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Leadership Platform

Educational Beliefs

I went into education because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. I've lived a very blessed life and feel that it is my calling to share my knowledge, talents, and love for learning with others. I strongly believe that every child deserves a good education and a teacher who cares about them. Not just about their academic achievements, but also about how they are doing physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. I believe that every child can be successful in school if their needs are met and there is someone to support them and believe in them. I believe that people are people, and kids are kids - some have just had more opportunities or support than others- and some need a little extra. With that statement in mind, I believe that fair is not always equal. Every child has different needs. They learn differently and are going through different things in their life. It is our job as educators to give them the tools that they do need to be successful. What one child needs is not going to be the same for every other child in the class. We need to differentiate the way we deliver instruction and offer support and accommodations to those who need it.

My Story

My story (and my belief system), though shorter than some, has been evolving my entire life. I remember developing a sense of compassion, acceptance, and love for helping others early on in life. In elementary school, every day during recess, I would go to the special ed classroom (back then special needs students were separated from the rest of the school) and volunteer as a helper. My favorite days to help were PE days, when we got to play with the students, help them stretch, and share a lot of laughs. I vividly remember thinking at such a young age that it was unfair that the special needs students were separated from the rest of the school. They were just as kind and hardworking as everybody else. I learned a lot at a young age about how people are different, yet we're all the same. I carried this feeling with me throughout my entire life. That is why my strongest belief in education is that people are people; kids are kids; some have just had more opportunities, experiences, and support along the way- and some need a little extra.

Later in life, this belief solidified when I worked at a YMCA summer camp as a camp counselor. It was the most magical place to work! Nobody wore makeup, or worried about the clothes they were wearing, or talked about what cool toys they had at

home or the boys they had crushes on. It was a place where people could be themselves and be accepted for who they were. During my summers at camp I counseled cabins of girls aged 8-15 from all walks of life. Some campers were bussed in from the local Indian reservation, others were on scholarships and brought to camp through a social youth program, while some campers paid the full cost and came from beautiful homes on the south hill. Once everyone got to camp, it didn't matter where you came from, kids just bonded over being kids and their shared interest in having fun. Everyone thrived at camp. I heard a lot of tough stories from campers during my summers on the lake, and sometimes I had a really hard time saying goodbye, knowing they were going back to a tough place. As I said goodbye each week, both myself and the campers with tears in our eyes, I remember thinking "I am so fortunate to have been able to be a role model, make an impression, and give that kiddo some love... even if it was just for a few weeks of their life." It was working at summer camp that made me want to become a teacher. I knew I could connect with kids, help them grow, and give them the love and support that they need- especially those not getting enough at home.

Soon after, I became a teaching major at USD. It was during my time in this program, observing classes and doing student teaching that I deepened my thoughts and feelings about education. USD does a really good job of exposing their students to all different types of school settings. I did classroom observations in wealthy suburbs, in barrios, at a continuation high school, and in areas of south San Diego where the majority of the school population were English learners. During that time I observed a lot of great teachers. Teachers that clearly knew their students well, and loved them. Teachers who went the extra mile to help kiddos in their class that were struggling. Teachers who were in touch with students' academic, physical and emotional needs- sometimes offering them a snack if they knew they missed breakfast, or a hug if they were having a tough day. I saw the admiration that some students had for these special teachers and it made a huge impression on me. I wanted to be like them. I was very inspired by many of the teachers I observed and worked with during my time at USD.

I also saw quite a few bad teachers, and learned from them too. I saw teachers who had appeared to have given up on some of their students. I saw teachers who blamed the students for not being motivated or trying hard enough. I saw lazy teachers who had become jaded by the system. Later that year, I'll never forget, I was telling a woman on an airplane that I was going to become a teacher. She turned to me and told me very frankly "When you work with kids and they don't understand something, it's never their fault, it's yours". That statement made such a huge impression on me. Everytime my class doesn't understand something, instead of being frustrated with them, I think about how I must not have been clear enough, or I should teach the concept in another way, or maybe that student needs some extra support. All of these

things contributed to my belief that all students can be successful if their needs are met and they have a teacher who cares about them.

