

July 1st, 2023

Greetings Thoreau Families,

It is with sincere optimism that I speak to you today as the newly appointed Principal of Thoreau Elementary School. During my recent interview process I had the opportunity to meet many of you, and each interaction drew a picture of an exceptional school. I was heartened by the demonstrated evidence of a community committed to ensuring their children's educational excellence. Across the board, everyone I encountered was student-focused, passionate, and positive.

I believe the years I invested in teaching at the elementary level in rural, suburban, and urban settings created real-time transferable skills. Teaching in different contexts helped me identify the varied unique impediments to student success. And after more than a decade, I was ready to tackle the admittedly daunting challenges of an inner-city school as Assistant Principal and then Principal. Over those four years as an administrator, I learned all students must feel welcomed and invested to reach their full potential. Connections to staff, enrichment offerings, friendships, academics, and athletics correlates with their ability to thrive. Each child represents a complex puzzle to be solved by educators who must identify what makes them unique. In determining their strengths and challenges as learners, we can enable the growth and development of the whole child.

This philosophy rings true for me as an educator and administrator, but also as the proud father of two children. My 12-year-old son, Luke, and 7-year-old daughter, Phoebe, could not be more different from one another. They learn in different ways; they are motivated and driven in different ways. They have different talents, growth-opportunities, and interests. All of our children have experienced challenging times as they were forced to navigate through the pandemic as well as a rapidly changing and evolving society. Wanting the very best for our children, we will go to great lengths to advocate for their needs. And I will bring this perspective with me to Thoreau every day. As a student-focused leader, I never lose sight of why we're here, and my decision-making process always begins with: "Is this best for kids?" Understanding and supporting the social-emotional needs of children while holding high academic expectations is a core belief of mine.

I also have experience forging productive, collaborative school-community partnerships. Having recently completed a second 3-year term as member, Secretary, and Vice Chair of the Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School Committee, I appreciate the impactful benefits of a healthy relationship. As a board member, it was a priority to be visible and accessible to all stakeholder groups. To me, the position meant more than creating policies and crafting budgets; it was about listening and engaging in collaborative discussions on topics to improve the system and enrich the educational experience for our students. Through this work, opportunities for students grow and outcomes are strengthened. The stronger the connection between home and school, the stronger student achievement will be. I intend to carry this mindset with me to my new position.

As with school board service, being visible and accessible is essential to the success of a Principal. Looking ahead, partnerships will elevate us in the upward trajectory of success. I'll be communicating often with you through multiple platforms. Be on the lookout for my weekly newsletter in your inbox every Sunday. Throughout the year, regular coffee hours will offer informal ways to collaborate. This summer, you'll find me in the building Tuesday-Thursday most weeks, for opportunities to meet with me one-on-one, either in-person or virtually. Please do not hesitate to reach out for any reason, as I'm here to serve our students and families.

I look forward to collaboratively building upon the greatness that already exists in CPS and Thoreau.

"This world is but a canvas to our imagination."

-Henry David Thoreau

With Gratitude,

Justin M Sparks

Principal

Thoreau Elementary School

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