

Youth Initiative High School

Winter 2014

K

A L L E I D O S C O P E

STEWARDS OF THE FUTURE

What is a teacher? A figure of arbitrary authority? A molder of minds? A manufacturer of habits? One who cannot do? A font of wisdom?

A YIHS teacher rejects these mantles in favor of one, all-important label: human. Here teachers strive to earn the respect of their students by striving to improve themselves, by remaining vulnerable and open to change, and by recognizing these same human characteristics in their students. This basic human empathy is one of the foundations of YIHS, one which all are expected to cultivate in themselves. There are many qualifications to become a teacher at YIHS but the most important is that one stays alive to themselves, alive to others, and alive to the world—after that, the teaching is simple.

For this issue we asked some of our faculty four questions. We hope you enjoy their answers.



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Walker

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1. What is the highest virtue you seek to cultivate in your students?
2. What practical skill?
3. Why do you love working at YIHS (assuming you do)?
4. What is your favorite YIHS moment?

DAVID CANNON WALKER



The Calculus, Music

You Can't Always Believe What You're Thinking

The highest truth I hope to impart to my students is that one should always be both curious and skeptical. I have believed a variety of ill-founded ideas in my life. I believed when I was 13 that I looked beyond suave with a ponytail. I believed (and still believe most Saturdays) that the Wisconsin Badgers football team is intrinsically more virtuous than any other and only a cruel and unjust universe would allow them to lose. I occasionally believe that I will feel amazing after eating $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. cheeseburger from Culver's. I am sometimes compelled to update these beliefs (courtesy of old photographs, Stanford Cardinal at the 2013 Rose Bowl, and the rumbling protestations of my stomach).

For me (and probably most other people too) it is easy to update our beliefs about small ideas we don't take seriously and have an easy time evaluating.

However, there is a whole slew of ideas that are

either important to us or are confusing and hard to evaluate, or sometimes both. In order to deal with these doozies of the idea-world we need practice analyzing ideas, recognizing and admitting our mistakes, rejecting bad arguments, and hunting for better ones. When students learn and practice math, they inevitably make mistakes, correct them, and find solutions. This happens in a concrete arena where it is relatively easy to know the truth.

You Will Use This, You Just Might Never Know It

Students ask semi-regularly when they will use the skills we are working on in math class. There isn't a particularly satisfying answer to this question- although the math we are studying is astonishingly useful and is foundational to most or all developments in science and technology, it is unlikely that any particular student will encounter any particular application in their future professional life.

What is certain, however, is that all students will have problems in their future lives. There is a confidence, a sort of intellectual swagger that comes from knowing you've solved many a tricky puzzle in the past. It stops you from giving up before you begin or feeling cowed by something you've never seen before.

This skill is useful and, I believe, manifestly practical.

A Community of Teachers, Young and Less Young

I love being surrounded by a community of students whose creative ambit at times seems boundless, who care for each other and enjoy each other's company. I love interacting with other adults in the community who are remarkable communicators, thinkers, and organizers. I love attempting difficult things that I am not good at, struggling and sometimes failing, and eventually becoming a more competent person.

Singing Out

70 of us standing around the campfire on the last night of the camping trip this year, arms around each other's shoulders, howling song after song at the stars refusing to break the circle and go to bed. So many different people took a turn leading us in a song, and we learned them all.

ANNA RODRIGUEZ

Striving to Impart Some Wisdom

The highest truth that I try to teach my students is that we are all capable of cultivating creativity. Cultivating creativity means exercising your imagination and intuition. It takes creativity to look at a challenge from a different perspective and imagine a solution. Part of tapping into creativity also means that a student sees that my solution is not always the same as their solution. A wonderful moment for me is when I hear a student ask with a slight whine or groan, "Do I have to do it this way" And I respond with, "If you discover a better way then go for it!"

