Rodel Exemplary Teacher Initiative

Five Traits of Exemplary Teachers in High-Potential Classrooms

1. Passionate Belief System
2. Motivation and Student Engagement
3. Focus on Subject Matter
4. Effective Classroom Management Strategies
5. Data-Driven Instructional Planning
Nine years ago the Rodel Foundation of Arizona created the Rodel Exemplary Teacher Initiative. It was developed as one answer to attracting the most effective teachers to schools in Arizona, specifically high-need schools. Rodel identifies the most successful teachers in high-need schools and asks them to mentor student teachers. This mentorship, along with intensive training by Rodel staff, and the foundation established by their university training, will pave the way to a smooth transition as the Rodel Promising Student Teacher Graduate’s moves into their own classroom.

Obviously, each Rodel Exemplary Teacher possesses unique qualities and traits, but all share the following five characteristics that make them exceptional.

- **Passionate belief system:** Exemplary teachers have high expectations for their students and refuse to give up on any of them. They deliver more than enthusiasm; they deliver a pure passion for inspiring their students to become triumphant learners. One finalist said, "I know I make an impact on my students’ lives. I give 100 percent every day. I give them all I have." These teachers care deeply, but they never confuse caring with letting kids off the hook. They demand – nicely, but firmly – that their students be responsible and prepared to work and learn every day. There are no compromises because they know the stakes are high.

- **Motivation and student engagement:** Exemplary teachers make the curriculum come alive by igniting the interests of their students. They use flexible grouping strategies such as whole group, skill groups or individual instruction to ensure students are being taught at the correct level of difficulty. Students’ minds are engaged with hands-on experiences and higher-level thinking. These teachers practice the fine art of involving students in learning by making it fun, exciting and relevant. Each teacher’s classroom is an exciting place where the kids believe they are with the best teacher in the world.

- **Focus on subject matter:** These teachers know their subject areas inside and out and are completely focused on the importance of all students mastering the Arizona standards. Clear objectives are stated and understood by students. Instruction is consistently related back to the objectives. Assessment is continuous and used to target individual and group needs, focus students on their progress and speed the pace of learning.

- **Effective classroom management strategies:** The classroom environment is respectful and sensitive to each student, with no evidence of disruptive behavior. Routines are structured so that students know what is expected; there is no wasted time. Teachers demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds that students bring to the classroom. "I am building our next generation of good citizens," one finalist said.

- **Data-driven instructional planning:** Exemplary teachers are careful observers of their students and are constantly assessing their skills and abilities. They use both formal and informal methods to gather data about their strengths, weaknesses and progress toward mastery of essential skills. They use “formative assessment” data to plan instruction and customize programs so that each student strives toward his/her own personal goals and moves forward at a maximum pace. Using data is their key to getting results in helping students to succeed.


After nine years, we continue to see that the exemplary teacher does more than that. They not only inspire their students, but choose to pay it forward as they inspire the next generation of teachers.

As we look forward to the future of the Rodel Exemplary Teacher Initiative, we envision continued success and growth. We expect our ten-year anniversary will mark the potential for more than 900 Rodel Graduates who will each be giving Arizona children nothing less than what they deserve: the best.
Passionate Belief System

- **Exemplary teachers believe they hold the key to the success of their students.**
  - Believe that all kids can learn.
  - Have an “I make the difference” attitude.
  - Emulate positive “can-do” attitude.
  - Develop passion for learning within each student.
  - Maintain high expectations for their students.
  - Develop passion for learning within each student.
  - Proactive planning to ensure success by preparing materials in advance.
  - Accept responsibility for student achievement results.
  - Have high expectations for self as a classroom teacher.
  - Constantly reflect on their teaching, what they are doing and how they can do it better.

- **Exemplary teachers frequently equate their love of children as one key factor of their success.**
  - Have the best interest of the students that he/she teaches.
  - Value what students say.
  - Practice sympathetic listening to students toward what happens in the school and students’ lives outside the school.
  - Develop and encourage students as role models.
  - Know their students individually; understand each student's learning style and needs, likes and dislikes, and personal circumstances that affect performance in school.
  - Are purposely aware of the student cultures.
  - Provide opportunities for all students to succeed.
  - Understand the whole story before responding to any disciplinary situation; tell students exactly what they did wrong that was wrong and what they need to do that is right.
  - Have a sense of humor, interacts in fun, playful manner.
  - Give 100% of themselves everyday.

- **Exemplary teachers exhibit high levels of motivation which relate to high levels of achievement in students.**
  - Model enthusiasm and passion for teaching.
  - Take pleasure in teaching.
  - Provide learning activities outside the school.
  - Inspire students to be life-long learners.
  - Use community circles for group inspiration.
  - Read inspiring books.
  - Play inspiring songs, such as, “I believe I can Fly.”
  - Balance motivation with action.

“Teachers’ believing that they can make a difference for students is one of the most powerful determinants in predicting teacher performance and student success.”

(Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998)
Motivation and Student Engagement

- **Exemplary teachers recognize the different learning styles of all students when planning instruction.**
  - Have an understanding of how students develop and learn.
  - Set individual goals and use differentiation of instruction strategy.
  - Provide various hands-on experiences.
  - Address higher-level thinking questions as well as lower-level
  - Address multiple intelligences.
  - Include cooperative learning techniques.
  - Keep assignments challenging to continue feelings of success.

