

Teacher Support & Autonomy

Guided by a love of learning and the magic of childhood, most teachers choose the profession with great hope and joy, believing they will have the ability to positively influence, guide and impact children's lives, while also sharing and more deeply learning about subject matter that they enjoy. The children arrive in all different ways as children will. Sometimes students arrive eager, curious and open to what is being offered. Sometimes they arrive tired, sad, hungry and really not wanting to be told what to do. Every single day our teachers have to assess their students and their classroom and determine how to best move them forward with their academic learning as well as with their social emotional learning. This takes agility.

One struggle faced by our teachers is they are given strict schedules and their curriculum is often dictated, yet their every-day reality requires agility, and the trust to appropriately apply it. Sometimes their classrooms need more academic rigor and sometimes they need less. Sometimes they need to be outside and sometimes they need to be inside. Sometimes there is a student or two that needs something else that particular day or hour. Sometimes there is a family or community that needs something else.

The first thing we did upon engaging with our zoned public school (Title 1, 74% economic disadvantage, 50% minority) was to meet the teachers one-on-one and say, "I believe in you. What do you need?" And we tried to systematically approach those various needs. Some were material items that can be ordered and paid for (this calls into mind access to resources which must be addressed). One request though was for a preschool. As one of the six elementary schools in the county (out of seventy-four) that does not have VPK, this Kindergarten teacher made clear that her biggest challenge was having students start school having never been to preschool; that it took several weeks, if not months, teaching and reinforcing the general school expectations around standing in line, taking your turn, etc. when she knew she could be advancing them further with letter sounds, numbers, shapes and concepts. We started asking questions and advocating and nearly five years later are breaking ground on a building that allows our school to have preschool for the students in our geographic zone. I give this example to reinforce that listening to our teachers, doing the

best we can to meet what they see as the needs for a “high quality education” is vital.

Trust, respect and standards-based autonomy do not cost money and can be done tomorrow. Let’s start there. Then professional reviews, professional development and professional compensation. These items will go a long way to retention and recruitment.

Further, on school autonomy, I would like for our traditional K-12 schools to have the opportunity to more fully re-create their day, their subject matter focus, the methodology through which they would like to teach. Allow traditional schools to do the work of developing their plan and submitting it for approval. Allow our teachers, staff and communities to be creative, to say what their priorities in learning are, and obtain student success. Yes, common standards, and a common annual test. Allow schools and teachers to determine how to best get their students there.