

Wildkit Way Podcast: Season 1, Episode 1

Announcer (00:03):

Welcome to the Wildkit Way, a podcast that gives the mic to Dr. Marcus Campbell, the superintendent of Evanston township high school. Join us on this audio journey. As Dr. Campbell shares his stories and insights, and has honest, real conversations with people who make ETS and our community, the incredible place it is.

Announcer (00:30):

In this inaugural episode, healing together. Dr. Campbell introduces you to the ETHS assistant superintendent and principal Taya Kinzie, and the two discuss their work to help transform the lives of students while supporting staff this school year. So let's get started.

Marcus Campbell (00:56):

Hello E-Town. This is Dr. Campbell, new superintendent, Evanston Township High School District 202. And I'm joined by the assistant superintendent, Dr. Taya Kinzie, who has been one of my colleagues here for the last 18 years. Is it Taya?

Taya Kinzie (01:14):

Yeah. 19th year right now. Yeah.

Marcus Campbell (01:16):

So, Taya and I have been sharing for quite a bit of time that we are new to our roles, but not new to ETHS.

Dr. Campbell in the ETHS hallway (01:25):

Hi, Dr. Campbell. How are you Miles? I'm doing good school. Year's going good? Yeah, it's doing really good. Yeah.

Marcus Campbell (01:32):

This is my 21st year at Evanston Township High School. I've been a teacher, I've been a coordinator. I've been a director. I've been an associate principal. I was assistant superintendent principal and who would've thought that I would be superintendent. So I'm very happy to serve in that way. And Dr. Kinzie, you're here with me today. What about you? What about your roles? What have you had in the school?

Taya Kinzie (01:54):

So I love the fact that we've had some parallel experiences through the years of having held many roles and focused on both supporting students and helping all of us learn and supporting our staff as well as our families. So I think about that with the different hats I've worn. Fun little fact that I had shared just most recently was actually my journey at ETHS started along before I even came to ETHS myself, because my grandmother was a teacher's aide, a paraprofessional helping students learn to read. And I...

Marcus Campbell (02:30):

That's pretty awesome. I didn't even know that.

Taya Kinzie (02:32):

Crazy. Yeah, it is awesome. And I feel like this is just another way to honor her memory right now. So, it is fun to think about all the years having been here. I am not counting my 18 years when I came here as an intern in '97. So hopefully not everybody out there is doing the math for us right now.

Marcus Campbell (02:50):

I graduated from high school in '97.

Taya Kinzie (02:51):

Thank you very much. <laugh> I wasn't that much older <laugh>. And then, having been an intern and then coming back to ETHS, having stayed connected and came back as a school social worker working in special education and loved that and loved all the schoolwide work that we do both in supporting teachers and doing schoolwide committee work and systems change and, and found myself in that Dean's role. And I know you and I have both shared kind of a similar process of realizing that sometimes we don't know what we're gonna be called to do next. So I didn't see myself as moving into that associate principal for student services, but I loved every minute of each of these roles. And I'm really excited now to be working alongside you as principal and assistant superintendent.

Marcus Campbell (03:41):

Dr. Kinzie and I are gonna be out and about in the community doing a listening and learning series this fall. We want to continue to introduce ourselves to you and the Evanston community. Although we've been here a while, there's still a lot of learning that we know that we can do. And we want you to know who we are. We want you to know our stories. We think that stories is actually what connects us and our humanity. And throughout the fall, you'll have an opportunity to do that. I think we can both say that we are very kind of low key individuals. We recognize the positionality that we have, but that's not like how we really roll, right? We are really just human beings trying to connect with other human beings, recognizing that hierarchy exists, but that's

not necessarily how we have to engage one another. We can engage each other in our humanity, in our collective experience. Certainly, you've had students here that you've connected with, that you still are in touch with you and I have both had students that we've lost and, we share a lot of similarities and our why and and leadership and how we plan to engage these roles to really transform the lives of our kids and support our students, but also support our staff who are supporting students directly.

