

Educational Philosophy and School Vision
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I've been on my own educational path for over 40 years, and in this time have come to see that developing, nurturing, and sustaining a healthy, positive, and productive school culture depends upon the levels of student, teacher, and parent agency maintained in your school community. It's about moving beyond engagement and enabling a school community to seek empowerment. Helping students and families reach their full potential also means having a foundation built on social and emotional learning. A final piece in the educational puzzle is the willingness for a system to revise and change. My goals as Superintendent are to:

- foster **authentic school community empowerment**
- prepare our students and families for a healthy and successful future by maintaining a **foundation in social and emotional learning balanced with rigorous academics**
- commit to a **willingness to grow and revise**

I believe that keeping these goals in front of us, will lead to learning, growth and health for every person. To meet these goals, I embrace three mindsets:

- **Distributed leadership** offers a collaborative, dynamic way for our school community to be a more sustainable, effective and transformational school.
- Leadership is about creating the **conditions for transformation**, not about power or control.
- Being rural, isolated, and tiny is an **asset**, despite unique challenges.

Empowerment:

For some schools the end goal is compliance (success defined by rule following and doing what's asked of you), but our school aims for much more. Moving from engagement to empowerment is a goal I have for myself as a leader, our school community, and the education system. Good schools are places where students pay attention, care about what they are learning, and have choices in the process and products they produce. But a great school, a school that empowers people, is driven by student interest, student directed pathways, and personalized learning. John Spencer and A.J. Julian created a compelling and simple graphic to explain the difference (2017, p. 35)

Engaged Environments	Empowered Environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attentive and committed to our curriculum ● Preparing for their future jobs ● Teachers wanting to make it interesting ● You must learn_____ ● Giving Choice ● Following the Beaten Path ● Taking an Assessment ● Consuming ● Differentiated Instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attentive and committed to their interests ● Preparing themselves for anything ● Teachers working on tapping into their interests ● What do you want to learn? ● Inspiring possibilities ● Making your own path ● Assessing your own learning ● Creating ● Personalized learning

This work needs to start with teachers: students will never feel empowered until their teachers are. Teachers need to be guided to be the leaders of their own learning. Teachers need to build their own curriculums, set their own schedules, design their own research, and be given the opportunity to be the expert for their peers. Teacher learning needs to be just as personalized as student learning is. If a teacher has a great idea, they need to be supported in making it happen, even when a leader doesn't know if it's a great idea or not. Just like students, teachers need to accomplish outcomes and achieve results they never dreamed they could achieve. One of my most empowering moments as a teacher was when I was supported in creating a project

that led to teachers and students from Rwanda staying in our school community as we studied colonialism in Africa. Our students and I raised thousands of dollars, purchased plane tickets, found places for our guests to stay, and took our African guests on travels throughout the Southwest, as we learned together about history, culture, race, and ultimately love. Silverton School needs to continue to be a space where teachers can thrive.

I want to continue to strive for EL Education's vision and approach to teacher and student agency:

“To create schools where teachers can fulfill their highest aspirations,
and students achieve more than they think possible,
becoming active contributors to build a better world”

“Our approach is grounded in respect for teachers and
school leaders as creative agents in their classrooms.
We build their capacity to ignite each student's
motivation, perseverance, and compassion
to propel growth and success in school, college, career, and life.” (2017, p.1).

A learning institution where students and teachers are empowered is what I will continue to work towards, and what if parents were even more empowered too? I value parent input and voice. When we invite parents and community members to participate in the school as more than an observer, magic can happen. I know that, as a school leader, it is my responsibility to create time and space for these interactions. When a new structure is introduced into school, if parents actively participate, relationships strengthen. I recall adding 15 minutes more to our school day to begin our “morning movement” initiative, which asked every student and teachers to start their day in 15 min of structured exercise. Doesn't seem radical and is backed by science, yet parents were uncertain about a longer school day and a shortened time to do homework in the morning. But when we invited parents to join us and had an open door policy buy-in came community wide. Parents became advocates for the new initiative and spokespeople while out in the community. This type of authentic involvement in our school is vital.

