

Wildkit Way Transcript: Season 2, 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 ETHS and our community, the incredible place it is.

([00:30](#)):

How do we as a school community show up to ETHS each day? How do we honor, celebrate, support, and see each other? In the first podcast of the 2023-24 school year, Dr. Marcus Campbell sits down with ETHS, assistant superintendent and principal Taya Kinzie, and together they discuss the strategic priorities of the district along with the commitment to be responsive to staff and student needs. Let's begin.

Marcus Campbell ([01:02](#)):

Welcome everyone. My name is Marcus Campbell. I use he him pronouns. I serve as superintendent here at Evanston Township High School and welcome to the Wildkit Way podcast for the 2023-24 school year. And I am delighted to have our illustrious assistant superintendent, principal, Dr. Taya Kinzie, joining me for the first podcast of the year like she did for the last podcast. And how are you doing, Taya?

Taya Kinzie ([01:31](#)):

I'm good. I think, I know we've talked about this. It feels like a fresh new year. We're already in week five and we've gotten such good feedback from students and from families and even from open house and from staff, and we've got lots to do, but it's been a good year already. That's

Marcus Campbell ([01:50](#)):

Good. I mean, I see you all around the building all the time. I'm sure you're getting a lot of steps in.

Taya Kinzie ([01:55](#)):

I am, which is why I'm wearing those tennis shoes.

Marcus Campbell ([01:58](#)):

That's great. So one of the things that you and I have been talking about are the strategic priorities of the district, and that is social emotional learning, racial equity, literacy, and post high school planning. And we know that those count as not as a strategic plan, but really how we are doing what we do in the district. We know that we want our kids to be able to read the word and read the world, which is our literacy component, that racial equity is a huge portion and value in our community. And post high school planning, well, you got to be prepared for when you leave ETHS and social emotional learning, which we were starting before the pre pandemic, but boy oh boy. Now that all of that's kind of ending, we're still dealing with the impact of what it meant to be so isolated and all of that. So how are you addressing the priorities? And then I'll share a little bit too, I guess.

Taya Kinzie ([02:58](#)):

Yeah. Well, as I think about the ways that we've identified those strategic priorities and how they're all interwoven, that ultimately so many things that we're talking about has social emotional learning centers, racial equity. At the same time they're not in exclusion. And when we're thinking about literacy as well, and even the post high school planning, and I know we've talked about this through the years of everything that we're doing right now to help students build skills isn't just about the planning, but it's about those lifelong skills, whether that's post high school planning, the social emotional learning, and all these other facets of how we're centering our racial equity, how we're centering our focus on literacy. And so I'm excited about the way that we are all as an entire school owning that and that our families are too and our students,

Marcus Campbell (03:44):

And I know that we are working on a lot of things here at ETHS, both structurally and programmatically to address these priorities. We're thinking about a number of ways to get these programming and services to the kids. And so we're really excited about that. So I'm asking ETHS community to stay a little bit tuned for that. One of the things that I was able to do during institute day is to talk about our district pedagogy. And when I say pedagogy, I simply mean what it is that we do, why did we do it, and what is our approach? I came across an old poem called In Lak'ech, and I shared it with the staff and Dr. Kinzie and I are going to read it in both English and Spanish and kind of talk about how this is also our guiding principle. Taya, you going to start?

Taya Kinzie (04:37):

Sure. All. All right. I'll start that in Spanish then. In Lak'ech. Tú Eres Mi Otro Yo. Si Te Hago Dano a ti. Me Hago Dano a Mi Mismo. Si Te Amo Y Respeto. Me Amo Y Respeto Yo.

Marcus Campbell (04:44):

You are my other me. If I do harm to you, I do harm to myself. If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself. So this has become how we do what we do at ETHS In Lak'ech and what you just heard. And you can find it online anywhere. I think if you just Google it, you can pull up the poem. But in reflecting, it's our discipline philosophy. It's social emotional learning, it's racial equity. It's the Wildkit Way. It's pretty much everything grounds everything that we do at ETHS. How are you interpreting some of that Taya and actually demonstrating that and leading that as the principal?

Taya Kinzie (05:35):

Yeah. Well, two pieces to that, right? And I think about In Lak'ech and what it's meant to us and to me through the years, and it's so perfectly dovetailed with our focus as we think about the year of how we're showing up, you even said that as part of the introduction to In Lak'ech. And that really is about the reflecting. It's really about listening, understanding, stopping to reflect on ourselves and what we're doing and thinking about that for me and then how I'm acting with compassion. So I think about that for all of us, but I also want to make sure that I'm modeling it, not because I get it right every moment, but because I want to make sure that I'm actually engaging in all of those steps.

Marcus Campbell (06:20):

You don't get it right, Taya? (laughs)

Taya Kinzie (06:21):

Well, sometimes I get it right, but not all the time. Come on now. And that's part of how we model it. Even when you ask, we can joke about it because we know I ain't perfect, but the importance of each of us being able to take accountability, that is leaders that I want to make sure that I'm doing that every moment that I'm doing that with other leaders, and I'm doing that with staff, that we're doing that with students so that we're all giving each other not just permission to do that for ourselves, but also that we're communicating the expectation of this is how we show up for each other.

Marcus Campbell ([06:56](#)):

This is how we show up for us. This is how we show up for each other. This is how we show up as leaders. And this guides every interaction. Student to student.

Taya Kinzie ([07:06](#)):

That's right.

Marcus Campbell ([07:07](#)):

Teacher to teacher, teacher to student, whatever support person, whatever the staff member is. This is the guiding framework and it humanizes us, but it also acts as an extension of love. And I think I said to the staff, I say people don't talk about love in schools, but I'm going to talk about love in schools because we are a very people-oriented organization. And it's okay to say that we want to treat each other with respect and with love. That's okay to say in the school.