Taya Kinzie (05:04):

Absolutely...had to pause, as I thought about the students we've lost and I guess this is also similar to how we started the school year, and you and I both said we can hold space for grief and for loss and still be excited about coming together and a whole new school year ahead of us. And so it reminds me of kind of starting the school year and all the journeys that we've had along the way. Also I was thinking when you were just talking about how we both lead, I was sharing with someone just the other day-- with a parent-- I love the fact that you and I can both say, well, this is where Marcus and I are very much on the same page. And there are many ways that we are. And I think one of them is the act of listening and showing that care to folks. Like you said, we're both pretty low key and hopefully pretty approachable.

Despite having some positionality along the way, and the value of really listening and paying attention to what folks need, whether that's students. And I know through the years, we've both said, sometimes it's the act of showing the care to really listen: what is someone's experience, whether it's a parents' experience, whether it's a staff member, whether it's a student. It's one of the things I appreciate about you. It's one of the things I'm always striving to do. And you know, I think it goes along with we're going to listen. And I know that along the way, we're all perfectly imperfect, myself included. And so when I make a misstep, I talk about that, and I know you do too with our staff members and with our families and with our students, because that's how we can model we're human beings. We are humanizing ourselves and we can always work to do better and be better. So I think that goes along with the fact that we do-- you and I-- I think strive to be kinder than necessary to each other. Yeah. I believe that we have to do that. And I think we both do for all of our students and for our staff and our families who have gone through so much and have so much to look forward to at the same time. So it's really about balancing that.

Marcus Campbell at Staff Institute Day (07:16):

Here are my anchors and how I plan to serve you and serve our students: to serve this community with humility. I need encouragement when I succeed, I need empathy and I will model empathy, but I also plan to be proximate. And I think that is the key for us to really be together is to be proximate to one another.

Marcus Campbell (07:49):

Yeah, I think I shared with the staff on opening day that we want to be empathetic, proximate, and humble. And that is sort of how we want to, it's definitely a part of our leadership core and it's not something like a box that we're checking. It's really who we are and how we've lived and

have tried to live our lives perfectly imperfect, so much so that even on the way to have this conversation, I was stopped by a number of students who wanted to talk about our practices regarding tardies and things like that. And I say, hey, if I'm approachable, of course, I'm going to have the conversation with kids and explain our why, and they understand what we're doing and why we are doing, and how we're holding them to high expectations of being in class and being on time.

Marcus Campbell (08:44):

That is really important for us. Because that instructional time is really the most valuable, some of the most valuable time that they could have in the school. So, we want to continue to do that. We want to do that in the community this particular fall. And even though we've been here a long time and I'll say this again, we know that we still have a lot to learn. There's still so much more that we can take in as leaders. And I believe that there's safety in the multitude of council. So the more counsel we get, the more conversations we have, I know we end up in a better place regarding some decisions that we have to make.

Taya Kinzie (09:19):

Absolutely. And we've made some of those changes along the way already with student voice at the center of that. So I know we want to keep doing that and especially as we look at, you know, how we're moving forward with the four guiding principles.

Marcus Campbell (09:36):

Why don't you share a little bit about what they are?

Taya Kinzie (09:38):

So when we think about our priorities: equity, we focused on for a long time, as we think about racial equity. And I'm so excited about the ways that we are now naming how that intertwines with social-emotional, learning, how that intertwines with our post high school planning, how that intertwines with literacy. So really excited about that and how we're holding ourselves accountable to how are we going to grow into this and how are we going to make it relevant? Now I had a student and again, honor his memory right now, too, who talked a lot about the real world school, right? And I think this is what we're doing right now is making this about the real world. It's relevant to right here right now, and relevant on down the road. And that means the loving accountability for each of us, you're mentioning the tardies, right?

Marcus Campbell (10:29):

And the attendance.

Taya Kinzie (10:30):

And the attendance and how can we really be present and how can we support student voice in that? And also make sure that each of us is working to hold each other accountable with support. And that relates to social-emotional learning. You know, we think about those priorities and I think about safety and how that's been center for a lot of us in our community and how that we each have a step to take about how we're supporting each other. And you, and I've said it many times and you just said it the other day and we both added to it around acknowledge care and tell as a theme, when we think about that, it's real. It really is about acknowledging how we feel when we're worried about another student, when we're worried about ourselves, if we're worried about self harm, if we're worried about the potential for someone else to do harm that we always have to acknowledge it, tell the person we care or show we care by then telling an adult.

