Ensuring Every Student Leaves with Their WINGS

The Falcon Zone, District 49

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The goal of WINGS was to clearly and intentionally develop the skills and dispositions every student needs for success beyond graduation. The Falcon Zone in D49 recognized there was not an aligned set of traits in the K–12 system to clearly identify shared goals for students and so they developed their Portrait of a Graduate framework to focus on WINGS. WINGS represents Wisdom, Integrity, Networking, Grit, and Self-Confidence—core traits embedded across the Falcon Zone to guide learning experiences and prepare students for their future.

The Portrait of a Graduate was designed collaboratively by a steering committee, teachers, and K–12 students working in small groups, undergoing many iterations of both the design and acronym. Family feedback and input was sought during implementation through school-level School Accountability Committee (SAC) and PTA meetings. Implementation was led by the zone superintendent and supported by administrators, teachers, and staff.

WINGS became the foundation for both academic and behavioral expectations across all seven Falcon Zone schools and was fully embedded within each school's PBIS system. At the elementary level, teachers incorporated WINGS into daily instruction. Schools hosted assemblies to celebrate students who exemplified WINGS traits. At the secondary level, WINGS was highlighted through "WINGS Wednesday" Senior Spotlights. WINGS was also communicated through zone-level newsletters, community messaging, and visible branding. In addition, community members and partners who support Falcon Zone schools were intentionally recognized by presenting them with a WINGS certificate and thanking them for helping Falcon Zone students "earn their WINGS."

The practice was evaluated through ongoing observation of student and staff use of WINGS language and its integration into classrooms. The framework was organically woven into school and zone newsletters, Facebook posts, school assemblies, student recognition programs, and community celebrations. This continual integration into everyday practices and communications demonstrated that WINGS is a part of the Falcon Zone's culture rather than a standalone initiative.

To successfully replicate this practice, districts should begin by building a representative committee that includes students from across grades K–12 to ensure the framework reflects the voices of those it is intended to serve. Keeping the design simple, memorable, and meaningful is essential. Before launching the practice, districts should intentionally seek feedback from family leadership groups, such as School Accountability Committees (SACs) and PTAs, so families understand the purpose of the framework and feel invested in its success. Leaders should then embed the language into daily routines, instruction, celebrations, and recognition systems, while also incorporating it into communications with families so students experience consistency between school and home. Strong visuals, consistent branding, and regular reinforcement through newsletters, social media, assemblies, and community events help make the framework visible and recognizable.