

Edwin Parr Award nominee brings a world of experience to C.P. Blakely Elementary School

For Immediate Release, April 30, 2018: It was while he was volunteering in Uganda that Steve Higgs knew he was meant to be a teacher. He is now teaching Grade 6 at C.P. Blakely Elementary School in Sylvan Lake, but had originally begun studying music at a small university at his home in New Brunswick. It was there that he met a group of volunteers who were heading to the small African country to work with children, and Steve jumped at the chance to join them. Three and a half years later, he returned to begin his degree in education.

“We were working with very vulnerable children, and we were convinced that if we could provide as many kids with as decent an education as possible, it could make a valuable difference for individuals and families,” said Steve. “Seeing the gratitude in their eyes to be receiving an education opened me up to what teaching can offer the human race. Now that my first year of teaching is nearly done, I can say that I’ve felt my most authentic self when I’m in the classroom. I am so happy to be here.”

It is that capacity to be reflective on his teaching practice, for valuing each student and for forging strong relationships with everyone around him that inspired Principal Anne Frey to nominate Steve Higgs for the Chinook’s Edge Edwin Parr Award nomination. The Alberta School Boards’ Association ‘Edwin Parr Award’ recognizes teachers who are new to the profession who show significant promise in their first year.

“He has extremely strong student relationship skills - our students and families truly love him,” said Principal Frey. “He has contributed so much to our culture here that it’s hard to believe he is a first year teacher. He has cultivated a diverse and flexible classroom space that keeps students engaged. He is very Google savvy and has shared his Level One Google education skills with all our staff. He’s been a great staff member right from the start and he’s been an impactful teacher, because he made it a priority to immediately become part of the community.”

For Steve Higgs, this meant honouring everything that was important to his students inside the school and out. It became common to see Mr. Higgs at students’ hockey games or dance recitals or theatre performances.

“This told them they were important to him, that he believed in them and had great hopes for them,” said Mrs. Frey. “He truly knows the kids in his classroom and cares about them. Along with this caring culture, he has super strong classroom management skills. He volunteered for our two-month basketball intramural program, comes early one morning every week to help with our breakfast program, is part of our student leadership group, and took the lead in building a Grade 6 culture at our school including organizing a student showcase. His past music, sound and light experience is an asset to us at assemblies and he has skills and abilities well beyond his experience. He has never felt like a brand new teacher.”

That said, Steve has participated in every opportunity Chinook’s Edge provides to new teachers. He arrived a week early last summer to take part in the New Teacher Orientation, is part of ongoing teacher mentorship and the Grade 6 PLC, and is committed to continuing to improve his practice.

“The idea of forming a strong relationship with students isn’t a new concept for Chinook’s Edge – this division already has that priority right,” said Steve. “I just wanted to work hard to establish myself as someone worth these kids’ time for eight hours a day. I hope they remember their experience in my class and how I valued who they are as people. For me, I’ll remember their innocent reminder to me to have fun, because we really enjoy our learning together. They have helped me as a teacher.”

The Edwin Parr Award winner from Zone 4 will be announced at a special event on May 28.

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