

# Brian W. Thomas

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(603) 748-8975 (c)

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July 9, 2024

To Andrew Watson, Jennifer Fleischer, and The Harley School Head of School Search Committee:

It is an honor to submit my materials to become the next Head at The Harley School. I have known about Harley's rich history and legacy since 2004 when I met a former Head of Harley when we were both tasked with building schools in Las Vegas. We each had a great many notes to share about our love of Rochester, NY, and its surrounding areas. I also have two lifelong friends who have been college counselors at the two Pittsford Public Schools for decades. When asked about Harley, they said, "It's a great school, but we don't know much about it." How can that be, I thought? When I look at the School's Magazine *Becoming* from 2022, I see an epicenter of best-in-class work: Climate Change Leadership with an Edward E. Ford Foundation grant; alums like Toren Reeves '06 talking about the transformational nature of his teachers and working at a Hospice facility as a student that completely changed his life; and the "1000 Words" pictorial essay showing a self-assured and confident school that was boldly expressing its value proposition. As the Sixties Song goes: "There's something happening here..." I am still thinking about what my two Pittsford friends said, wondering if that notion about Harley was a common theme of people in and around Rochester or just a fluke. Indeed, how could they not know much about such an amazing place?

Because of those Pittsford friends, I have spent memorable times in and around Rochester, NY. It is a wonderful community in which to raise a family and educate children. Harley stands out as the Progressive Independent School beacon in Upstate New York for those who understand how forward-looking independent schools can shape and inform students whose lives will forever be changed by being in them. On my own journey, I currently desire to find a Progressive School community to lead with true credibility in its Progressive roots, where I can add significant value and bring my entire self to the work, given my background and identity as a Black man (DOS), and with a skill set as a change agent/manager. I have ably headed school communities with strength and clarity, building immediate trust and being highly visible while communicating the value proposition of my schools, internally and externally – far beyond the friendly confines of the school's footprint.

In brief, [being the recent Head // CEO of an independent boarding school with 393 students, a \\$26M budget, and a \\$36M endowment](#) matches the aspirations of a school that seeks to be well-positioned in its future, as Harley has been and will continue to be with continued good direction and right action. The work I have managed and led as a Head of School and lead administrator at previous schools propels me to ask critical questions and get results that few people have or can, using a persuasive technique of question asking and data gathered from around the school to guide my work and thinking.

As a strategic and collaborative thinker and doer, I have begun and closed out a [campus master plan and strategic plan](#) within two years of my start date at my previous school, fostering a strong culture of collaboration and inclusion. Yet, the most crucial part of our work is to actually use the plans now and in

the future to guide the excellent outcomes of the institution and the people in it – as opposed to having the Plan sit on a shelf as a hoop that was jumped. Having a start-up and problem-solving mindset means that the best and most salient vision for an institution only happens with good processes, surveying the landscape within and without the school, and laying out good tracks so all of our engines can get there on time. At my previous school, [we employed a dashboard](#) created with our partners at Mission & Data that is designed to keep us moving forward using our outcomes, qualitative updates, and metrics to show progress toward our goals. I would welcome the opportunity to dive fully into Harley's updated Strategic Plan and set up a similar dashboard for the senior leadership team and Board to mark the plan's progress and its steps along the way, if that remains a job to be done.

Strategic thinking and thinkers must resist isolation. It's about collaboration and inclusion, thinking outside the box and with the larger community while significantly developing the professional development of the leadership team would be job #1. Effective leaders create other leaders. Full stop. Considering the professionals with whom I have worked deeply in the past and engaging those leaders and the leadership team they comprise affords the entire school community [the ability to communicate clearly and effectively, convey the institution's essential narratives](#) while ["telling stories"](#) and exhorting others to be their best, striving always to do and be better. In addition, I have worked in and helped to elevate schools near other good public schools and private school peers, helping those schools to distinguish themselves from the rest. For instance, I write to my school communities every week during the school year to ensure we transmit our strategic priorities and value proposition more broadly to every constituency near and far. One example of this was positioning our DEI-B mission firmly at the center of one of our partnerships, which occurred two years ago and again last year during the thirtieth anniversary of [Proctor Academy's Ocean Classroom](#) by partnering with [the MET charter schools in Rhode Island](#) during and after the pandemic. Our team also executed and brought on a new partnership very elegantly and seamlessly [when we engaged with the Sea Education Association \(SEA\), which has been educating students for fifty years](#). The essential lesson learned is that encouraging innovation, especially when thinking about our larger goals and strategic collaboration within DEI-B, allows for greater innovation and connection. Harley has been leading this work on DEI-B and Climate Action. Who else might the school partner with that might create an even deeper impact for more students? That is the kind of school I would like to partner with in my next headship.