You're Gonna Make it if you Try

One practical skill I try to teach students is how to make a commitment to a project, i.e. sewing or knitting, and follow through to completion even if there are mistakes. This commitment helps students experience what it is like to persevere and strengthens their will forces. It is easy to give up if the project gets challenging or does not turn out how you expected. Yet, I remind students that the gift is in the process and that pushing through a challenge is when real learning happens.

Why I Agree to Show Up to Work

What I love most about being a faculty member at YIHS is that I get to be a part of a community that fosters trust, honesty, creativity and humility and because these virtues are in place everyone has the opportunity to voice their opinions and needs.

It Could Go Viral on You Tube and Other Amazing Hallway Moments

My favorite YIHS moment was spontaneously salsa dancing in the hallway with students and another teacher. There have been many moments when spontaneous singing has erupted in the hallway, then next thing you know you are singing along too.



Fine & Manual Arts

BEAN VOZ



The Right Answer is Always Kindness

To me the most important value isn't x or n . Even though I teach Algebra I'm still a human being and being human means having compassion for others. In my work as a teacher and in my mentorship role at the school I try to be an example of compassion for all living creatures. Math gives us a view of an objective truth and yet not everyone can so easily come to this truth. It is our job as human beings to help others to come to truth; to teach is an expression of compassion.

One Step at a Time

The opinion that high school math doesn't teach practical skills is a well-worn cliché, but in reality the lessons in practical life-skills taught in a math class are almost endless.

The first thing I try to teach my

students is to slow down, stay calm, and get organized. When you run into a problem as everyone does in math and in life, look at the parts, play with them, move them around. When you know what you're dealing with keep everything in rows, take it one step at a time, and for goodness sake, use a pencil—in life and in math, we all make mistakes. If these aren't lessons that we use everyday in life then we should all go back to a high school math class.

It's A Party

Being a member of the YIHS faculty is a lot of hard work. Sometimes I am grading papers after I put my children to bed or updating student report pages on a long car drive. A lot of the work is not very glamorous but doing the dirty work is a necessary exercise toward the spiritual fulfillment of having served others. But my favorite part about this job is that the line between work and fun is never clear and always moving. At this job I am likely to be crying with laughter while adding something to a student's transcript or graphing an equation on the board. Work is fun because I am surrounded by students and staff that make me smile.

One Long Moment

I really believe that every moment at YIHS is important; the boring stuff, the exciting stuff, the happy and the sad. They all come together to make the hard parts more bearable and the good parts that much more satisfying. Every moment matters.

A Congregation of Free Beings

The highest principle I try to teach? The highest is necessarily the one that holds all other virtues within it. It is thus the most difficult to characterize briefly and perhaps also the one I attain most inconsistently. Let me try it this way: I attempt to example the soul position of one who stands in the world with a given task (e.g. teaching German, Acrobatics, Eurythmy, etc.) striving to fulfill it through the conditions given, including my own and others' strengths and weaknesses. That is, I insist on my allowing others to be what they are and inviting them to become more along the lines of their own sense of the good, which I seek to awaken through the subject being taught. Another way of expressing all this: fanatical enthusiasm for a self-chosen goal tempered by a holy awe before the being of the other. Or: courage and compassion. Or: love.

Reverence for the Other

See above. If you can pursue any goal with athletic zeal while embracing the rights and dignities of others, you can – much more importantly than any other exceptionalism – be yourself. All other practicalities are a long series of moot points without you being there. And you can't be there if you are afraid of hurting people. And you can't avoid hurting them if you don't revere them. And you can't revere them if you haven't found the wellspring of your own will, your own drive to mastery and creation (reverence is an art, after all).

In the Realm of the Possible

I love knowing that my creative impulses have room. My inner life can breathe. There is a robust sense of the value of the endeavor. There is really a youthfulness about the institution itself: possibilities disguised as imperfections abound (elsewhere it is quite often the other way around).

