

Wildkit Way Podcast: Season 1, Episode 2

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.

Announcer (00:31):

The high school experience. How would you describe yours? What connects students to their school community? On this episode of the Wildkit Way, ETHS Superintendent Marcus Campbell sits down with students to give us all a better understanding of the Wildkit Experience. Let's get started.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (00:55):

Hello eTown. This is Superintendent Marcus Campbell. Today I want to put the focus on our future. The students. Let's just say that the past few years have not been easy. They've been tough, and yet out of this, you have found yourselves resilient and ready to face the future because of your experiences here at ETHS. So I want to shine a light on the Wildkit experience. Joining me today are two Wildkits, Nicole Yao and Kaleb Hadaway, two juniors who can describe what it means to live and breathe as an ETHS Wildkit. So hello, Nicole. Hello, Caleb. How has the school year started for the both of you and how would you be describing your Wildkit experience so far?

Nicole Yao (01:44):

Well, I think my Wildkit experience has been pretty good. This year has been a little bit stressful just because it's junior year. It's a big deal apparently, but I've started to manage that stress and get a hang of how school is working, so that's good.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (02:04):

Alright, Kaleb?

Kaleb Hadaway (02:04):

Yeah, I would definitely agree with that. Last year and the year before that were pretty chill, but this year there's definitely been struggles, but time management is definitely a good way to go. And just the Wildkit experience in general is pretty interesting because there's two factors of it, for me. One is just a normal student, but then the other is as a black student. The normal student is just paying attention to grades and all that stuff. But then the black student, you also have to worry about seeing other people who look like you in a given space. And it is cool to

have a new superintendent who is black, but like with AP classes I have seen way less people that look like me and that is, it definitely does affect one's mental health and takes away from the enjoyment of the class or even the motivation. And that's definitely something that's been going on.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (02:59):

Well thank you both for sharing your experiences. That's something that is always important to us is how you are all being supported in your social spaces but also the academic spaces. Kaleb, we have Team ASAP for students who are in AP who want to feel seen and affirmed and valued and understood in those spaces. And Nicole, I'm sure the year has been stressful. Both of you are juniors and your freshman year we weren't here <laugh> and last year was a very difficult covid year. So what adjustments have you made personally to be able to navigate your junior year? A very important year after coming off of two hard years of a pandemic.

Nicole Yao (03:49):

As Caleb said before, time management has definitely been a big thing for me. I've been using a planner a lot. You wouldn't think that would work right, <laugh>, but...

Dr. Marcus Campbell (04:00):

It works!

Speaker 4 (04:01):

It works a lot. I've also been using other resources in the school, including I guess my teachers and my peers. Teachers here are really, really accessible when it comes to things that are related to stress or uncomfortableness, I guess, in a classroom setting. And I really thank them for being a support in every part of the Wildkit experience for me.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (04:32):

Yeah. Mm-hmm. That's great.

Kaleb Hadaway (04:32):

For me, I think the biggest thing is the AM support and all that stuff coming in to just build that connection with my teachers and all that stuff because it makes it easier when you are having a bad time with a class or a subject or anything. And then friends is definitely a good way to go because you just get to see that other people are going through what you're going through and you're not alone and that is very helpful and all that stuff.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (04:55):

Yeah. So what would you say is on the minds of Wildkits these days?

Nicole Yao (05:01):

Well, if I'm being honest here, I know that a lot of students are stressed about academics and college app season just or early admission, early application. That just passed. So I know that a lot of the seniors are feeling a little more relieved about that process, but that's pretty much what I've observed.

Kaleb Hadaway (05:27):

Grades, for me. Coming from a Caribbean household, that's definitely a big thing that they pay attention to. And it is a stressor for sure, but finding little ways to have you de-stress and all that stuff is nice.

Announcer (05:47):

This school year, ETHS has made adjustments to support the wellbeing of students. Wildkits have opportunities to get the care they need, including the use of mental health dates. Comprehensive programs are also offered by Student Services and Academic Supports departments.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (06:06):

So with that said, too, we've made a lot of changes to the school this year, coming off the pandemic, kind of getting back to the things that we have normally done outside of the pandemic or prior to the pandemic. What do you all make of the changes...some of the changes that we've made to the school? As we try to readjust for learning and safety and so many other things --and actually mental health-- all of those adjustments we're making, what are your thoughts about some of the changes that we've made in the school so far?

Kaleb Hadaway (06:44):

The five mental health days are definitely a good thing. To be able to just take that time, not because I'm sick, but it's just like school's getting a little too much and I just need a break. And it also, besides just building your mental health, it is a good way to catch up on school and all that stuff because you just have that day for yourself. And that is definitely a good new initiative that was brought to the school.

Nicole Yao (07:05):

A big change that students are noticing from last year to this year is probably the lunch.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (07:12):

Yeah, no, lunch is a big deal, right, for a lot of high schoolers. Lunches are a really big deal. And so we get it, especially after coming out of a time where you couldn't connect with your friends, you couldn't connect with your peers because of covid. So this year we're like, okay, we'll assign

the cafeterias because we got two lunches instead of three. And students are like, man, Dr. Campbell, I wanna be able to sit with my friends. I want to be able to go outside. And so I know that Dr. Kinzie and I are working on a plan so the students can actually be with their peers and their friends during lunch because we understand how important that is for all of you.

