**Matt Damon’s speech at the Save Our Schools rally, July 30, 2011**

‘I think you’re awesome!”

I flew overnight from Vancouver to be with you today. I landed in New York a few hours ago and caught a flight down here because I needed to tell you all in person that I think you’re awesome.

I was raised by a teacher. My mother is a professor of early childhood education. And from the time I went to Kindergarten through my senior year in high school I went to Public Schools. I wouldn’t trade that education and experience for anything.

I had incredible teachers. As I look at my life today, the things I value most about myself— my imagination, my love of acting, my passion for writing, my love of learning, my curiosity— all come from how I was parented and taught.

And none of these qualities that I’ve just mentioned— none of these qualities that I prize so deeply, that have brought me so much joy, that have brought me so much professional success— none of these qualities that make me who I am… can be tested.

I said before that I had incredible teachers. And that’s true. But it’s more than that. My teachers were EMPOWERED to teach me. Their time wasn’t taken up with a bunch of test prep— this silly drill and kill nonsense that any serious person knows doesn’t promote real learning. No, my teachers were free to approach me and every other kid in that classroom like an individual puzzle. They took so much care in figuring out who we were and how to best make the lessons resonate with each of us. They were empowered to unlock our potential. They were allowed to be teachers.

Now, don’t get me wrong, I did have a brush with standardized tests at one point. I remember because my mom went to the principal’s office and said, “My kid ain’t taking that. It’s stupid, it won’t tell you anything and it’ll just make him nervous.”

I shudder to think that these tests are being used today to control where funding goes.

I don’t know where I would be today if my teachers’ job security was based on how I performed on some standardized test. If their very survival as teachers was based not on whether I actually fell in love with the process of learning but rather if I could fill in the “right” bubble on a test. If they had to spend most of their time desperately drilling us and less time encouraging creativity and original ideas; less time knowing who we were, seeing our strengths and helping us realize our talents.

I honestly don’t know where I’d be today if that was the type of education I had. I sure as hell wouldn’t be here, I do know that.

This has been a horrible decade for teachers. I can’t imagine how demoralized you must feel. But I came here today to deliver an important message to you: as I get older, I appreciate more and more the teachers that I had growing up. And I’m not alone. There are millions of people just like me.

So the next time you’re feeling down, or exhausted, or unappreciated, or at the end of your rope; the next time you turn on the TV and see yourself called “over-paid”; the next time you encounter some simple-minded, punitive policy that’s been driven into your life by some corporate reformer who has literally never taught anyone anything…

Please know that there are millions of us behind you. You have an army of regular people standing right behind you and our appreciation for what you do is so deeply felt. We love you, we thank you, and we will always have your back.

Matt Damon