Home Sweet Home

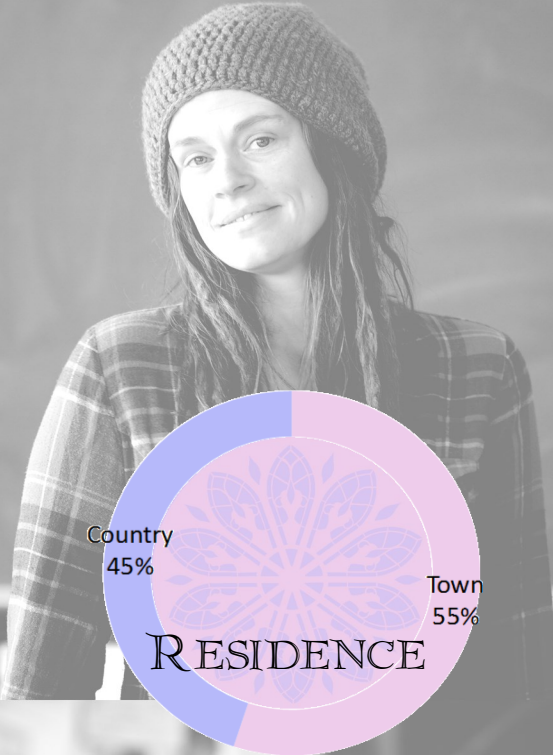
Well, if I discount my time as one of the fabled “founding students” and limit myself to my teacher's perspective, I would have to say that the open mic I went to was amazing. It was so not so much due to the more than impressive talent displayed, but rather because of the complete and utter lack of any of the normal teenage hatred you would expect to be vented from the back of the room when any sign of weakness appeared on stage, or any threat to the established hierarchy was displayed. I have never, in all my travels, seen anything like that. A vacuum of adolescent viciousness. Not only the cold of the slow march of ice mountains have been repelled here in the Driftless.