Nicole Yao (07:54):

So that's exciting. It's great hearing that the administration cares so much about student voice and student input.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (08:03):

Student voice, student input, and we care about your experience. Sometimes it's easy for adults to fall into decisions that are good for us, but not necessarily what your experience is. And that's why it's important that we're out and about and students stop me all the time and they even tell me about it's, it's too hot in a building, Dr. Campbell, it's too cold, where's the heat? All those kinds of things. And so I find that to be really special that students would take the time to just talk to me about those kinds of very important but mundane things. But lunch is big and it's important and we're going to try to figure that out. So just one other question. What advice would you give to eighth graders coming into ETHS? What would you say to them? What would you share with them or their families as they make the transition to Evanston Township High School?

Kaleb Hadaway (08:57):

I definitely had a non-conventional freshman year. You start off afraid and all that stuff. I definitely was nervous coming in, but as long as you just make the effort with your teachers, that is honestly the best way to do good in school in general. Just to build that connection so they understand what you're going through and you can lean on them whenever. And then also just start off strong because when you start off with the work effort, you have more faith in yourself and you just see that you can do it further down the road and that's nice.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (09:29):

Great.

Nicole Yao (09:30):

Yeah, I completely agree with that. I've been recently thinking a lot about what hard work and what smartness means to me. And I realize that a lot of people weigh being quote-unquote "smart" as the only defining factor for how well you're going to do in life. And I, well, I disagree with that. I completely believe that hard work is the key to anything. And for those eighth graders out there, I think number one, you should not be stressed going into high school. It's freshman year. That time is for you to branch out, make new friends, think about new activities, try new things, but also work hard and the result will take care of itself.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (10:18):

That's good. One other, since you all are given advice of <laugh>, I have another question. What advice would you give to adults, parents, guardians, teachers, administrators, somebody like me, as you adjust in your navigating high school these days, what advice would you give to the adults in your life?

Kaleb Hadaway (10:44):

For me, building a relationship with my parents about grades and stuff. At first it was rough when they would get on me for having something in lit or it just didn't me, it didn't motivate me to put it in on time and all that stuff. But when we got together and we worked it out and we saw that there are going to be times where I'm struggling and you just have to be there to support me and not to weigh me down, that is definitely important. And then with teachers, again, going back to building the connection and I would say not work harder, but definitely put that foot out to reach to the students for sure. Because there are the quiet ones, which I definitely am at times, or sometimes the people who need it the most or they need the connection the most.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (11:34):

I get that. I was a quiet student too and having students, teachers or staff to reach out to me was really important. What about you, Nicole?

Nicole Yao (11:42):

Well, I'm not quiet for one <laugh>, but that might change my experience a little bit. But I'd say to the teachers and the administration, and the staff here just I guess just keep reaching out because even though someone or some student may seem like everything is okay or might put on a face in the school building or something. There's always something behind everyone's little act. Everyone's personality at school and their persona at school is always different than how they are at home. But for the parents, I'd say just continue to support your student the best way you can. And most importantly, trying to empathize, I guess, because I understand that our generation, I guess, is a lot different than our parents'. So just continuing the empathy.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (12:49):

Empathy is a good word because you all have experienced something in school that your parents or guardians did not experience. Sure. And also with social media, there's so many other complex things that you all are navigating that previous generations did not have to navigate. So seeking that empathy and seeking to understand what your students experience is, it's very important and very good advice.

Announcer (13:17):

And a big part of that Wildkit Experience is student involvement in clubs, activities, and equity initiatives like student summits. These summits are designed by organizers to create spaces for

relationship building and healthy identity development. Using an affinity group model. Each student summit contributes to the establishment of a culture of belonging where students feel visible, heard and valued.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (13:46):

So both of you have been involved in quite a few things here at ETHS. And how can a student get involved in their school community?

Nicole Yao (13:54):

Well, this topic excites me a lot. I know that our student activities, people, staff work so hard to create so many clubs and outlets for creative output and just a lot of fun things for students. But for me personally, I'm involved in tennis, the sports here at school, and also the student union, which I am the president of. How exciting. With that role, it also comes with being the student rep to the ETHS Board of Education. And I think that all these activities for me are just a great way for me to learn about new things and get new skills and become a great leader.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (14:43):

I agree. Yeah. Kaleb?

Kaleb Hadaway (14:45):

For me, I'm involved in volleyball right now. I think that just joining a sport, especially with a friend, is just a good way to branch out and meet new people and it gives you that support. And then when I was being introduced to sports, Mr. Livatino, he came to my school and he was saying that most student athletes do a better job in school because they have that thing that they have to try harder to make sure they stay eligible. And that is definitely a good motivator. And then currently I'm thinking about joining *The Evanstonian* for photography. That's definitely an interesting thing for me just to go out, be involved in the community and take pictures of sporting events and just normal events that are going on at the high school.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (15:34):

Yeah. Great.

Nicole Yao (15:36):

Yeah, there are a lot of ways for students to get involved here. All these different clubs. I heard about a grilling club that might start, which is interesting. Some kids want to grill hamburgers during their lunches. I'm like, okay!

Dr. Marcus Campbell (15:50):

I'd join that club. Hamburgers and hot dogs and maybe some veggie stuff for those that don't eat meat, <laugh>.

Nicole Yao (15:57):

Oh, this is true. Yes.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (15:59):

We have a lot here at ETHS for students to get involved with and you all are good models for that. So thank you for sharing your experience. So as we wrap this up, I'm going to thank both of you for taking time to talk to me. I've learned a lot and I hope that the people listening learned a lot. too.

Nicole Yao (16:17):

Thank you Dr. Campbell.

Kaleb Hadaway (16:18):

Thank you.

Dr. Marcus Campbell (16:19):

You all are very welcome.

Announcer (16:22):

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