Social and Emotional Learning Balanced with Rigorous Academics

I remember, during my first years of teaching, being presented with the task of infusing character education into a schoolwide structure called CREW. It seemed daunting. Teaching the hundreds of math, social studies, and language arts standards seemed easy compared to direct instruction of integrity, responsibility, respect, courage, and compassion. I'd usually tackle courage first, then responsibility, but fumble through teaching integrity, compassion, and respect. I don't think I really believed that every child could learn and embody character. Honestly, and embarrassingly, I think I believed that a child was either a good kid or not. After a couple of years I had my curriculum aligned, my schedule perfected, my classroom under control, and my students seemed bought in, but I felt far away from providing an education to every student. They could all write 5 paragraph essays, take thorough notes, draw and label of map of the world, and solve equations. But they could not transfer their skills to other areas of life. They were fine in the structured, supported, 8 hour school day, but for most of them, when they left the building, they were consumed by the realities of their lives in Silverton. I learned that teaching and developing students' emotional intelligence was the key to opening the door to a world of possibilities by growing each student's self awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making and a growth mindset.

This realization helped me understand the importance of teaching social and emotional learning skills and concepts daily through direct instruction, school wide structures, and academic curriculum. Setting norms, goals, checking-in physically and emotionally, and talking through peer conflicts, meanness, and bullying are the foundations which an educational program needs to be built upon. Fieldwork, service-learning, authentic audiences and products, student-led conferences, and portfolios are the real-life applications that marry academic achievement and social and emotional learning. A study published by www.turnaroundusa.org, “Building Blocks for Learning,” makes an important point: “Successful engagement in the classroom and in life relies on a set of cognitive and social-emotional skills and mindsets, which are not represented in academic

standards.” (Strafford-Brizard, 2016, p.4) I know that schools need a balanced approach to teaching academics alongside social and emotional skills. Both are important and students’ futures depend on access to both.

We know that we can’t foster the emotional intelligence of students without a building of educators that are willing to practice and engage in strengthening their own emotional intelligence. It’s imperative that school is a space for social and emotional learning for teachers and parents, and alongside professional development in the craft of teaching content areas.

Willingness to Grow

As an educator and school leader, I know that experiencing success and failure and having the willingness to keep improving and trying, are key to the success of an educational institution and system. Ken Robinson explains that effective and inspiring leadership can “create a climate of innovation and possibility in education”(2015, p.249). While traditions, rites of passage, and powerful schoolwide structures are vital in building and maintaining school culture, schools have to be enabled by their leaders to grow and be on their own pathway. When a school’s teachers, students, and parents are driven and grounded in wanting to make the world a better place, the school will become a place that transforms and is transformative. My hope as we move into an uncertain world, is that we use improvement science to continue to research, revise, and innovate.

My first year of teaching at Silverton School I was introduced to Expeditionary Learning and this has a profound impact on the way I approach education. After over 20 years, this Preamble to the Design Principles continues to be my compass.

Learning is an expedition into the unknown.

Expeditions draw together personal experience and intellectual growth to promote self-discovery and construct knowledge.

We believe that adults should guide students along this journey with care, compassion, and respect for their diverse learning styles, backgrounds and needs.

Addressing individual differences profoundly increases the potential for learning and creativity of each student.

Given fundamental levels of health, safety, and love all people can and want to learn.

We believe expeditionary learning harnesses the natural passion to learn and is a powerful method for developing the curiosity, skills, knowledge, and courage needed to imagine a better world and work toward realizing it.

(From Reflections on Design Principles)

References

- Cousins, E. (1998). *Reflections on Design Principles*.
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Spencer, J. & Juliani, A.J. (2017). *Empower*. IMPress.
Strafford-Brizard, (2016). *The Building Blocks of Learning*.