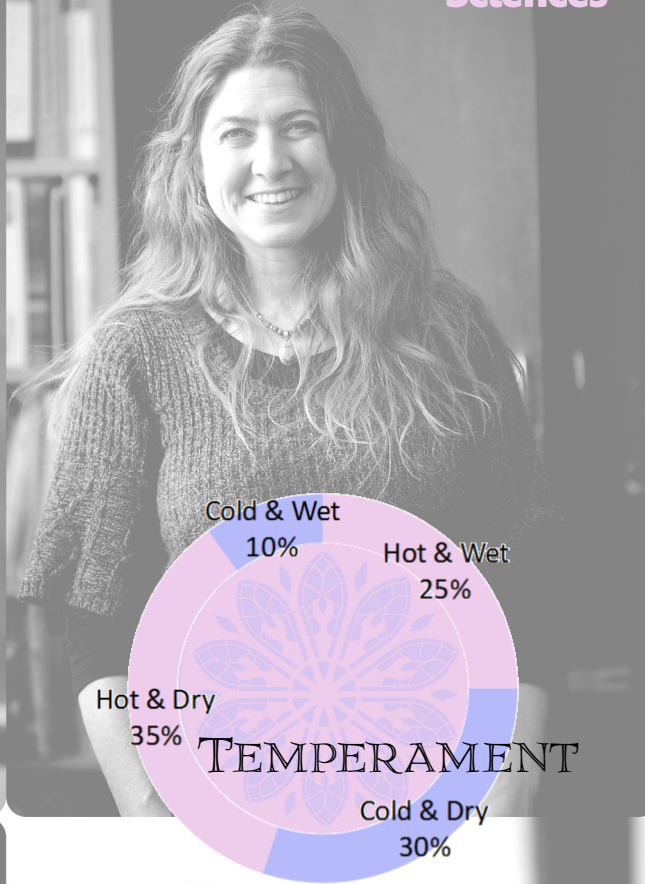
Foreign Language, Movement

DAVID ECKLUND

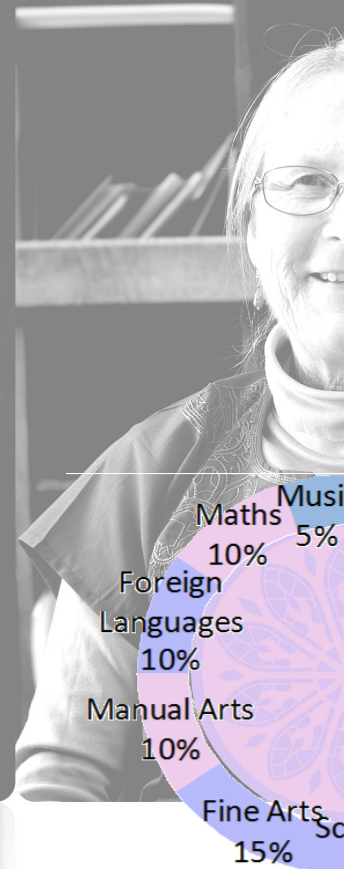
KADY FOX
Maths, Music