My Professional Experience

I started my path in education with 4 years of study at the University of San Diego where I earned a degree in liberal studies and my teaching credential. I've taught 4 years in 4th grade and subbed in grades K-6. During my time at USD I spent a semester abroad in Madrid, Spain where I learned to speak Spanish which has helped me greatly in my career. Through the education program at USD I experienced many different types of classroom settings through my 5 practicum experiences. I worked at a range of schools from elementary to high school serving a variety of student populations. I student taught at Ocean Beach Elementary under a master teacher for half of a school year. After student teaching I spent the spring long-term subbing in a 2nd and then a 3rd grade classroom at Balboa Elementary. It was at Balboa where I was trained in teaching English Language Development. I also participated in an hour of very focused reading instruction based on level each day. This provided remediation, intervention, and enrichment for students. I received my first full-time teaching position at Saint James Academy in 2012. I have been teaching 4th grade at SJA ever since. During my time at Saint James Academy I have become the technology chair and coach. We have a 1:to:1 iPad program so I have had the opportunity to attend multiple professional development conferences around iPads and technology. I have put on several technology in-service workshops for the faculty and staff at my school. I've implemented project based learning into my classroom and have worked with other teachers on using PBL in their own classrooms as well. I continue to share my professional growth with my colleagues at our monthly curriculum meetings.

Leadership Style

I was born a natural leader, but recently I have grown a lot in my leadership practices and would consider myself a democratic leader. I believe that everyone's unique experiences create a wealth of knowledge when brought together in a collective. All teachers are leaders to some degree. They all have different opinions and expertise, so it does not make sense to silence their voices or demand that they do certain things. With that said, I also believe that schools need structure in order to accomplish their goals. By demonstrating servant leadership, and distributive leadership, you can create a culture of mutual respect and at the same time ensure that teachers feel empowered and that they have some control of their work environment. When administrators and teachers come together to make important decisions about the school, everyone is going to have the students' best interests at heart. That will drive the decisions to be the

best fit for each stakeholder in the community. As an administrator I would also be sure to have an open door policy. It is important to have an open line of communication between teachers and administrators, and also to build that sense of trust and reliance. I think that the majority of people who have chosen education as their path, are more likely to be intrinsically motivated people. By empowering teachers, giving them a say, and respecting their knowledge and experience, a school staff can work together to accomplish great things.

My Non-negotiables

If I were an administrator in a school, I know that I would have very high expectations of my teachers. With that said, I must also hold myself accountable to very high expectations and standards. There are a few things that are non-negotiable to me; things that I would and already do fight really hard to ensure exist in my school. The first idea that I think is of utmost importance is to embed into the culture of the staff a commitment to excellence. Meaning that I would expect my teachers (and self) to always be willing to learn and grow. I never want myself or other teachers to become stagnant or lazy in their teaching style. There are always going to be newer, better, and more engaging ways to deliver content to students. Teachers and administrators should work hard to always be the best educator that they can be. As a leader, I would need to model this for my staff and share my love for learning. This commitment to excellence would become contagious and affect the students in a positive way. My second non-negotiable item is that faculty and staff need to be team players. Being willing to work with others is essential to building community, creating a positive atmosphere, and growing in our profession. Along with that, I hold myself accountable to supporting my colleagues and always having their back. I know from personal experience that parents or other stakeholders can become upset about situations in schools. I think it is really important that the leader always stands up for their teachers and has their back (even if it means that there may need to be a serious conversation with that teacher at a later time). If teachers and administrators don't stand up for one another, it creates an unhealthy divide in the school. It is important for the integrity of the school to remain a united front. Lastly, something that I feel very passionately about, is that every teacher working with me or under me must believe in every single student. Every student can be successful, and that starts with the teachers who are working to educate them each day. I expect teachers to go above and beyond to support every student in their class. That belief in each student could be the factor that carries them into their future.

Belief about Technology

I believe that the use of technology is a huge benefit to education. I believe this because I have personally experienced the benefits that technology has brought to my

classroom on a multitude of levels. By using various technology in the classroom I have seen student engagement go up, I've witnessed students communicating and collaborating on a whole new level, I've seen more students be able to access information at differentiated levels, and share their learning in new and creative ways.