And I think it's been phenomenal. I think about all the many, many times through the years, even since we started talking about acknowledge care, tell, when students bring their friends forward or share, I'm really worried about this, my friend, or say, or parents reach out and say, oh my, I'm really worried about this student. What can we do next? And we've been able to do interventions. And it's just the power of our community that really gives me even more great hope about the future and how we're going to continue to make changes. Because we live in a community that cares so deeply, you know, our families, our students, our staff. So I think it's pretty phenomenal about the ways that that happens and also about how we engage in school while we're at school. You know, just thinking about a funny story and I shared this the other night at open house, thinking about accountability and some of the changes that we're working to make, given that we are all tethered, many of us are tethered to, I shouldn't speak for everybody, should I? <Laugh>

Many of us are tethered to our phones and you know, a parent shared just the other day that they can tell that there's been a significant change in how their student engages in school and the messaging that we all as a school, right? This isn't teachers who've said, don't use your cell phones in class down. Put away when you walk in-- that that is not just a teacher message. That is all of us; parents are reinforcing that; all of us sending even announcements, emails. And that there's a difference because the parent could tell the difference from this school year with the number of minutes engaged in on their students phone compared to previous years. So we're excited about the ways that we can continue to help positive engagement too.

Marcus Campbell (13:22):

For those of you don't know, we changed some language in our student handbook where phones have to be off and put away during class and Dr. Kinzie and I mentioned that at open house and there were applause in a room from parents <laugh> on our new way to talk about phones in class. And it's quite a change. It's something that our teachers have wanted. And it's something that I didn't really quite know that so many parents were supporting of this too until open house, which was very encouraging that we have a lot of parental support saying, yeah,

please help my students stay off of their phone because we know how distracting that can be. And of course, you know, phones have their utility with emergencies and things like that.

Taya Kinzie (14:08):

Absolutely.

Marcus Campbell (14:08):

But what feedback! I was so surprised.

Taya Kinzie (14:10):

Right.

Marcus Campbell (14:12):

At the feedback to say, oh yeah, we're all on the same page. This is good. This is really good. It was exciting.

Taya Kinzie (14:17):

For sure. I was thinking about the other ways that we've been doing some of the four pillars and our priorities of thinking about that: the equity, social-emotional learning post high school planning, literacy, and thinking about that is showing up in so many ways in the classroom. And I'm sure you could come up with many, many examples as well right now. I'm thinking of one that just kind of is coming up to the forefront for me of, you know, a teacher's story about them never feeling like social-emotional learning, really pertained to math at all. And what they discovered along the way was there were some tools that we provided of how to pay attention, right. And be present, make decisions, how to solve some problems, how to navigate and cope. And they were really appreciative and wanted that to continue. But it's those unexpected ways that we can learn about ourselves, even if we've been doing the practice of teaching or instruction or whatever our craft is and to continue. So I just love that as an example.

Marcus Campbell (15:23):

And I just love that we're all on the same page. Yeah. I love that the students seem to understand our staff certainly is enthusiastic. Parents are supportive and we are just elated that we could all be on the same page for an objective that we know is important for our kids, for our students. And so, very excited about that.

Well, Dr. Kinzie, thank you for joining this podcast. I am really excited to be hosting a series of conversations in the podcast as superintendent. And I could think of no better first guest <laugh> than my partner and my friend Dr. Taya Kinzie. It's such a pleasure to have you here as we kick off a new year and looking forward to many, many opportunities for conversation, opportunities for change, and I'm just inspired by your leadership. So I appreciate you, you know

that. Thank you for being a teacher for me. And thank you for leading the way that you lead because it certainly has helped not just our school, but our entire community. So thanks again for being here, Dr. Kinzie.

Taya Kinzie (16:38):

Thank you, Dr. Campbell. I am equally thrilled to be here and I've already seen the changes in a few weeks with your leadership. So I'm excited about the future. Thank you.

Marcus Campbell (16:50):

Thank you.

Announcer (16:52):

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