Taya Kinzie ([07:41](#)):

Absolutely. Well, and part of that is us as a family, when we talk about any kind of family and ETHS as a family, that means that we can show love, we can show compassion, we can pause, we can reflect, and we problem solve. That's right. Because like any family, when we encounter problems, we want to name it, we want to claim it, we want to do direct problem solving. I know that's part of what we've been really making sure that we're all doing with each other, pulling, centering our students, centering our families, centering our staff. How are we doing that and thinking about that because I know a piece of that that we both communicated and that we want to continue to is what can we expect? The clarity of what I'm expecting. What can I expect from you? What can people expect from us? What can our students expect from each other and from us? What can our staff expect too?

Marcus Campbell ([08:30](#)):

Yeah. Well, it's how we solve problems together. And it's how we learn. It's how we grow as a community. And I appreciate you saying that you had something that you shared with the staff about honoring all identities. And it's important that we do that. I mean, given what's happening in our country, what's happening in the Supreme Court, we are just seeing so much is so much social movement and the deconstruction of certain things that we've had for a number of decades now. But at ETHS, we remain committed to honoring identity. This is not identity politics. This is about loving one another, seeing people and accepting people as they are and loving them and understanding them. And you had that in your message to the families and to the staff at ETHS.

Taya Kinzie ([09:24](#)):

Yeah, building on exactly what you're saying about, it's about seeing each other. It's about loving each other and it's about how we create the spaces for accessibility, for inclusion, for naming that, right? And

for naming our commitment, like you said, we remain steadfast and committed. And that really means focusing and centering all of our staff identities, our student identities and our family identities, too.

Marcus Campbell ([09:50](#)):

We certainly don't leave them at home when we come to work.

Taya Kinzie ([09:52](#)):

We do not leave our identities at home nor the complexity of our lives. Right? And so thinking about making sure that we're naming it and continuing to naming that we are honoring all identities and the myriad ways they intersect. Race, disability, ability, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language, and making sure that we are pulling our student voice in the midst of that, our staff too, and our families pulling our families in even more. And I know we spent a lot of time doing that last year as we went throughout the community as well as pulling families into the building. So how we're honoring that is important, particularly because we want to make sure that we're speaking the truth and allowing others to speak the truth. So we do disrupt patterns of oppression.

Marcus Campbell ([10:42](#)):

And we don't always get that right either. Our educational system is built on a certain set of principles that are agrarian, and there are lots of laws that are built and set around it. But whenever we can dismantle and disrupt systems of oppression, we will. And I think that we have been working hard to rehumanize education, right? To rehumanize ourselves as staff and rehumanize the kids. We're not just these cogs in the wheel or this manufacturing or this factory personality. You got the bell rings and people move and you've got these systems and it's a factory model. But if we can humanize the machine, that's what our goal is. And so the prevention is knowing that we don't always get it right, but we're working hard every single day. And when we get it wrong, that's why we have restorative practices. That's right. That's why we're engaging in things like that here in the district. How are you reflecting on that Taya?

Taya Kinzie ([11:54](#)):

Well, thinking about that healing and the humanizing and restorative practices so that we can repair harm when harm is done, I've done harm inadvertently yet nonetheless and needed to own it and repair that. And that's something we can all be doing every single day. That's why we're committed to it. And there's other facets of healing. It's our Acknowledge, Care, Tell. It's our call upon every single student, family, staff member that if we're worried about another individual, whether that's potential harm to self or others, that we speak it, we say it out loud, we acknowledge it, we show that we care by telling someone. And this happens all the time. It's part of how we keep our community safe. So that's part of that prevention you were speaking to and that healing, and I love this quote of healing, is that ongoing because we always have something to heal from. And you already said, yep. We walk in the door with our identities and the complexities right, of our own individual lives, students, staff, that the recognition of that healing is not a stick to beat others or yourself. That it's not an all or nothing mentality. And that's when sometimes we can think of problem solving is all or nothing or even healing, but it's not. It's an ongoing journey for each of us. And that's through restorative practices, that's through us showing up, like you said, in that Wildkit Way within In Lak'ech so that we can be sincere about that. And that's part of our shifting for our ongoing growth as a community. We can do this together.

Marcus Campbell ([13:25](#)):

And we know that showing that part of that prevention is actually also showing care for our students. We have data that tells us that when we show care for our students, it lowers depression and so many other things. And that is something that we've been focusing on with our teachers and our staff and all of the kids that are outside of my office making Tik Toks. When we show them love and care and compassion, it lowers depression. And that's important for us.

Taya Kinzie ([13:54](#)):

It's really important. And I think I'm glad that you brought that up. Just thinking about the years of data that we already have in that is we've seen an increase because students self-report that when staff members show the interest in their work within the classroom, but their lives outside of the classroom, there has been an absolute correlation to lower levels of depressive symptoms. And we've seen an increase in how students feel about staff members showing interest in their lives and who they are as human beings, as very whole complex human beings and lowering those levels of depression. And we're going to continue on that because everything we do makes a difference.

Marcus Campbell ([14:33](#)):

Everything we do makes a difference. And so well, I am really excited about starting another year with you and the team and the staff and the kids. We've had a smooth start to school. I think I can say that now.

Taya Kinzie ([14:48](#)):

You can. You can say it. Right?

Marcus Campbell ([14:51](#)):

And we're just excited to be back and I'm looking forward to a great year. So thank you everyone. And I'm hoping that you will tune in to the Wildkit Way podcast this year and have a great day. And Go Kits!

Announcer ([15:06](#)):

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