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April 2012

The Mosaica Mosaic



Like all proud parents, as Gene and Dawn were giving birth to Mosaica, they had to come up with a name. A lithograph of a stained glass mosaic inspired them. Each pane of glass shone brilliantly in its own way, and the totality was even more beautiful than the sum of its fragmented parts - exactly the right metaphor for schools structured to help every child shine. It is also an iconic art form that dates back to the classical period, just like the education we offer. Add an "a" to the end of the word to connote its futuristic promise, and Mosaica was born.

That mosaic has developed beautifully over the last 15 years, and today our 15,000 students are a diverse reflection of the communities we serve.

In a mosaic, every piece is reliant on the others, and in constructing our mosaic, we have always recognized that each individual is critical. Every student has a Personalized Student Achievement Plan, the building block of our mosaic, which reflects the individualized approach to instruction that is the hallmark of our educational model.



Our Positive Behavior Support program also helps strengthen our mosaic. Our schools use a common language to spell out the expectations of the community and establish the culture of the school. Procedures and routines for how students should conduct themselves are taught explicitly and practiced repeatedly. Classrooms have programs to create a nurturing environment that encourages and reinforces school-wide expectations and prompts students to self-correct misbehavior. Students who need additional support are identified through a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach, in which specific disciplinary referral practices, small group interactions and therapeutic interventions by the PBS intervention team are available for students who need additional support. Team Mosaica also works hard to prevent

bullying, which diminishes individuality and has no place in our mosaic or in our school communities.



Our Paragon® curriculum is another critical tool for promoting an appreciation of diversity and allowing students to find their place in the mosaic. They learn about character, ethics and empathy by studying heroes and stepping into the shoes of great historical figures. Paragon's arts focus develops creativity, self-confidence and critical thinking skills. Part of our educational philosophy is to encourage our students from pre-K on up to participate in regularly scheduled Paragon Night performances, because we recognize that, as the founder of the national arts program in Venezuela puts it: the most holy of human rights is the right to art.

Our goal is help prepare students to be whatever they want to be: engineer, lawyer, teacher or whatever. More importantly, we want to help develop human beings comfortable in their own skin and in the global diversity of the 21st century. To do that at scale, we must make room for diversity and recognize that different backgrounds are a strength, not a threat: if there were no differences among us, we would live in a much less dynamic world. The challenge is to ensure that all our citizens participate in and contribute to society, and the way to do that is through education.

Educators readily acknowledge the benefits that a diverse student body brings to classroom discussions and learning, but they also acknowledge that we have a long way to go to bring a measure of balance to the demographics of schools. Diversity is not just for the benefit of minority students or poor kids, inner-city children or underachievers, as important as that is. Every student in a diverse class benefits from the multifaceted experiences and perspectives of the others. Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of Education, has said that education "is the civil rights of our generation."

All of us have special needs and special abilities. Our job as educators is to recognize the special needs and talents of our students and to encourage their contribution to the mosaic. We learn when we are exposed to something new and different, when we are forced to overcome our frustrations and to understand what others are saying. This has certainly been the effect of education for the three of us.

Presidents from John F. Kennedy to Ronald Reagan have inspired us with a vision of America as a Shining City upon a Hill, a place where there is no racism or religious intolerance, which is, as President Reagan put it, "teeming with people of all kinds, living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, . . . open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here." And anyone with the will and the heart to get there will find themselves, like those dazzling pieces of colored glass that inspired Gene and Dawn, a part of a brilliantly diverse mosaic that can inspire us all.

Onward and upward!

Michael J. Connelly

Gene Eidelman

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