

Wildkit Way Transcript: Season 2, Episode 7

Announcer:

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.

As we wrap up the 2023-24 school year, Dr. Campbell sits down with the new superintendent of Evanston-Skokie School District 65, Dr. Angel Turner. The two discuss how the two districts are working together to support the needs of all students in the Evanston-Skokie community. Let's get started!

Marcus Campbell:

Hello everyone. This is Dr. Campbell here, superintendent at Evanston Township High School, and welcome to another episode of the Wildkit Way podcast. And I am here today with my distinguished and illustrious colleague, Dr. Angel Turner, the newly appointed Superintendent for District 65, Evanston-Skokie. Congratulations, Dr. Turner. And I guess officially welcome. Although you've been doing the work for a long time. A long time. You've been doing the work for a while. So can you talk a little bit about how you're feeling in the moment at the board meeting? I was at the board meeting. I was so happy and thank you so much and meeting your family and all of that.

Angel Turner:

Yes, they loved meeting you. My mom is like, I loved meeting him.

Marcus Campbell:

So how are you feeling and what's on your mind?

Angel Turner:

Yeah, that's a good question. I feel I'm grateful- for sure- for the opportunity. It has been a long journey. It's been a long journey. It's been a great and rewarding one though I think because I've been with the district. So I started off as the Director of Literacy in 2021, and then a year later I was appointed to the Assistant Superintendent of Schools. And then when the previous superintendent transitioned out, the board asked me to step in as an Interim Superintendent. And now being the appointed Superintendent, I'm just grateful that I was fortunate enough to have, it'll be almost three years in August, the opportunity to really learn the district, really unpack the needs of the community and just really see it all. And so now I've, in the eight to nine months that I've been in this role, the reality is you discover something new every day, but I'm just excited about the work that my team and I have planned moving forward. And so I think that's the part that just refuels me and keeps me wanting to do this

Marcus Campbell:

Work. We were both born and raised on the south side of Chicago, educated in Chicago public schools. Absolutely found our way to Evanston. And what about your life experience do you believe has prepared you for where you are right now?

Angel Turner:

Yeah, that's a good question. So the biggest life experience for me is just understanding and unpacking the background of where I come from. And so I was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, two, a single mom of three. I have an older brother who's deceased, was born with hydrocephalus. And they didn't anticipate he would live past six months, but he actually lived until he was 11. And so the resilience that my mom really demonstrated for my sister and I and my brother at the time, really raising us and really, despite the odds and challenges that she had to engage in raising three children, it was just the tenacity and the grit that she showed. And I think more importantly what was valuable for her was education. And she really instilled that in us. And so I just take that with me throughout everything that I do. I tell people I was born to be an educator, if that makes any sense. Makes sense. So I can recall back, it's a rolling joke in our family, but I would wake up really early in the morning, teach my imaginary kids, and every time my mom thought somebody was breaking into our house, but it was just me simply just minding my teddy bears, my dolls, and emulating...

Marcus Campbell:

You're teaching the teddy bears.

Angel Turner:

Yeah. Emulating the awesome teachers that I had. And so it is those kinds of experiences that I hold true to ensuring that providing the best quality education for kids is at the core of who I am. And I tell people that's because I was born to do this work.

Marcus Campbell:

So what are your priorities now, your top priorities for you now as the superintendent?

Angel Turner:

Yeah, so when I think about our priorities, I like to use an acronym or foreshadow this acronym. So it's U-N-I-T-Y. So you remember Queen Latifah?

Marcus Campbell:

Oh yeah. You are kind of a child of Queen Latifah with what you're wearing.

Angel Turner:

The 90s, right! But really it's really around our unwavering commitment for financial stewardship, being very thoughtful around how to create no nonsense nurturing environments and really being thoughtful around how safety and climate really plays a role in that work. At the core of it, improving the instructional core, it's important that we have to go in with a laser-like focus around teaching and learning. This idea around talent acquisition and retention is so huge because as we continue to bring talent and even with the talent that we have in our district, how are we continuing to cultivate that and build the capacity of the adults to better service kids? And I think in the middle of all of that really is every decision we make in District 65 is centered around kids. And we put kids at the forefront of every decision that we make. And I think surrounded by all of that, we are still on this journey and this campaign that I've been doing this year around the J factor, which is simply just bringing the joy back to this work. We work too hard. And I tell people who, those people who signed up to work to do this work, essentially you signed up as a servant leader. And so in order to do that, you've got to have joy with it. We know the work is going to be hard, but how do you keep people, how do you keep this exciting? Because at the end of the day, everything that we do as adults, we are molding kids into being essentially what our future will be. And so those are really just the five core areas that really align to, or we like to call them the five guiding principles that really align to the work of our strategic plan. And so it's just really honing in on those priorities and really trying to get it right.