There is always going to be a debate over any new advancement or change in education. In this scenario, some people question the necessity of technology in the classrooms. I've heard arguments that children already get too much "screen time" and that they don't need to be getting any more at school. I've heard others say that technology is replacing the importance of learning and mastering handwriting and spelling. Some opposers question whether technology actually adds to student achievement and if it is worth all of the funding that goes into it. On the other hand there is a lot of discussion on that fact that we are educating 21st century learners and that we need to connect with our students in a way that relates to them. The most important thing is that now that so many schools with access to great technology, they need to know how to use it.

Today I would like to highlight how technology has improved engagement, participation, and access to curriculum in my classroom. I am in a 1:to:1 iPad classroom, and my first year using the iPads I was fascinated with all of the possibilities for projects using these new learning tools. In that year many of my classroom projects went from posters, dioramas, and brochures to digital presentations, screencasts, stop motion videos, and iMovies. It seemed like every time I introduced a new project or application to the class they could not wait to dive into the lesson with excitement and enthusiasm. Often times I would show the class how to use a new app and explain what the project guidelines were, and the students would go above and beyond and their final products frequently exceeded my expectations. More times than not, the students ended up teaching me new and better ways to use the device. These were really wonderful experiences for students to be creative, work together, and teach one another.

It was the next year with the iPads that I learned what an incredible tool they were for differentiating instruction. One example of this was when I started creating math videos and using a modified "flipped teaching" model. During this year my class had a very broad range of abilities in math. I had some students who needed a lot of support, needed to go at a slow pace, and needed to solidify their foundation, while others were eager and ready to be challenged and move through the curriculum at a rapid pace. I developed a math workshop where students rotated through math centers. To support this program the students were required to watch math videos for homework that would preview the next day's lesson. This front loading technique worked wonders for my students. Some of my students who were much too shy and nervous to ever speak out during math now had the confidence to share their thoughts and ideas. My

stronger students were better prepared to dive deeper into a concept. The grouping was fluid. Most mornings, the students would fill out a google form on their iPads that gave me an idea of their understanding of the lesson. From there I could group them accordingly. During this year I saw my students experience tremendous growth in math.

Finally this year, I have seen the benefits of technology by giving students better access to the curriculum. I have several students with special needs this year, but two of them come to mind. One student struggles with motor skills and writing is especially difficult for him. He is a very bright boy, but for years has avoided writing. This has been detrimental to his grades in most subjects because he has not been able to clearly articulate what he knows. With the use of the iPads this year, he is now typing for all written assignments. He can quickly take a picture of a graphic organizer and type right on top of it. He is more engaged and participating more than ever. I have another student who is severely dyslexic. With the use of the iPads he is now able to listen to reading and follow along when students are required to read independently. He can also dictate his work as a way of getting his thinking on paper. Before the introduction of the iPads this year, I would often see Theo staring at his schoolwork in frustration with a tear trickling down his cheek. He hated the fact that he always needed someone to help him accomplish the tasks that all of his classmates could do. With the introduction of the iPads, both boys are now producing beautiful work and are more confident and happy at school.

These are just three examples of how I have seen technology benefit my students' learning. Their access to curriculum, engagement and participation are better than ever before.

Belief on Parent Involvement

It is widely known that parent involvement is a key factor in student achievement. There are many aspects that contribute to this correlation: help with homework and studies, organizational skills, preparedness for school, self esteem, and student emotions, among others. Today I am going to talk about one particular factor: student motivation. I believe that students are more likely to be motivated to do well in school when their parents are involved in their school life. I believe this because growing up I saw first-hand the impact that parent involvement had on my brother's life and I see it currently in the lives of my students.

Motivation is connected to student engagement which is another huge factor of student success. I read recently that students have the ultimate choice in how they are going to participate in school. When parents are involved in their child's school life, that student is much more likely to choose to engage in their school work. Additionally, when parents are interested and involved in their child's academics it sends the message to their child that school is worthwhile, important, and should be taken

seriously. In my classroom I make it known to students and families that teachers and parents are a team and must work together to support their students. When students know that their parents and teachers are communicating it gives that student extra incentive to work hard and do their best.