- **Exemplary teachers make sure to value students’ languages and cultural knowledge.**
  - Provide a classroom climate in which students feel physically safe and emotionally secure.
  - Create a learning community in the classroom that encourages positive social interaction.
  - Create instructional opportunities adapted to diverse learners.
  - Recognize individual differences and adjust instruction to meet needs.
  - Call on students with diverse backgrounds.
  - Adapt the materials and text.
  - Have language sensitivity and awareness of students’ language proficiency levels.
  - Increase wait time, use think-pair-share, signaling, timers, etc.
  - Ensure that learning groups represent a balance of gender, cultural, ability-disability, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

- **Exemplary teachers find out all they can about their students’ prior experiences and students’ interests in and out of school.**
  - Make learning meaningful to every student.
  - Build new learning on prior knowledge.
  - Give students choices about topics of study, ways of learning, etc.
  - Have students participate in discussions, write in journals, and explain their thinking.
  - Use continuous assessments to improve student learning.

- **Exemplary teachers recognize and celebrate the improvements made in student learning.**
  - Offer genuine praise and constant encouragement.
  - Provide a comfortable environment where students can take risks.
  - Use high-interest level materials.
  - Encourage “Peer Professors” through peer tutoring.

“Cooperative learning groups (small groups of students with diverse backgrounds working on common tasks) produce significant gains in academic achievement for minority students.” Beatrice Ward, 1986
Focus on Subject Matter

- **Exemplary teachers believe they need to know their subject matter thoroughly.**
  - Focus instruction on subject matter.
  - Place all emphasis on the Arizona State Standards.
  - Have a good understanding of the curriculum.
  - State clear objectives and relate them to everything in the lesson.
  - Communicate clearly to students what is expected of them and why.
  - Lead, direct, and pace student activities to ensure consistent focus on objectives.

- **Exemplary teachers understand how students learn.**
  - Make instruction relevant for students.
  - Provide direct instruction and connect it to students’ prior knowledge.
  - Organize the learning experience so that students gain new knowledge.
  - Focus on having students demonstrate understanding of meaning rather than memorization.
  - Teach using applications to relevant real-world examples.
  - Give clear examples and offer guided practice.

- **Exemplary teachers are knowledgeable about strategies for teaching content.**
  - Present information in a variety of ways such as verbally, visually, through demonstration, part to whole, and whole to part.
  - Provide constant review.
  - Encourage “on task” performance.
  - Develop high interest materials/lessons.
  - Activate prior background knowledge.
  - Include manipulative materials for all areas of difficulty.
  - Provide quick transitions with minimal down time.
  - Use team building strategies at all levels.
  - Design homework to extend the individual's understanding and skill level.

Linda Darling-Hammond found that "the strongest predictor of how well a state’s students performed on national assessments was the percentage of well-qualified teachers: educators who were fully certified and had majored in the subjects they taught" (Olson 2000).
Effective Classroom Management Strategies

- **Exemplary teachers create classroom environments that are respectful and sensitive to each student.**
  - Build positive rapport with students.
  - Set clear expectations.
  - Build a community within the classroom.
  - Allow opportunities for student choice.
  - Use praise and encouragement.
  - Encourage student participation.
  - Encourage students to ask questions and express opinions.
  - Value what students say.

- **Exemplary teachers demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds that students bring to the classroom.**
  - Treat students equitably.
  - Take time to listen to students and answer their questions.
  - Create individual plans for individual needs.
  - Acknowledge every student who wants to contribute to class discussions.
  - Offer acceptance of student answers.
  - Recognize students’ accomplishments.
  - Praise when appropriate and provide assistance when needed.

- **Exemplary teachers establish routines that are structured so that students know what is expected.**
  - Create a climate of high expectations.
  - Develop both general and specific rules.
  - Encourage the importance of child assuming accountability for behavior.
  - Enforce a consistently structured discipline plan.
  - Plan for minimal down time and orderly transitions.
  - Prepare thoroughly for every activity.

“The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

“The best way to extinguish good behavior is to fail to recognize it.”
Behavioral Learning Theory (Skinner, 1950)
Data-Driven Instructional Planning

- **Exemplary teachers are careful observers of their students and are constantly assessing their skills and abilities.**
  - They use both formal and informal methods to gather data about their strengths, weaknesses and progress toward mastery of essential skills.
  - They use this data to plan instruction and customize programs so that each student moves forward at a maximum pace.

- **Exemplary teachers use formal assessments as a tool to evaluate teaching, establish goals and re-focus strategies.**
  - AIMS and TerraNova results are carefully analyzed each year to explore relationships between measured growth and curriculum and instructional strategies.
  - Strengths and weaknesses of criterion- and norm-referenced data are used to make decisions regarding instructional focus.

- **Exemplary teachers know the research and use instructional programs and techniques that are proven to get results with students similar to their own.**
  - They keep up-to-date with the latest research in effective instructional techniques in areas such as Structured English Immersion, cooperative learning, multiple intelligences and brain-based learning to maximize their effectiveness in the classroom.
  - They constantly reflect on their instructional practice in the classroom and adjust based on observational data and achievement results.

“Teacher quality is emerging as "the most important ingredient in students’ achievement."

“A teacher affects eternity; you can never tell where your influence stops.”
– Henry B. Adams