Like the efforts gleaned from Harley over the years to distinguish itself in the market, the work of independent schools is, in the main, about sustainability and survival. For instance, my team and I spent time together modeling and ensuring that we continue to grow our areas of support and expertise, advancing the school's mission, looking for ways to maximize our financial resources, and searching for additional income to ensure long-term viability. Whether it was creating a new economic model where we prioritize accepting more tuition-capable families or leveraging our ski hill to be increasingly more revenue-generating while also being the only race-ready US Ski & Snowboard / International Ski Federation (USSS / FIS) course over the last few months in the East, our alpine and race-prep teams met the challenges of long- and short-term financial modeling with precise preparation and execution. We hit our targets of adding revenue while increasing enrollment.

In addition, the continued demand for my previous school has never been more robust, and enrollment has never been higher in the school's history, with local demand far outstripping what we can provide regarding seats. Of course, the challenge with local demand in a boarding school is that you don't necessarily get to offer more rooms for boarding students, representing significantly more revenue and making the school's financial sustainability work a more complex balancing act to maintain. Also, as an experiential school that allows 70% of our high school students to travel abroad and away from the school during their academic careers, we achieve our financial goals by over-enrolling the school by 22% each

trimester because we have the demand due to our 50-year-old off-campus programs – Ocean Classroom, Mountain Classroom, Proctor-en-Segovia, European Art Classroom in Aix-en-Provence. However, challenges come when there are events like a global pandemic to derail our best-laid plans. Or, if we over-yield and over-enroll far too many day students – because we do not get to recoup or resell the additional beds, we punch a hole in our financial modeling. Instead, we learned to dance and pivot carefully and make new plans, taking calculated risks that lead to rewards down the road. Being resilient, entrepreneurial, and a problem-solver are the hallmarks of my journey as a Head of School. I love diving into the complex issues that might await me at Harley, as I did at Proctor Academy and my previous schools. The work of a significantly over-subscribed boarding/day school with high demand means that the correct mix of students must be carefully engineered. For Harley, with its Progressive School approach, I would welcome the opportunity to infuse additional revenue-generating ideas, other than enrollment and heroic fundraising, to create long-term sustainability and impact for mission-ready students and families. Certainly, mission-centric signature trips in and out of the school year regionally and abroad might help. Together, how might we increase the demand in some areas of revenue generation for Harley to take some stress off the general operating budget?

My team at my previous school and I continued to solve these riddles with insight, grace, and the intelligence of Solomon because it takes prescient collaboration and a skillful “webbiness” to pull the various teams together – Business Office, Development, Enrollment Management, Communications, and Marketing – under one aegis called advancement, in addition to the Student Life and Teaching and Learning Teams, which modeled out these changes for the Leadership Team and the Board to also wrestle with the nuanced priorities. Add into the mix 100% Tuition Remission students representing up to 10% of the student body – or the current children of the faculty and staff – and we had to face other challenges of sustainability and growth. We skated a fragile line between financial stability and a robust academic program, which is the envy of our peers. Also, at my former school, we increasingly understood that the piper was waiting to be paid in full unless we did something dramatic, and soon, to alter the school’s current course, which is what we did in the final three months of my tenure. In helping to facilitate and participate in these existential discussions, because every school and College will have them, even though many say they do not, I have learned to lead with greater certainty, nuance, professionalism, and decisiveness. And, it is clear to me that I, too, must have thought partners who are aligned with the same or a similar journey of impact, stability, growth, and professionalism. I am the chief storyteller of my school's mission as the Head, yet a thousand other stories can be gleaned and retold. If you visit my previous school's social media sites or blog pages, you will see that the stories – and storytelling – lead directly to admissions yield and development dollars.