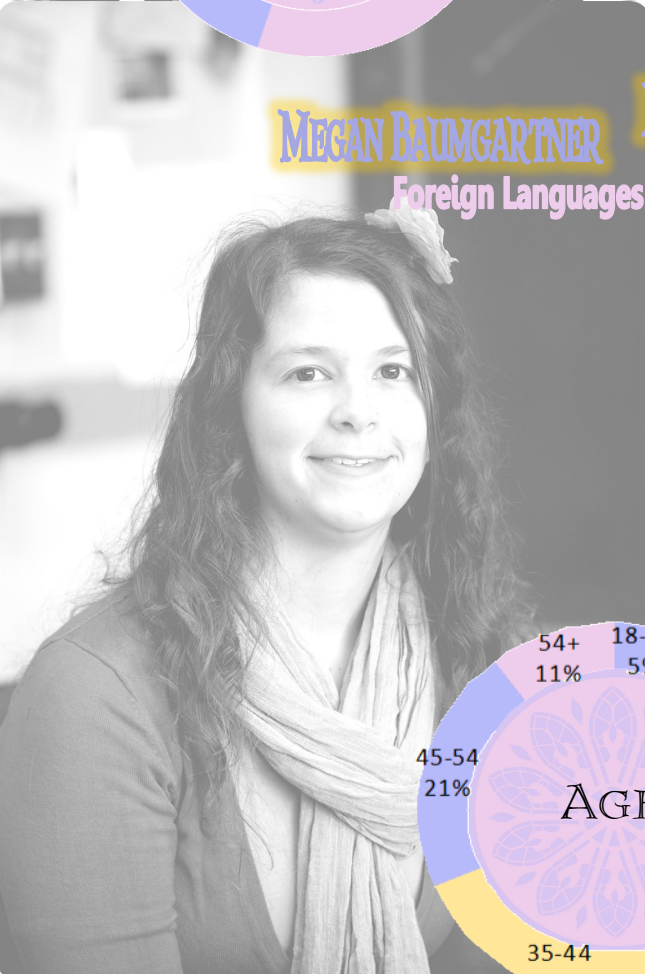
VICKI RAMSAY
Sciences



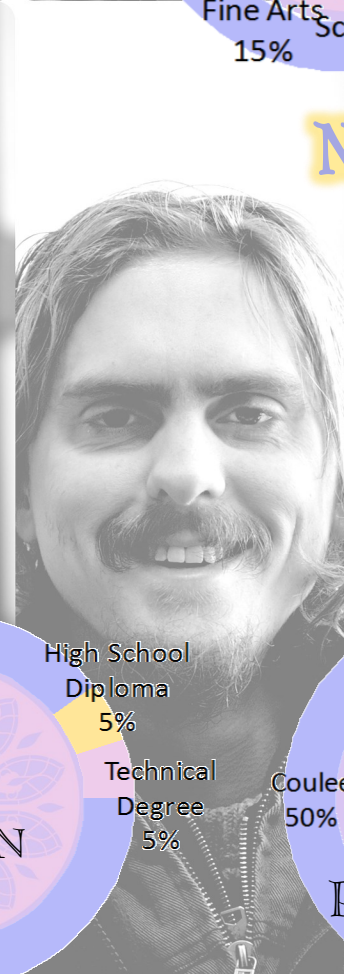
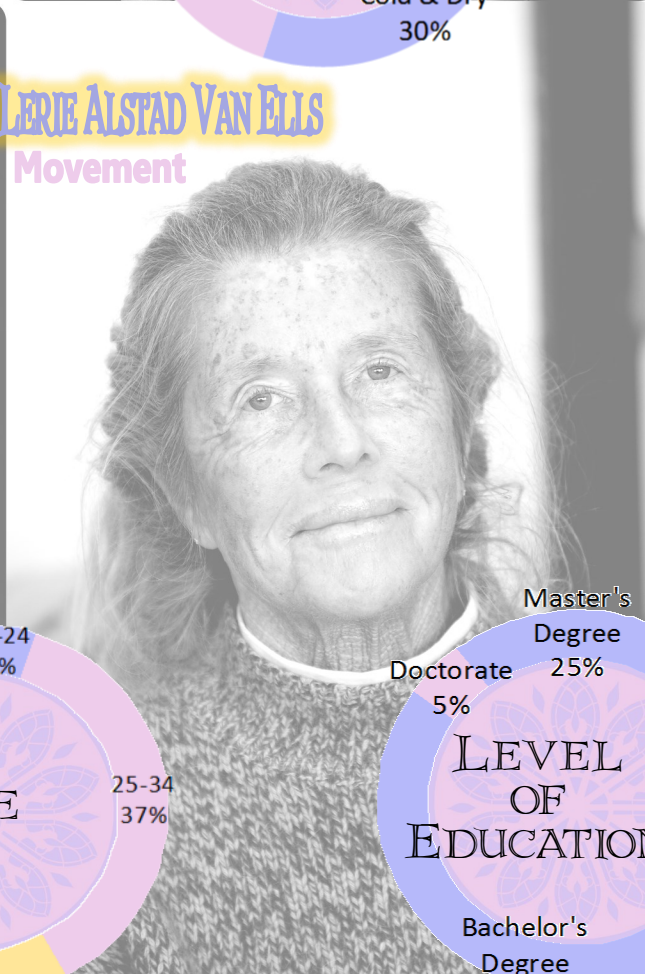
JANE SIEMO
Nutrition



