

Dear Colleagues and Families at Thornhill Elementary,

Sometimes hindsight provides us with a connect-the-dots kind of experience where we can look back upon the events of our lives and see where we are headed. Reflecting upon my professional life and considering what I know about Thornhill Elementary School, I am delighted that being your principal will be the next step in my journey.

My unique career path and empathy for families and students have especially prepared me for the role. My teaching experience includes kindergarten, grades 4-8, a year of high school, and graduate school. I also taught in the GATE Summer program in Oakland, and was acting principal for five summers. My teaching experience taught me the value of project-based learning including standards, for providing deep understanding to students. I am convinced that the arts are not extras, but an essential part of the curriculum for all our children. In my personal life I have cultivated a love for music and currently sing with the Golden Gate Men's Chorus. My experiences as a teacher and principal have given me several perspectives of what it means to be a community of learners.

My partner and I started our own family by adopting 2 special needs boys, in 1990 and 1993. My experiences with our sons have given me an empathetic perspective on interfacing with our special ed system, the importance of long-term conversations with parents around these issues, and in supporting families in similar situations. I have learned that every school needs a system of identification and intervention support for kids with all types of needs.

As a school leader I work for constant improvement in achievement, relationships, and systems functions. I reflect upon data with teachers for increased achievement and social growth and to lead inquiry about our practice as educators. If it is not currently a practice I intend to establish weekly collaboration sessions by grade-level teams. Collaboration helps interrupt inequity and close the achievement. I try to have the courage to be direct and honest as I support and challenge my teachers. By taking time to talk I involve others in important decisions and authentic work. My decisions typically reflect a common vision of learning for all.

I intend to guide parents toward effective involvement in the school and partnership in the learning of their child. Volunteerism in the school can support the teachers, their programs, and student progress. I will work with the Thornhill PFC to support our school in providing enrichment classes and experiences. I put effort into listening well to teachers, staff, students and parents and maintain an open door policy. As a school is a human organization, I do my best to show caring for everyone around me.

Two summers ago I had the opportunity to attend the Harvard Principals' Institute. There I heard respected leaders in academic fields talk about the principal as the heart of a school, and was inspired to renew my vision and goals. My journey has led me to be the educational leader of one of the best schools in Oakland, and I am ready for my next step. I come with a deep knowledge of the scope and sequence of elementary education and the needs of the students at this age. I understand the needs of families and students and am committed to working in a public system to support education for all. I am honored at being chosen for the position of principal at Thornhill Elementary School.

Sincerely,
Mel Stenger