[My leadership narrative is about magic and innovation](#), so I am looking forward to working with a new partner and with the opportunity to become the next Head of the Harley School. The School fits well with my life theme, which posits that deep and abiding relationships (“affective connections”) coupled with leading with compassion—students and adults—can fundamentally galvanize communities, strengthen culture, and change lives.

My Very Best,

Brian Thomas

For more information on our impact, click [HERE](#).

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## **EDUCATION**

### **Portland State University**

Portland, Oregon

M.S. Education with Honors, Curriculum, and Instruction/Progressive Education Focus

### **Yale University**

New Haven, Connecticut

B.A. History

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## **EXPERIENCE**

**PROCTOR ACADEMY** July 2021 – June 2024

### **Head of School / Chief Executive Officer**

**Proctor Academy** is a 9 – 12 secular, co-educational, independent board and day school for 385 students and more than 200 employees.

Duties, responsibilities, and highlights include:

- **Lead and Inspire:** Leading with a thoughtful, collaborative, enthusiastic, and strategic mindset and understanding how to foster a balanced sense of mission to enrich and further define the School.
- **Support Faculty and Staff Excellence:** Bringing a high level of support to a gifted and dedicated faculty and staff.
- **Sustain Momentum:** Proctor enjoys a strong and unique position in the boarding school market.
- **Valued for its dedication to diverse learners, comprehensive off-campus programs, experiential learning, and beautiful campus setting,** as its leader, our team builds upon the significant growth and momentum the School has experienced in recent years while maintaining and building strong relationships internally and externally.
- **Continue the Work of Financial Sustainability:** Ensuring that the School remains fiscally sound while exploring ways to enhance the School's financial position and invest in its faculty, program, and facilities.
- **Continue a Commitment to Environmental Sustainability:** Continuing Proctor's investment in renewable energy sources while continually using the lens of the school's Environmental Mission Statement in institutional decisions.
- **Promote a Diverse and Inclusive Community:** Demonstrating a deep and engaging commitment to building a more diverse educational community of students and adults.
- **Inspire Philanthropy:** Partnering with the Board of Trustees to lead comprehensive fundraising initiatives, ensuring the School's continued growth and prosperity.

- Work within the school's sustainability mission statement to achieve a carbon-neutral campus while guiding institutional decisions for environmentally responsible choices and creating programs to tackle climate change to make for a more equitable and just world.
- Work closely with an Engaged Board of Trustees: Enjoy the support of a mission-centered and committed Board of Trustees.
- A Few Accomplishments Since 2021: Started and completed a working strategic visioning process and strategic plan; started and completed a comprehensive campus master plan with Black River Design Architects; Fundraised \$18M in total funds in support of the school (\$7.7M in annual giving and \$10.9M in capital giving); after the COVID-19 Pandemic, increased and sustained enrollment, especially Tuition Capable Families in one of the most competitive markets in Boarding Schools by 7%; communications & marketing efforts considered best in class as named by our peer groups; completed a successful \$3.2M building project and began another more ambitious project under the title "the healthiest school possible."

## **MICDS (Mary Institute and Saint Louis Country Day School) 2016 – 2021**

### **Assistant Head of School**

**Mary Institute and Saint Louis Country Day School**, or "**MICDS**," is a Junior-K – Grade 12 secular, co-educational, independent school, which is home to more than 1,200 students.

Duties, responsibilities, and highlights include:

- Supporting and promoting the MICDS Mission and strategic plan. Responsible for "Great Teaching and Learning 2.0," each faculty member collaborates with another colleague to ensure measurable progress towards performance goals. Students provided teachers and department chairs with student surveys and state-of-the-art engagement data using the Wellington Engagement Index. Standards-based grading and standards-based feedback committees' pilot programs in the Middle School and Upper School. Aligning curriculum JK-12 horizontally and vertically.
- Working closely with the Head of School and coordinating the connection among the three Division Heads to ensure the growth of the exceptional academic program, cohesion of the curricular scope and sequence, teaching corps, and reputation of the School.
- Chair, Accreditation Steering Committee for the Independent Schools of the Central States (ISACS) ● Lead, the Group of 5 (Go5), made up of the Head of School, Assistant Head of School, and the three Division Directors.
- Contributing member of the Senior Administrative Team.
- Overseeing the day-to-day academic program of the school, including hiring and crafting professional development for the JK – 12 academic chairs and their work.
- Facilitating the professional development of the 260 faculty and staff, as well as the evaluation and observation of the 180 faculty.
- Leading and collaborating closely with the development office to successfully fundraise and coordinate the 1 work of the International Board of Visitors.
- Working collaboratively with the admissions team to attract and retain mission-appropriate families and children to the School, including meeting with prospective families to orient them academically and clarify expectations.
- Representing the School as a speaker at high profile School, local, regional, and national events and

