The makings of a GREAT PRINCIPAL

What makes the three Washington State Principals of the Year so great?
Read on to find out more about Elementary Principal of the Year Chris Pearson, Middle Level Principal of the Year Keisha Scarlett, and High School Principal of the Year Keven Wynkoop.

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At West View Elementary School in Burlington-Edison School District, Chris Pearson commits himself to “Cada Niño” or “Each Child.” Pearson became principal at West View Elementary in 2011. West View is a Title I school that serves predominantly low-income Hispanic students. Over 79 percent of the school’s 364 students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches.

West View is also a “turnaround” school; in 2010 it was identified as persistently low-performing and was on the “priority” federal list. Today, it has a waiting list to enroll. In 2013, West View was honored by the Washington Education Association (WEA) as a “High-Performing Priority School” and featured in the Seattle Times for its reading proficiency scores, which climbed from 40.1 percent to 62.5 percent in the two years under Pearson’s leadership. The school was one of only 34 in Washington state to make double-digit growth in both math and reading scores.

The Family Center

For Pearson, it’s all about community. He believes that the partnership between school and community is essential for supporting the achievement of all students. Pearson has sought to cultivate this relationship in a variety of ways, including the establishment of an evening Family Center. The Family Center brings the school together with community agencies to embrace families and their needs. Parents can access technology, GED classes, and ELL services while students get tutoring support from teachers.

“The Family Center has opened doors for parents to not only learn strategies to support their child’s learning, but in many cases learning English,” explains Laurel Browning, Burlington-Edison Public Schools superintendent. “[Pearson] has promoted a climate of, ‘we can do it, no excuses.’”

In addition to inspiring parents to become advocates for their children, Mr. Pearson is also an advocate for parents,“ writes parent Joey Wasson.

Student and Staff Safety

School safety is also of utmost importance to Pearson. It’s his goal each day to make sure his students and staff feel safe by implementing regular safety drills, being an active presence in the school building, and greeting all students by name. He champions the phrase “Cada Niño” as the school motto.

“I have found that the most impactful way to make students feel safe is by making them feel known and loved,” says Pearson.

Pearson began his principal career at Allen Elementary (Burlington-Edison SD) in 2007. Before that, he served for a year as Dean of Students at Burlington-Edison High School. Pearson graduated in 1999 from American University in Washington, D.C., with a master’s degree in education. He earned his administrative certification from Western Washington University in 2009 and is currently working on his doctoral degree from the University of Washington.

In the spring of 2013, in partnership with Western Washington University, Pearson founded the Northwest Principal Leadership Collaborative, which provides collaboration and mentorship opportunities for principals through a summer institute and monthly site visits during the school year.
Keisha Scarlett believes the most important part of her role as principal is to develop strong teachers. Scarlett has been principal at South Shore PK-8 School since 2010, where more than 89 percent of the students are of color and more than two-thirds of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs. The school was founded in 2002 in partnership with Seattle Schools, the New School Foundation and the City of Seattle. The school is known for its innovative whole-child PK-3 program, an approach that aims to give students a firm foundation in academic, cognitive, social and emotional skills and habits.

No More Revolving Door

Scarlett was hired at South Shore in 2010 as the fourth principal in eight years. The school had been struggling with a large number of family departures after grade 3, and an influx of new students from a nearby closing school. It was also dealing with a high teacher attrition number.

Says Scarlett, “Over the past four years, I have worked to attract and retain high quality teachers. With only 240 students and each core teacher instructing an entire grade level, it is imperative to create a culture of excellence.”

Scarlett’s work has paid off. South Shore now boasts staff positions that include a full-time art teacher, a part-time STEM teacher, a new music teacher and a Chinese/Mandarin teacher, all of which answer to the community’s feedback on what it would take to retain students through to the middle school program.

Today, South Shore is the fourth highest performing K-8 school in the district. Continuous enrollment has increased to the point they now have a waiting list at each grade level, with many families attempting to move their students to South Shore even during their eighth grade year.

Community Feedback Leads to Stronger Curriculum

A survey was sent out to parents and the community for feedback on the school’s program and curriculum. The school’s master schedule was changed to support a more personalized environment, including a daily 20-minute advisory period for socio-emotional literacy skills and an hour-long Flex-

Friday period for small group projects and social skills. Under Scarlett’s leadership, South Shore’s math program was accelerated. And, Scarlett worked to bring in the best teachers possible with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education.

Kelly Aramaki, Seattle Public Schools’ Executive Director for the Southeast Region and 2013 Elementary Principal of the Year, says this about Scarlett: “When I’m discouraged or frustrated by challenges in our profession, I go to her for wisdom and inspiration. Last year I happened to be named Washington State Elementary Principal of the Year, yet Keisha is ten times the principal I was.”

Scarlett has worked as an educator in Seattle Public Schools since 1999. She taught STEM at Asa Mercer Middle School until 2005, when she moved to the central office to become a STAR Consulting Teacher. In 2007, she became a math coach at Denny Middle School, and in 2008 she took an assistant principal position at McClure Middle School, where she worked until taking a principal position at South Shore PK-8 School in 2010.

Scarlett graduated from Clark Atlanta University in 1996 with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry. She earned her Master of Teaching degree in elementary education from Heritage University in 1999, and her administrative certification from the University of Washington in 2008.

Keisha Scarlett is now a Principal Leadership Coach for Seattle Public Schools.
Keven Wynkoop

even Wynkoop became principal at Ballard High in 2010 and was Ballard High’s assistant principal for five years prior. His connection to the school goes even deeper, as Wynkoop himself is a third generation Ballard High School graduate.

Alumni Association Helps Struggling Students

Wynkoop’s goal is that all families—rich or poor, majority or minority—feel the special connection to Ballard High School that he feels. To make this happen, Wynkoop has worked diligently with Ballard High’s alumni association and the Ballard Foundation to strengthen support of struggling students. One major example of this effort is the GAINS Program (Graduation Assistance Identifying the Needs of Students), created by Wynkoop and funded by the Foundation.

“The program is in its second year and making a difference in the lives of students that might have been otherwise forgotten,” says Wynkoop.

The Freshman Transition

Wynkoop has also placed a critical focus on the transition to high school, pairing incoming freshmen with seniors through the Link Crew mentoring program. The program began in the 2005-06 school year when Wynkoop was assistant principal. Since its implementation, the school has seen dramatic changes. The number of ninth graders with at least one failing grade dropped from 89 in the program’s first year to 46 in 2012-13. In that same timeframe, the number of ninth grade suspensions has dropped from 30 to 18, with three years of only seven suspensions.

“Not only do students benefit from this program as freshmen when we learn time management, organization and problem solving skills, but seniors also learn to mentor, understand how to lead a group and gain valuable knowledge about working with a classroom,” says recent Ballard graduate Anna Cechony.

“Keven has embraced the ideology that every student can and will be successful at Ballard High School and is working diligently to create the best climate and culture possible for his students,” says Scott Seaman, AWSP Director of High School Programs.

Valuing Staff Input

Wynkoop has also worked to create a culture in which staff is involved in helping make school decisions and where their input is valued.

“Keven shows a lot of trust in his staff and he guides them to fulfill their duties while allowing them the freedom to take ownership in their decisions,” says teacher Michael James.

Wynkoop began his administrative career at Ballard High School in 2005 as assistant principal. He graduated in 1998 from Pacific Lutheran University with a bachelor’s degree in social studies education. Wynkoop earned his Master’s degree in Educational Administration in 2005 from Western Washington University.