

Dr. Chad Gestson

Camelback High School

2013 Rodel Exemplary Principal

Bragging rights

Our greatest source of pride is our campus climate. When students feel happy, safe and challenged, and the adults on campus are respected, trusted and viewed as leaders in the change process, then the environment is ripe for improvement. Our gains in academic achievement, graduation rate, scholarship totals and attendance, to name a few, are a result of an amazing climate that the entire community has worked diligently to create.

Being inspired to lead

Spend a week, a day, or even an hour with the amazing kids here in urban Phoenix and you'd be inspired to become a principal, too. Every student in the system deserves an amazing place to learn and grow academically, socially and emotionally. For me, the inspiration and drive to become a principal occurred just months after becoming a teacher, sponsoring student council and serving on various committees.

A tip for new principals

Although the principal's primary job is to raise student achievement, the principalship is about leading, inspiring and managing people. Thomas Sergiovanni writes that school leaders must manage the psychological climate of their campus. Knowing when to push, pull, slow down, speed up, celebrate, hold accountable, implement change or even just rest is an art and a science. Spend more time studying people and systems. Empower your teachers to lead curriculum and instructional improvements. You lead your people, your systems and your stakeholders.

Setting high expectations

A culture of high expectations begins with clearly defining and communicating expectations through both word and action. We are models of excellence and ethics. Administration, certified and classified employees, and parents must all feel equally responsible for establishing and maintaining high expectations for all stakeholders. From the principal to campus security to club sponsors to the classroom teacher, speaking a common language and modeling a common expectation are paramount in creating a culture of excellence.



Dr. Chad Gestson
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Phoenix Union High School District
1,900 students in grades 9-12

Experience: 12 years in education including three years as a classroom teacher, three years as an elementary school assistant principal, three years as a middle school principal, and four years as a high school principal; currently serving on the district Strategic Plan Steering Committee, the Common Core Implementation Team, and the New Course Selection Committee

Degrees: B.A. in English from University of Washington; M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from Arizona State University; M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University; Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University; Principal and Superintendent Certification

Rodel, in partnership with Social Venture Partners Arizona, developed the Rodel Exemplary Principal Initiative to recognize outstanding school principals and populate a pipeline of highly skilled school leaders for Arizona's most challenging schools.

The Rodel Exemplary Principals are selected for their demonstrated ability to lead high-need schools to success by inspiring their staffs to develop a campus that is high achieving, safe, orderly and welcoming.

Each cohort of Exemplary Principals provides professional development, field experience and mentorship to a class of Rodel Aspiring Principals. After learning from the best, Rodel Aspiring Principals are better prepared to lead their own high-need schools.