

Q&A: Powers Principal Brian Teppner Discusses First-Year Excitement

Brian Teppner enters his 24th year as an educator about 2,400 miles away from his previous school. Teppner begins his role as principal of Powers Elementary School this year after most recently serving as principal at a middle school in Washington State. How has he adjusted to life in the Midwest? What is he most looking forward to as his tenure begins in Amherst? The principal let us know over the summer, shortly after he relocated from the West Coast.

What are your initial impressions of the Amherst community in your short time here?

Amherst is a city with a lot of history and pride. It is a close-knit community where people stick around for generation after generation. I love hearing about the rich history and need to go visit the local museums to learn more. The people are incredibly kind and care for each other. I have been welcomed by countless people, including total strangers. I love the downtown and exploring all of the local restaurants and shops. I am a huge advocate of supporting local businesses. There is a ton of civic pride and a real sense of community that I can't wait to be more integrally a part of. There is also a deep commitment and appreciation for the teachers and schools here in Amherst. I am grateful and honored to be a part of the Amherst School District and to work with such a veteran staff. I think we have tremendous leadership and a very supportive and collaborative school board. I couldn't be happier to be here and can't wait to get started.

What are you looking forward to most as you head into your first year as the principal of Powers?

I can't wait to meet the children, learn their names, and get to know them and their families to understand how to support them. The majority of my 23 years in education have been at the elementary level. The past four years, I have been working with middle schoolers, who are wonderful and ridiculous, in their own way, but I am really looking forward to getting back to working with younger students. On a bad day, it is difficult to be too upset if you are hanging out with a room full of smiling kindergarteners. There is something pretty special about an elementary schoolhouse. There is a deep commitment to instilling a love of learning at an early age. This commitment is evident at Powers.

What did you learn from your involvement in things like your former district's Special Education Advisory Committee and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee's STEM Education Innovation Alliance? How did they enhance your leadership skills as a principal?

As a Principal and as a parent of a student with special needs, I have had a lot of experience supporting students with Individual Education Plans and their families as they navigate the education system. Having multiple perspectives and having sat on both sides of the conference table has been incredibly valuable. Working with the Special Education Advisory Committee for a number of years in Renton (Washington), I supported the development of a Special Education handbook where systems and procedures were documented in order to promote consistency and legal compliance. We also surveyed staff, students, and families to create meaningful and timely professional development for classified and certificated staff. Members of the committee included all stakeholders (teachers, para-educators, parents, and, when relevant, students) and

influenced my skills and knowledge as an administrator by grounding me in practical solutions to the vast and diverse needs of students. Truly, the benefit that I bring with me to Amherst is a deep commitment to making sure the unique needs of students are met with creative and equally individualized supports.

As for the Governor's STEM Education Innovation Alliance, it was a chance to work with educators, politicians, business leaders, and scientists in support of closing the gap between what the STEM industry needs and what our students are learning. Washington was number two in STEM careers, but number 46 in successfully getting students through our education system qualified to take on those jobs. Sitting in the room with distinguished leaders of diverse fields of expertise and influencing policy and budgets for the state of Washington was an incredible leadership opportunity. I was truly honored to sit in a room and have a voice at the table with the Governor as policy, legislation, and budgets were drafted. The work and the people helped me to be a better leader. Out of the years of service in Washington, I developed a value for effective communication, creative and diverse perspectives in problem solving, and keeping a laser focus on objectives with metrics to monitor progress towards those objectives.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not working?

I love being outdoors in any season. In Washington, we had a beautiful and diverse landscape that I took full advantage of by gardening, hiking, camping, or playing/watching sports. I look forward to finding places to explore here in Ohio and am already a fan of the Cleveland Indians. We just built a new house in Amherst, so I am spending a lot of time putting a yard together and trying to be handy inside the house as well. I also love to exercise. I am a gym rat. Lately, I have begun to run more. You might see me around town trying to keep up with my amazing wife (who is a REAL runner). If you ever see me, please say "hi" or wave.

What is something your students might be surprised to learn about you – any hidden talents we should know about?

If you ask me, I'd say my best attribute and what I enjoy doing more than anything (besides being a Principal) would be cooking. When I was first dating my wife I kept telling her, "you don't know my best attribute yet!" I love throwing together meals out of whatever is in the refrigerator or trying to match flavors I discover in some restaurant. I even love shopping for food in markets or butcher shops. Cooking really allows me to be creative, which is probably why I stay away from baking where a little more precision is required. My main goal these days is to (not so secretly now) slowly increase the heat threshold of my wife, so that I can cook some of the spicier foods that I crave. I can't wait to cook for my staff at Powers.