

**By Regie Routman, 2017 WSRA Convention Keynote Presenter**

### **Silent Voices**

I hear them in the hallways and classrooms  
before school, at lunch, after school  
whispering to each other  
but not speaking out right.

A reporter calls me from Tacoma  
and another from Baltimore!  
“We can’t find teachers who will speak out.  
If they don’t they’re going to get run over.”  
I wonder why.  
What are we afraid of?

Taking a stand is risky business.  
It’s an energy drain and a chore.  
But not speaking out is cowardly and irresponsible.  
We are the experts - we teachers -  
not the scientific researchers, not the politicians  
or school board members,  
not the policy makers or government officials, not the media.

Yet our voices are missing from the literacy conversations.  
Our students’ achievement, our classroom-based research  
and assessment,  
our knowledge and know-how, our years of experience.  
No one asks, and we don’t tell.  
The uninformed continue informing.

We must speak out -  
for ourselves, for the children, for our future.  
The very survival of public schools  
Rests on our shoulders and in our hearts and minds.

We cannot be afraid. Together  
We must raise our voices  
to make a difference.

---

This is an original poem written by Regie Routman for the 1997 University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Department of Reading Fall Reading Conference, at which she was a keynote. *Silent Voices* was originally published in the WSRA *Journal* V35, No. 2, Winter 1998 and again in Routman’s book *Conversations*.