Marcus Campbell:

Yeah. So you got a lot of 202 families that are listening, a lot of District 65 families and families that have students in both 202 and District 65 as the new superintendent. What's your message to them? What do you feel like you would want to share for families who are in our schools as the new superintendent in District 65?

Angel Turner:

Yeah, that's a good question. I think the message I would want to really share to families is, it is really about putting kids at the forefront of everything that we do. And in District 65, we have adults who are totally committed to ensuring that the children in this community are successful. I appreciate the collaboration and work that you and I do. Do we have some work to do in terms of just getting it right? Yeah, absolutely. But our partnership and collaboration, I like to tell people, at the end of the day, we service the same kids.

Marcus Campbell:

Right? Same families.

Angel Turner:

The same families. And so the more we are in sync and aligned, the more when our kids transition to 202, the more we know we are preparing them to be able to go into that next phase of their life. And so for us, it's just staying grounded and staying focused around what's most important for kids.

Marcus Campbell:

And I appreciate you saying that because we have been developing a relationship, a bond, both professional and personal. Absolutely. And there's no animosity. There's no thing, no competition. No competition between the districts. We're really trying to work together. We shared this at the last board meeting that we're really trying to align our efforts. And we have different challenges because of the populations we have can be a little different, but we're really trying to work together to address the issue.

Angel Turner:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think first really changing the narrative around that was that February joint meeting. That's right. We worked extremely hard to really show that we collectively work together and partner on ensuring that our kids are successful. This isn't what 65 isn't doing. And what 202, that's right. This is once kids are getting ready to matriculate from elementary school to high school, what additional things do we need to take into consideration to continue to support the needs of students? And I just think the more we shift away from, you know...

Marcus Campbell:

This binary of us and them and them...

Angel Turner:

Or just these silos where we are in silos versus this idea of us working together to really support the needs of children, I think the more we continue to do that both sides, your staff, my staff, absolutely. I'm confident that the outcomes for students will improve.

Marcus Campbell:

And I know people know this. You and I live it every day, and so do the staff and the kids. The landscape and education has just changed dramatically, dramatically since the pandemic. And we're all trying to figure out, okay, what's the best way to support, what's the best way to service kids? Absolutely. What's the best way instructionally, given TikTok and social media and the screens, it's all different.

Angel Turner:

And just the increase and just mental health...

Marcus Campbell:

And mental health.

Angel Turner:

From the pandemic. Yeah, it, I mean, honestly, I would say since we've had to come back off the pandemic, we have really had to be thoughtful about how do we think about doing school differently. That's right. And it's not an easy task and every day, and we're not perfect, but every day I think we continue to strive to work together to keep pushing and really trying to uncover and discover what else we can do to transform the lives of kids? And we do that collectively. So I appreciate that.

Marcus Campbell:

And I appreciate it too. What are you looking forward to?

Angel Turner:

I'm looking forward to having the ability to reimagine District 65 in a different way. Right? I'm looking forward to really being thoughtful about how we lift up our five year strategic plan. So as you know, two years ago, the board adopted our strategic plan that we are currently in. We're in year two of that. So we have three years left on the lifecycle of it. And I'm just looking to get really granular on what our priorities are as a district and really help everybody within the district understand what those priorities are, understand how the work of the different departments drive those priorities. But more importantly, I'm really looking forward to creating solid systems and structures in our district that will have huge dividends for the organization long term. And I think the greatest thing of all is just, I'm looking for us to just slow down. I think I used a term when I came to this district three years ago, and I started using this term last year with staff, but really it's as slow as we must. Everything is not urgent. Everything is not an emergency. But when we can hone in on the things that are most important, we can have the most impact, the greatest level of impact on improving outcomes for kids. And so I'm just looking forward to slowing us down, getting us very laser-like focused on what's most important, and then I'm hopeful and excited for the outcomes that we're going to get in the future. And so that's what I'm looking for.

Marcus Campbell:

Alright. Well, Dr. Turner, it has been a pleasure to get to know you and to meet you and to work with you and to have you here at the podcast on this podcast. I hope we can do this annually.

Angel Turner:

Oh, let's do it annually. We should. We should.

Marcus Campbell:

And just kind of get out there and talk to folks together just so that we can be unified and begin to address whatever we need to address together. Absolutely. As we've been entrusted with such a humbling opportunity to lead these districts in such an amazing community. Absolutely. It has such an emphasis and a pride and priority in education. Yes. Right. So, well, Dr. Turner, thank you for joining me. Absolutely. And to all of you, thank you for joining me in this podcast and I look forward to you joining us the next time. See you later.

Announcer:

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