- conferences as noted in [MICDS Magazine](#) and [iHeart Radio Communities interview](#).
- Attending all Board of Trustees meetings, sit on three Trustee committees--Marketing and Communications, Educational Life (liaison), and Collaboration and Inclusion (liaison).

**BENTLEY SCHOOL**, Lafayette, California 2008 – 2016 **Associate Head of School (2011 – 2016)**

**Head of Upper School and Lafayette Campus (2009 – 2016)**

**Assistant Head of School (2009 – 2011)**

**Interim Head of Upper School (2008 - 2009)**

Bentley School is a 95-year-old K – 12 independent school in San Francisco's East Bay, at capacity with 680 students.

Duties, responsibilities, and highlights included:

- Overseeing the entire 9-12 campus operation, including building and sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and shared leadership with the Head of School, Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and community members.
- Managing all aspects of the Lafayette Campus, including the Upper School budget of \$7 – 9 million, and hiring, retaining, supporting, and evaluating 72 faculty and staff members.
- Membership in the Head of School's Leadership Team and All-School Administrative Team.
- Supervising and supporting the Upper School's Administrative Team, including Dean of Faculty, Director of College Counseling, Dean of Academics, Dean of Teaching and Learning, Dean of Students, Director of Counseling, Grade-level Deans, Director of Technology, and Director of Facilities.
- Engaging parents and students with the school's culture, including establishing a positive tone for the Town Meetings and creating/authoring a weekly column directed to Upper School parents and guardians.
- Implementing cost control measures in response to the 2008 economic downturn, e.g., cutting \$3 – 4 million in 2009 from the Upper School budget and eliminating 16 faculty FTEs, and \$600,000 in the non-FTE budget in 2010.
- Increasing admissions yielded a high of 46% in 2015, from 22% in 2009. Increasing matriculation from Bentley's Middle School to its Upper School to 65% in 2015, from 12.5% in 2009.
- Introducing a refined, rubric-based observation system in the Upper School in 2008 in which every faculty member is observed annually and given written feedback, including commendations and recommendations for improvement.
- Creating two new positions – “Dean of Teaching and Learning” and “Learning Support Specialist,” which are models for curricular and pedagogical innovation, and student support in cognitive diversity, learning differences, and students who are English Language Learners.
- Representing the School as a speaker at high profile School, local, regional, and national events and conferences as noted in such media as [Diablo Magazine](#).

**PRESIDIO HILL SCHOOL**, San Francisco, California 2006 – 2008 **Director (Head of School)**

Presidio Hill School is a 96-year-old progressive K-8 independent school that educates 200 students. It is the oldest Progressive School west of the Mississippi River and includes 42% students of color.

Duties, responsibilities, and highlights included:

- Educational leadership and directing the school's day-to-day operations, including managing 32 faculty and staff employees.
- Responsibility for overseeing a \$4.2 million budget, 12% of which was financial assistance.

- Moving the school from a deficit of \$500,000 in FY 2006/07 to a surplus of \$30,000 in FY 2007/08.
- Reorganizing the administrative team and creating the position of Lower School Dean. Supporting the professional growth and development of the administrative team. Hiring additional learning specialists. Overseeing the faculty professional development program, focused primarily on addressing learning differences in individual classrooms. All employees took part in at least two professional development opportunities each year.
- Creating a framework for faculty review for the first time in the school's history. All faculty and staff received a formative assessment after observation, for the first time in 20 years.
- Increasing enrollment to the maximum allowed by the school's conditional use permit. Appointing the Lower School Dean to chair the Enrollment Committee, which presented recommendations to the BOT for short and long-term enrollment solutions.
- Growing the 2007 – 2008 Annual Fund to 4 times the 2003-04 amount by personally cultivating each major donor to assess interest and commitment in supporting the School.
- Targeting and obtaining increased scholarship funds from the Making Waves Education Program, increasing funding from \$92,980 to \$172,408.
- In response to auditors' advice, successfully recouped a \$167,000 pledge from a prior year's Capital Campaign.
- Responsibility for managing and significantly improving business operations under audit results and management letters.
- Completing the School's strategic plan 2004 – 2008.
- Greeting every student and their families at the curb in the morning as the face of the school.

