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*Inspire
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Swan Valley Students Inspired by Real-World Learning Opportunities

Page 16



Developing leadership and unity within our membership to achieve continuous improvement in public education.



Inspiration

By William Hill

For me, as with many of the best educators I have known, my profession is a calling. To facilitate learning and see the light bulb of understanding come on in students is a true joy and privilege. But what I truly relish is getting students to see something much broader—their limitless potential. I also enjoy supporting the learning of fellow educators, which I did for six years as a school and district administrator and which I now do as a leader in a nonprofit that supports district and school transformation. The drive to help people of all ages become the best version of themselves profoundly inspires me to remain on my learning edge and continuously improve my own practices.

I became an educator despite the fact that the schools I attended as a child in Baltimore, Maryland, were not always nurturing. After substance abuse broke up my parents' marriage, I moved with my mother and brother to a nearby housing project. It was not a safe place; the vast majority of young men in our part of town were caught up in a cycle of violence, substance abuse, and prison. Boys from my neighborhood were greeted by teachers with mistrust, disdain, and low expectations. For example, when I scored well on the state's test in fourth grade, my teacher said, "We need to re-test that one; kids from the projects don't get scores like that." Comments like that hurt, but I did not let them deter me from continuing to push myself academically.

One of the main forces propelling me to excel in school was my mother's



Mr. Hill inspires others who he coaches in the educational field by utilizing his personal story in education.

example. She had been a homemaker until her marriage ended, but once she was solely responsible for my brother and me, she took on two jobs outside the home to keep us housed, fed, and clothed—refusing to accept any form of public assistance. On top of that, she put herself through school and became a diagnostic medical sonographer. I could not help but be inspired by her.

I would go on to college and learn about the societal forces that prevent vulnerable children of color from realizing their potential. It's a complex mixture of sociology, politics, economics, and psychology, but in my mind it boils down to systems and structures that promote and reinforce low expectations. Children desperately want us to believe in them. This is especially true of vulnerable children, who often are not getting posi-

tive reinforcement at home for a complex set of reasons. High expectations inspire children to achieve things they did not know they could.

The high expectations that my mother had for me helped drive me, and I have been successful in life despite being discounted by teachers as a young student. I am living, breathing proof that a person can overcome the challenges that stem from poverty if given the proper encouragement, supports, and opportunity.

I like to think that other educators and children in poverty will find my personal story inspiring, but I work to inspire those around me in other ways as well. When I coach district and school leaders, I do it with an infectious enthusiasm. And I show examples of success so our partners will come to



know that transformation is possible. I offer 100% commitment to the success of our partners.

It pains me to say that many of the educators with whom I have worked are not used to having support as they try new strategies, fail, reflect, adjust, and try again. For example, when we at Partners in School Innovation began supporting Battle Creek Public Schools, an assistant superintendent regarded my assistance

with skepticism. She asked whether I was “working an angle.” I told her that I was only interested in helping her and the students of her district succeed. After a few weeks of showing her that I was committed to helping her, the doubt faded, and we have worked well together for four years now.

In addition to dedication to helping others improve, I offer the following specific advice to educators looking to

inspire the next generation: Make every child feel welcome and valued every day. Greet your students at the door with a smile and tell them that you’re glad to see them—even the students who act out. Plan for and teach rigorous differentiated lessons based on product, process, and content. Learn as much as you can and never stop.

Remember that this work is as much about your heart as it is about your head. Expect great things from your students and colleagues. They will surprise you and themselves with what they can achieve.

William Hill is Regional Executive Director, Midwest, for Partners in School Innovation, whose mission is to transform teaching and learning in the lowest-performing public schools so that every student, regardless of background, thrives. He can be reached at 443.538.2482 or whill@partnersinschools.org.

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