When I was growing up, my older brother had a really hard time in school. He was the youngest in his class, he had a severe case of ADD, he felt like every teacher disliked him, and school work did not come naturally for him. If my mom had not been constantly communicating with his teachers, helping him with his homework and making sure he had his assignments in his backpack, he may not have made it through. Knowing that my mom was there to help him and hold him accountable pushed him to keep trying. Later, in high school, Alec still had to work super hard in school, decided it wasn't for him and that he didn't want to go to college. He knew that neither of my parents finished college and they were "doing fine" so why should he have to? With the support of my parents and his teachers, my brother not only realized the importance of going to college, but he boosted his GPA enough to get into a 4 year university and graduated with a Bachelor's degree four years later. Without the support and involvement of my parents to keep him motivated, my brother probably would have dropped out of high school and never would have earned a college degree. He is just one example of how parent involvement can be life changing.

In my current classroom I also see a difference in motivation between my students whose parents are highly involved and those who aren't. I remember last year when I asked a student why they did not turn in their project they told me "only my tutor and my babysitter do homework with me and they didn't know about the project". I remember feeling so sad for that child. They knew their parent was never going to see the project, let alone help them with it, so they had this "skate by" mentality. I frequently send letters home to the parents of my students encouraging them to "check out" their child's latest project, writing piece, or test grade. Parent involvement is a source of motivation, pride and sense of accomplishment for many of my students.

My Belief About Discipline

I believe that any classroom or school discipline plan needs to be clear, consistent, and fair in order for it to work. I strongly believe this because in my first year teaching, I had to grow a backbone and learn to be firm with my policies, or I would have been eaten alive by parents.

Discipline is a tricky subject and teachers and administrators have a wide view on it. It is believed by some that teachers must be firm in order for their classroom to run smoothly. Others feel that kids are kids and exceptions should be made on a case by case basis. Some educators feel that disruptive children should be removed from the classroom so they do not affect the rest of the class' learning. Others feel that students

should suffer consequences if they are late or unprepared for school. All teachers and school leaders have a right to their own behavior management plan, but the important thing is that their expectations are clear, fair, and that they are acting on them in a consistent manner.

My first year teaching I was 22 years old, had never taught 4th grade, and had no teaching team to support me. Before the school year started I loosely put together a behavior plan and homework policy and posted it to my website. As the year began, I started to cave in to every excuse a parent or student brought to me. I made tons of exceptions and gave students far too many warnings about their behavior before taking action. By setting up the school year like this, I put myself in a really tough position. If I made an exception for one student, than it wouldn't be right to not excuse another for their late project or poor behavior. Especially when they told me "It is a one time thing, I promise I will do better". Parents quickly got word of the exceptions that I had made for one child, and reminded me of that when they came in with their own request. They even started to question my grading and asked that I "re-look" at their child's assignment from time to time. In a few words, I was being walked all over. I felt like I had no control and that I had lost my integrity as a teacher. Needless to say, the next school year I created very clear policies regarding behavior, homework, and grades and I stuck to them. I had no problems with parents that entire year, and my judgement was never questioned again. It made life easier for me, easier for the students, and easier for the parents because "that was the policy and it wouldn't be fair to others to make an exception for one child and not another". As a school leader you must also be consistent in following school procedures and policies to maintain a fair and orderly school environment.

My Beliefs on Curriculum and Instruction

I believe that curriculum is critical to ensure that students receive a balanced, well rounded education. That curriculum should be rigorous, developmentally appropriate, and should be focused on preparing students for becoming global citizens. In addition to that, I believe that students are entitled to quality instruction of that curriculum and that every student deserves to have a teacher that is committed to excellence. I believe this because I was lucky to have great teachers growing up. I can think of specific life skills that I learned from individual educators. For example, I have always felt comfortable speaking in front of others because my 4th grade teacher taught us how to properly write and deliver a speech and we practiced this skill by giving a speech once a month all year long. My 6th grade teacher taught me to love reading. She read aloud to us every single day while we practiced handwriting and left us on the edge of our seats every afternoon. She also hand picked novels that she knew I would be interested in. From that grade on I understood what a gift it was to be able to read

and I became a voracious reader. In high school, my ASB teacher instilled in me what it meant to be a leader, and taught me that I could have a tremendous impact on the people around me. What I am trying to explain with those examples is that quality teachers and quality instruction can affect students for the rest of their lives. Curriculum is the skeleton and teachers are the heart. Together they can foster critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, communication, curiosity, and a love for learning.

My beliefs about education have developed and changed over the years. As an educational leader, I know that my beliefs will continue to evolve with each opportunity and experience that I am faced.