**ANDRE AGASSI COLLEGE PREPARATORY ACADEMY, Las Vegas, Nevada 2004 - 2006**  
**Executive Director (Head of School, 2004 – 2005)**  
**Founding High School Developer/Principal (2004 – 2006)**

The Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy was a model charter school, which offers academic programs designed to enhance a student's character, respect, motivation, and self-discipline.

Duties, responsibilities, and highlights included:

- Stepping into the role of Executive Director in the fall of 2004 and resuming my original role of High School Developer/Principal for the 2005-06 school year.
- Working with architects and the Agassi Foundation to design and create educational spaces and programs for the new high school facilities.
- Soliciting and receiving support from the Agassi Foundation to build a \$5 million high school gymnasium and develop a sports program, which has garnered multiple state championships. The gym was selected by the NBA as one of its practice facilities in the lead-up to the NBA All-Star Game in 2007.
- Accelerating the school's timeline and decision-making to establish the first Kindergarten and first-grade classes three years earlier than planned. Adding the first high school class in the school's history (2005- 06).
- Overseeing the completion of the new state-of-the-art Kindergarten wing of the School.
- Carrying out policies set by the Agassi Prep Governing Body (equivalent to the Board of Trustees).
- Responsible for the school's day-to-day operations and administering an operating budget of over \$6 million; setting the budget and strategic direction of the school for the 2005-2006 school year.
- Shepherding the middle school towards an "Exemplary" status in 2005-2006 under the "No Child Left Behind" guidelines. It was the only middle school in the State of Nevada to achieve this status.

- Guiding the elementary school towards the State of Nevada's Department of Education's "Adequate Yearly Progress" status in 2005 - 2006, only 1/3 of the schools in the State of Nevada earned this recognition.
- With colleagues, authored and introduced a charter school bill, signed into law in 2005, that enrolled more underserved students from the neighborhood.
- A key member of the fundraising team, including providing tours weekly to major donors—for the Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation and the Andre Agassi College Preparatory Academy that:
  - Raised \$7.5 million in 2004-05 via the Agassi Foundation at Andre Agassi's Grand Slam for Children.
  - Successfully solicited a \$1 million donation on behalf of the school's new Beauchamp Apprentice Teacher Program in 2005.
- Designing/implementing the Beauchamp Apprentice Teacher Program in 2005 that led to sixteen new teachers joining the profession, obtaining teaching licenses, and earning their Master's or Bachelor's degrees from the University of Nevada – Las Vegas or Nevada State College.
- Expanding, re-organizing, and hiring new staff, increasing from 25 employees to 55 staff between 2004-05 and 2005-06.
- Evaluating the faculty and staff three times each year per state law.
- Managing the recruiting and retention efforts of faculty and staff. Hiring 42 key staff members, including a K-8 principal and an assistant principal, as well as 25 teachers and 16 apprentice teachers.
- Serving as a member of five of the six Governing Body committees—Finance, Development, Curriculum, Human Resources, and Facilities.
- Re-writing the school's mission statement and co-authoring the student discipline policy and the faculty code of conduct in 2004.

## **THE CATLIN GABEL SCHOOL, Portland, Oregon 1999 – 2004**

### **Assistant Head of the Upper School**

**English Teacher**

**Baseball Coach**

Catlin Gabel School is a pre-K through grade 12 independent school.