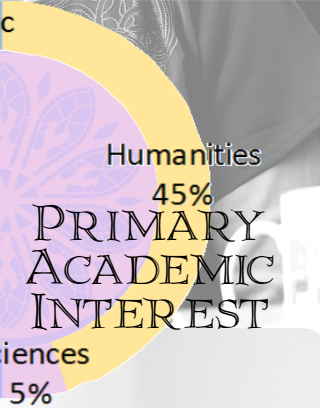
MEGAN BAUMGARTNER
Foreign Languages



LERIE ALSTAD VAN ELLS
Movement



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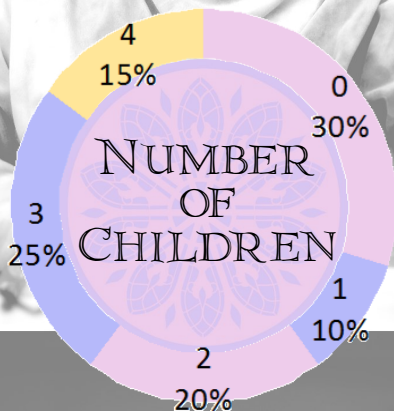
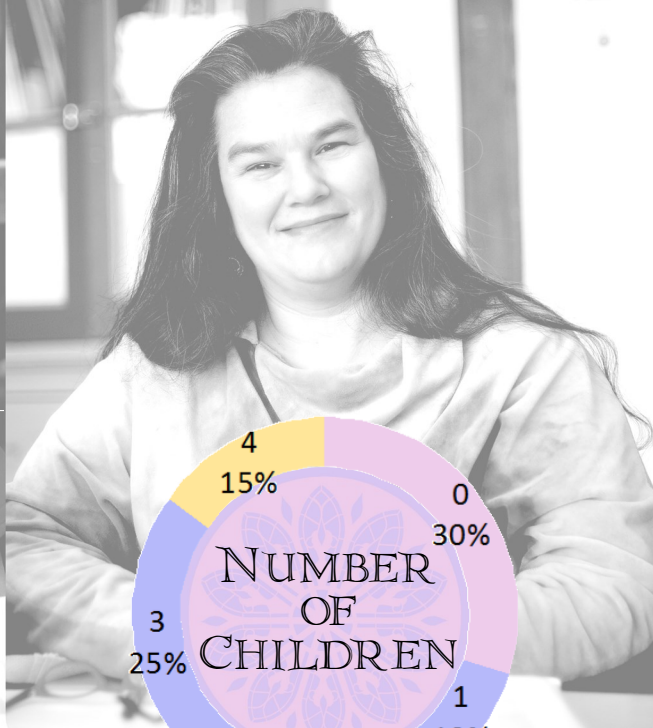


