

Sue-Ellen O'Shea
Principal of Marvin Elementary School

How do you and your school community promote a sense of belongingness?

At Marvin Elementary School, we believe that belonging begins with knowing that you are seen, heard, valued, and cared for. We work daily to create a school community where every student, staff member, and family knows that they matter and that they have a place here. We build belonging through relationships and through the everyday things we do, greeting students by name, celebrating their strengths, creating opportunities for student voice, honoring the many cultures and experiences represented in our school, and making sure families feel welcomed and connected to our school community.

Our Champion for All initiative is one example of this commitment: every student is connected with an adult in our building who knows them, cares about them, and is there to champion them.

Our staff also creates belonging for one another. We celebrate each other's successes, support one another during challenging times, and remind ourselves that we are stronger when we work together. I am reminded of the saying when I see a student or staff member wearing a T-Shirt the PTA made for every student and staff member that said Marvin School Better Together. Our STARS expectations: Safe, Truthful, Always Respectful, Responsible, and Super Kind are more than words on a wall. They reflect the kind of community we want Marvin to be every day.

What do you value most about your staff?

What I value most about our staff is their deep commitment to children. Our staff members care deeply about their students, not only as learners, but as people. They notice when a child is struggling. They celebrate when a child succeeds, and they remind them of the Power of Yet by looking for ways to help every student grow.

I also value their willingness to learn and grow together. Teaching is complex work, and our staff understands that we do not have to have all the answers. We can ask questions, learn from one another, try something new, reflect on what is working, and adjust when something is not.





I value the heart our staff brings to Marvin every day. They bring different strengths, experiences, perspectives, and talents to our school, but they share a common belief: every child deserves to feel successful, connected, and valued. That commitment is what makes our school community special.

How does your school community help you to be a better principal?

Our students keep me curious and remind me to

see the world through their eyes. Our teachers continually challenge me to think about what learning and teaching look like from the classroom perspective. Our families help me better understand the hopes, experiences, and needs they bring to our school. My colleagues remind me that the best solutions are often created when we work out solutions together.

Being a principal has taught me that I am a better leader when I remain a learner. My school community pushes me to listen more closely, ask better questions, be reflective, and continually consider how my decisions affect the students in our building.

Working at Marvin reminds me that leadership is a relationship. I don't believe I have to have all the answers and rely on the expertise of the staff around me to gather their input so there is a shared sense of commitment and collaboration.



What are you most proud of and what are you striving to do better?

I am most proud of the community we continue to build at Marvin. A community where we care about one another and where we make sure every student feels that they belong. I am proud of our staff's commitment to children, our families' partnership with our school. I'm of the ways our students are learning to be critical thinkers, effective communicators, and kind, responsible members of our community.

I am also proud of our willingness to look honestly at ourselves. We celebrate our successes, but we also ask where we need to grow. That is an important part of who we are as a school. What I am striving to do better is create even greater coherence and consistency in our work. I want our students and families to experience the same high expectations, sense of belonging, and commitment to learning no matter which classroom, grade, or part of the building they enter. As a leader, I am also working to listen more, share leadership more effectively, and create the conditions for our staff to learn from and support one another.

There is always more work to do, and I see that as a strength rather than a weakness. Our goal is not perfection, our goal is continuous growth: for our students, our staff, and myself.