Duties, responsibilities, and highlights included:

- Overseeing and developing the cultural competency of the entire school community; working with the division heads, teachers, parents, and students to create a more intentional educational and ethical community: hiring acclaimed South African author Mark Mathabane as the first Director of Multiculturalism and Inclusion; supporting families of color in staying at the school during difficult periods; helping to lead a course of study for all newly admitted families to the school with the Lower School Head and Assistant Head for Diversity and Multiculturalism called "Diversity 101;" reviving and sustaining the ethos that character
- was not just talked about but was demonstrated every day in the school community by one's actions.
- Responsible for managing 250 Upper School students and 50 faculty members.
- Teaching two sections of English each term, and? Or are these what you taught? 9<sup>th</sup> grade and junior/senior electives.
- Coaching Varsity Baseball—four seasons.
- Participating in hiring committees and in administrative review committees involving faculty and interns; interviewing all prospective Ninth Grade applicants for admission.
- Serving as an advisor to the Student Government and student diversity groups.
- Sitting on the BOT Finance Committee and helping create a new strategic plan in that committee.



- Soliciting fellow parents for the Annual Fund. Authoring an appeal to faculty and staff resulted in pledges in that sector rising by ten percent.
- Co-facilitating the diversity committee, the Ubuntu Council; founding and organizing in 2003-04 a citywide high school diversity and leadership conference, "FROM WORDS TO ACTION."
- Co-creating and implementing an evaluation of the Upper School's pilot laptop program.

**MARIN ACADEMY, San Rafael, CA 1995 – 1999 English Department Chair**

English Teacher  
Softball Coach  
JV Boys' Basketball Coach

Marin Academy is a co-educational high school of 400 students in a college-preparatory program.

**NORTH HILLS PREPARATORY SCHOOL, North Hills, CA 1992 – 1995**

Humanities Coordinator  
Softball Coach

North Hills Preparatory School emphasizes an educational program that provided a challenging, coherent, and relevant curriculum for a heterogeneous population.

**THE MARLBOROUGH SCHOOL, Los Angeles, CA 1990 – 1992 English Teacher**

Marlborough School, founded in 1889, is an independent day school serving a diverse group of young women.

**THE COSBY SHOW, Astoria Queens, NY 1986 – 1988 Studio Teacher—English and History**

High School teacher on the NBC Television series. Taught English and History/Social Studies to actors Tempestt Bledsoe and Malcolm Jamal Warner.

**BOARDS AND ADVISORY WORK**

- Member of the Board, Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE), 2022 - 2024
- Member, Board of Trustees, Center of Creative Arts (COCA), 2019 - present
- Member, HR Task Force, Center of Creative Arts (COCA), 2017 - 21
- Member, Board of Directors, The Network of Complementary Schools, North American Schools Organization, 2003 – 2021
- Member, California Association of Independent Schools, Board of Standards, 2015 – 2016
- Member, Board of Trustees, The Bay School of San Francisco, 2007 – 2014
- Member, Board of Trustees, The Seven Hills School, Walnut Creek, CA, 2010 – 2014
- Member, Board of Trustees, Parent Education Network. San Francisco, CA 2011 – 2014
- Advisor, Parent Education Network. San Francisco, CA 2006 – 2014
- Founding Advisor, S.A.F.E Voices for the Parent Education Network, San Francisco, CA 2006 – 2014
- Principal Writer and Partner: "A-NEW," Vegas-PBS, the public television station in Southern Nevada, 2015
- Advisor, Writer, and Lead Educational Consultant, "My Life Is About: Stedman Graham's Nine-Step Process for Teens," 2006 – 2013

- Member, Board of Trustees, Presidio Hill School, 2007 – 2008
- Member, Board of Trustees, The Gardner School, Vancouver, Washington. 2004

