it didn't, not until I finally gave myself permission to slow down and breathe.

For nineteen years, I lived inside the walls of a classroom. I taught through snow days, testing seasons, spirit weeks, and staff meetings that could have been emails. I laughed until I cried, cried until I laughed, and learned that teaching is equal parts heart, hustle, and humor.

This book is not about quitting teaching. It is not about bitterness or blame. It is about truth. The kind of truth teachers rarely say out loud but feel every single day.

If you are reading this as a new teacher, I hope these pages feel like guidance and reassurance. If you are a veteran teacher, I hope they feel like validation. If you are somewhere in between, I hope they feel like permission to reflect, to question, and to breathe.

Most of all, I hope you feel seen.

Because here is the Pretty Truth of Teaching: you are doing work that matters deeply, even on the days it feels invisible.

And if this book reminds you that you are not alone, then it has done exactly what it was meant to do.

A MESSAGE TO ADMINISTRATORS FROM TEACHERS WHO ARE TOO AFRAID TO SAY IT

Dear Administrators,

We love you. Truly.

You juggle more than most people realize. Parents, policies, test scores, district meetings, and an inbox that somehow fills up before lunch. You are pulled in a hundred directions, yet you still find time to open a milk carton for a kindergartener in the cafeteria. So, before anything else is said, please know this: we see you, and we appreciate you.

Now that I have said that, can we talk about something real?

Your teachers, the ones in the trenches every day, have a few things they wish they could tell you. Things they whisper in the lounge but rarely say in your office. Not because they do not respect you, but because they do. They are afraid of sounding ungrateful. Afraid of being labeled difficult. Afraid of consequences for speaking honestly.

But now that I have retired and traded faculty meetings for coffee and yoga pants, I can say it for them. Kindly. Honestly. And with genuine respect.

So here it is.

We do not need pep talks. We need permission.

We appreciate the reminders that we are heroes. We really do. But sometimes what we need more than motivation is margin. We do not need another email that says, “You’ve got this.” We need one that says, “You can go home on time today.”

We do not need cupcake carts every quarter. We need a culture that allows us to eat lunch without guilt, use the restroom without panic, and take a mental health day without explanations. This is not about being ungrateful. It is about being human.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: You cannot recharge teachers with sugar. You recharge them with trust.

Walk the halls, but see the humans.

We notice when you walk the hallways, and we notice how you walk them. When you pop in with a smile, even briefly, it matters more than any memo. A simple “How are you holding up?” can soften a very hard day.

But we also feel the difference between support and surveillance. One feels like partnership. The other feels like pressure. We want you to see teaching, not just testing. We want you to notice the messy magic, the laughter, the noise, and the engagement, not only the checklist.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: A teacher who feels seen will give more than you ask. A teacher who feels watched will give only what is required.

Remember that teaching is personal.

Every teacher has a rhythm. Some teach with humor. Some with calm. Some with structured routines. Some with creative chaos. There is no single way to be effective.

One of the most freeing things an administrator ever said to me was, “Maria, I hired you because of your heart and enthusiasm. I am not here to change it.”

He said this after walking into a Friday afternoon dance party in my classroom. I was embarrassed at first, but also proud. That one sentence gave me permission to teach authentically, and I did some of my best work that year.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: Great teaching does not come from identical classrooms. It comes from empowered ones.

Please do not forget that we have families too.

Teachers love their students deeply, but they are not our only children.

When meetings run late or last-minute requests arrive, it is not that we do not care. It is that we are trying to keep promises to people outside the building as well.

When you offer flexibility, you build loyalty.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: When teachers are allowed to have a life, they love their work even more.

We are not lazy. We are overloaded.

Every new initiative adds another plate to an already full tray. Teachers are not resistant to growth. We are exhausted by constant change without subtraction.

Before adding something new, ask what can be removed.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: Innovation feels inspiring when it is an invitation, not an obligation.

Mental health matters more than data.

We understand accountability. We understand test scores. But behind every number is a human being.

Sometimes the bravest leadership move is not raising expectations but raising empathy.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: Healthy teachers create healthy classrooms.

Trust us to know our students.

Teachers spend seven hours a day with their students. We see what motivates them, what challenges them, and what makes them laugh uncontrollably at very specific times.

Sometimes the most powerful thing you can say is, “I trust your judgment.” Teachers do not need micromanagement. They need mentorship.

You set the tone.

Your energy becomes our energy. If you lead with fear, we lead with compliance. If you lead with grace, we lead with compassion. Leadership is not control. It is climate.

Protect your teachers like you protect your students.

We notice when you stand up for us, and we notice when you do not. When you defend your teachers, we will walk through fire for you.

And yes, this must be said with care and honesty. When truly ineffective teaching is ignored, it affects students and staff morale. Strong teachers want accountability because they care about the profession. Accountability is not punishment. It is protection.

We need to feel seen, not just evaluated.

A simple “You are doing great work” can carry a teacher through a difficult week.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: The best leaders nurture people, not just performance.

A personal note from a teacher who stayed quiet too long.

There were times I did not speak up because I wanted to be easygoing and agreeable. Looking back, silence did not serve anyone.

I was lucky to work with administrators who supported me, encouraged me, and somehow gave me glowing evaluations even when my classroom looked like a glitter explosion met a science experiment.

They checked in, not just boxes. They trusted me. They laughed with me. They reminded me that leadership is connection, not control.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: Teachers do not leave students. They leave cultures that make it impossible to love them well.

Gentle Ways Administrators Can Support Teachers

Lead with curiosity.

Simplify initiatives.

Protect teacher time.

Encourage boundaries.

Celebrate humanity, not heroics.

Create safe spaces for honest feedback.

Invest in wellness.

Communicate transparently.

Be visible for connection, not critique.

Lead with genuine care.

Administrators, you are the bridge between vision and reality. Teachers are the heartbeat that makes that vision possible.

You do not need to be perfect. You need to be present.

THE PRETTY TRUTH OF TEACHING: Administrators may run the building, but teachers build the heart inside it.

Pause + Reflect

For administrators:

When was the last time you asked teachers what they needed?

How do you model balance and empathy?

What could you simplify this month?

For teachers:

What would you say if you could speak freely and kindly?

What grace could you offer your leader today?

Because here is the truth.

Great schools are not built on policies. They are built on people who care enough to listen.