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## **PUBLICATIONS**

- Proctor Academy's Head of School Blog, "The Journey"
  - ["Starting ANEW" – June 28, 2028](#)
  - ["Changes and Transitions" – May 24, 2028](#)
  - ["The Sounds of Summer" – May 17, 2024](#)
  - ["The Parent School Partnership" – May 3, 2024](#)
  - ["The Farthest Shore" – April 18, 2024](#)
  - ["Accessing Their Voice in the Hays Speaking Prize" – April 12, 2024](#)
  - "Mountain Classroom in Apache Stronghold" – April 5, 2024
  - More [Here](#) and [Here](#)
- Editor and Founder of MICDS Publication (online), "Every Child, Every Day." 2019 - 21
  - ["What We Share: These Three Things"](#) – Final Article
- Contributing writer, Diablo Magazine Online, "Education Matters" blog, 2008 – present.
- ["Why I Stay: And What Independent Schools Can Do to Attract and Keep Other Teachers and Administrators of Color."](#) Independent School Magazine, Spring 2003.
- "Teach By Learning," A Child's Book.com, <http://www.achildsbook.com>, 2003
- "Our History, Our Heritage," Op-ed piece, The Oregonian, February 17, 2002.
- "The Mayor of Bronzeville," Webzine In Which, Vol.1, No. 3, Fall 2001.
- "Jumping Through Hoops," A Child's Book.com, <http://www.achildsbook.com>, 2001.
- "The Secret of Our Success," Celebrating Children.com, <http://www.celebratingchildren.com>, 2001. \*\*"The Case for Diversity," A Child's Book.com, <http://www.achildsbook.com>, 2001.
- "Reflections: On Goals," Webzine In Which." Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 2001. [http://diprisco.com/wzine/reflect\\_vol1\\_2.html](http://diprisco.com/wzine/reflect_vol1_2.html)
- "Weighted Down: Achieving Pre-school Academic Excellence," A Child's Book.com, <http://www.achildsbook.com>, 2001
- "Starting Your Own Children's Book Club," Celebrating Children.com, <http://www.celebratingchildren.com>, 2001.
- "Weighted down: achieving preschool academic excellence." Preschool Education .Com <http://www.preschooleducation.com>, 2001.
- "Hellhound on My Trail," Celebrating Children.com, <http://www.celebratingchildren.com>, 2001. \*\*"Rapport: An Educational Philosophy," A Child's Book.com, <http://www.achildsbook.com>, 2001.
- \*Founder/Writer, A Child's Book.com at <http://www.achildsbook.com>
- \*Columnist, *Call and Response*, Celebrating Children.com at <http://www.achildsbook.com>
- \*Columnist, *In the Promised Land*, ParentPreneuer.com (Web Syndicated)

## **SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS**

- Presenter, People of Color Conference, National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) National Conference, 2002. "Creating a Regional Student Diversity Leadership Conference with Independent, Parochial and Public Schools" with Jim Wickenden, Percy Abram, and Rod Jemison.
- Presenter, People of Color Conference, National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) National Conference, 2011 and 2012. "The Path to Becoming a Head of School" with Jim Wickenden, Percy Abram, and Rod Jemison.

- Speaker, The American School Counselor Association, Seattle, Washington. Presentation on “My Life Is About” with Stedman Graham. June 2012
- Speaker, “Gear Up,” San Francisco, California. Presentation on “My Life Is About.” July 2012
- Speaker, Andre Agassi’s Grand Slam for Children, 2005—a premier fundraising event for the Andre Agassi Charitable Foundation, including a live auction and live entertainment by Faith Hill, Tim McGraw, Robin Williams, Ray Romano, Josh Groban, John Mayer, among others—that raised \$6.3 million dollars in one evening.
- Speaker, The West Las Vegas Rotary Club, A Public Purpose in Education: Creating a School that Stands for Something, September 2005.
- Founder, Learning By Heart Education Blog,  
<http://www.learningbyheart.blogspot.com>, 2005 – present.

## **AWARDS**

- \*Emmy Award Winner (Presented for Acting), for “FASTBREAK TO GLORY” (WMAQ-TV), Chicago Branch, 1988
- \*Best in Show, Art Chair, Marin County Fair, 2012; Third Place, Art Chair, Marin County Fair, 2015 \*Recipient, Edward E. Ford Fellowship, 1996
- \*Recipient, LEF Foundation Grant, 1998

## **SPORTS**

- \*Member, Bay Area Conference and Bay County Athletic League—East. Body made up of Principals, Superintendents, and Heads of School. 2008 – 2016.
- \*President, Bay County Athletic League—East. 2014 – 2016.
- \*Member (Baseball Player and Coach), Bay Area Men’s Senior Baseball League, 1996-2001, 2006 – present.
- \*Member (Baseball Player and Manager), Portland City League Baseball, 2002 – 2004.

Transformational Leadership  
Brian Thomas

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Through my years of teaching and leadership, I have come to believe that ALL students need the same thing: to be known, to be seen, and to be valued for who they are and who they want to become in this world. Educators in Pre-K/K - 12 schools who create the systems and rituals and who contextualize the learning environment, making learning and teaching culturally responsive, are the ones I champion. In short, transformational leaders in my chosen field of education--or, more accurately, the field that chose me--create the conditions in which all students thrive. When highly engaged and competent, these leaders direct attention, time, and resources to areas of keen focus. These leaders lock onto people and places that need cultivation, while analyzing and then mobilizing data to measure not just success, but also effort.

Data must be the vehicle by which systemic change in schools occurs, measuring not just success but also registering responsible effort towards a goal. As leaders in independent schools, as well as in public charter schools, we use the data we collect to drive decision-making and change. Yet, in many schools, including some of the schools in which I have worked and led, data has been and continues to be used unevenly, especially as it relates to student achievement. However, what does a school measure: test scores, student engagement, teacher observations, college and high school acceptances, or something else? Yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes. Just about anything can be measured. The point is this: how can a school ever progress unless some weight is given to the effort? An example for one school may be in the form of a question. For instance: "Why do some African American boys at the Upper School seem to be testing to get into the school at the same or even higher levels of achievement as their white peers but score terribly on standardized tests and have lower grade point averages over time?" At the beginning of the inquiry, all you need is data. The answers will come later if the adults have the courage and tenacity to truly seek them, perhaps even helping more students along the way. In time, the narrower questions may eventually extend to broader questions like "what is the value-added proposition of our brand of teaching and learning for ALL students at our school?" Choosing to look at the data and our practices are acts of courage that must be taken up with an in-depth and critical eye towards continuous improvement.

In my practice as a teacher and administrator, the most significant gains and "ah- ha" moments arose directly from what felt like a quagmire of failure or retreat. As a teacher, for instance, when I could not reach a particular student in an English section, perhaps a student who did not look like me, I blamed myself. In one English class, I struggled to find a way to connect with boys like "Bryce" when he earned a D or lower because I felt I had failed to motivate him successfully. Similarly, as a leader, I feel the same way if a family or families become disaffected with the school because of some decision(s) we made. These "failures" lead me to ask better questions, to plan and communicate more carefully, and to wonder, "What else can I do?"

Areas of a school that may need critical focus require crafting a strategy that is inspired by a school's mission and will direct where that institution chooses to spend its collective energy. It's a reflective process that tracks what students do and what they find fascinating, while also being intentional about creating experiences that might engage even more students. Every school that is impactful has the driving drumbeat of its mission and strategic plan to guide its process and progress. Effective school strategy puts children first. Commonly used phrases in any school's strategic plan will have words like "transformational student experiences," "attracting and retaining a world-class and inspiring faculty and staff," and "developing a vibrant school community." However, the aim and purpose of an effective plan echo in people's minds when those words are lived. Ultimately, the heart of what schools do is foster positive change in the people they are charged with shepherding through their educational growth. One example of a transformational plan would be when a school's remembrance outing for a young alumna who died becomes an integral part of the school's cornerstone environmental service program.

ALL students should have conditions created for them in which they can ultimately be successful. That means seeing, knowing, and valuing every child AND adult at the school. This very idea comes from thoughtful, inventive, creative, and intrepid souls who have sometimes sacrificed much themselves to teach, lead, and serve in the way that would be considered highly-effective--no matter the school or context. As with our students, the lived experiences of the adults in the schoolhouse must be recognized for them to thrive as well. For instance, I marvel at the newest teacher who digs into her grades like wrapping paper around the holidays to see how she might improve her questions. I am also amazed by the housekeeping staff member who stops to encourage a child who recently lost his father to cancer because she sees her role as more substantial than just getting the rugs vacuumed. I am awed, too, by the CFO who wants desperately to find an extra thousand dollars to make sure the all-girls robotics program has the resources it needs next year to compete and to thrive.

Like our students, all these people and more are the folks that I see, that I know, and that I value. They pull hard for the school and the mission of the school, with its plans and dreams. Sustained school transformation sometimes begins with a simple conjecture or question that we whisper out loud, followed by some bits and bytes of data we can't quite understand, until finally, a plan emerges that may one day or one year help a student, a classroom, or an entire school.

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