NOLAN FRANK
Music

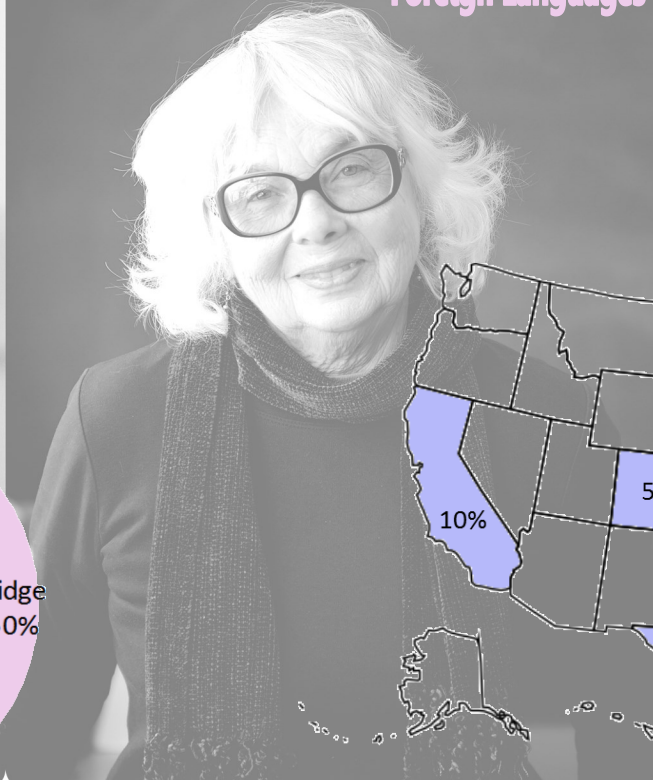


MARTHA BUCHE

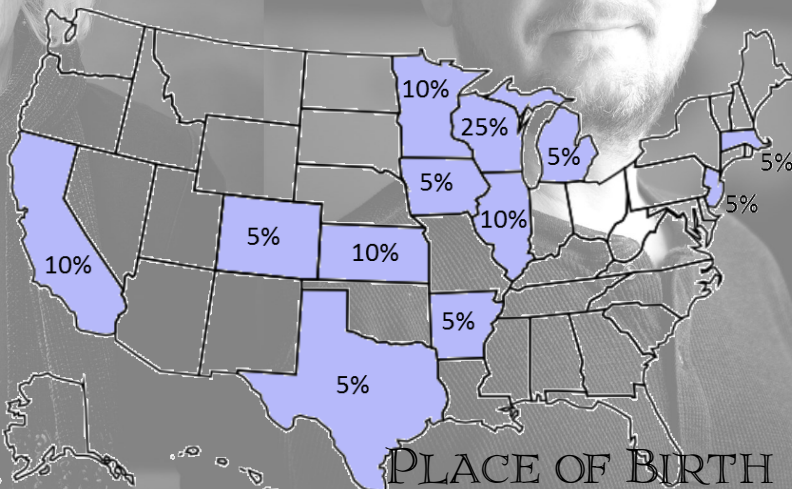
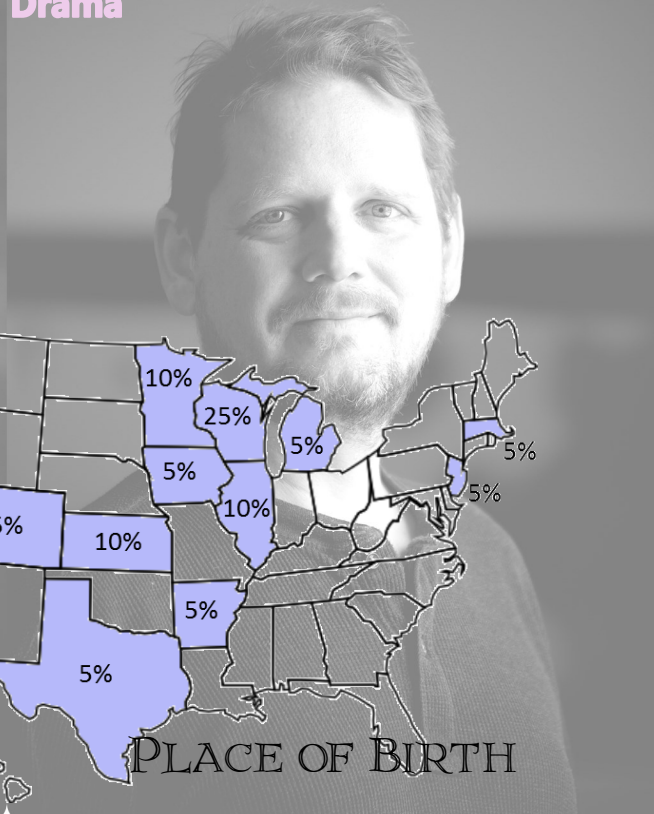
Fine Arts



PHILOTHEA BEZIN
Foreign Languages



STEVE LAURDAN
Drama





The Power of Positivity

The highest principle/truth/value that I try to teach my students is... I'm not sure. I may tend to lean more towards modeling the principles and values that I try to instill in others through my words and actions. I consistently show up with positive energy, I listen, and I do what I can to show that I care. I'm a humanist by nature, and sometimes to a fault, but I want students to know and to see that when you're kind and you carry a positive attitude, and you care about the people around you, those people will care about you in return want to be around you. Good things happen in positive atmospheres.

Communication is Key

The most practical skill that I try to teach my students is to *communicate your needs*. For some students, it's easy to raise a hand and ask for help or just blurt out, "I don't get it". For others, it doesn't come naturally, and may even be stigmatizing.

At any rate, I encourage openness and honesty and provide opportunities for students to personally communicate with me so that I can try to best meet their individual needs. Lack of communication often leads to detrimental results; so the more we're talking to each other, the better.

Family First

As a faculty member, I love being a part of the Youth Initiative family. The connection to students, teachers, and parents alike is unlike any bond that I have ever experienced in an educational setting. The care that is taken to form and maintain relationships with one another is a key component to the development of everyone involved. As a family, we are all learning from each other and growing together.

Too Many To Choose From

I'm not sure that I have a favorite moment just yet. I have amassed this fantastic collection of joyous, challenging, humorous, tender, and real moments in the short time that I've been at Youth Initiative, but it's difficult for me to single out just one moment. I *can* say, the moments that are most memorable to me are the moments when I see students demonstrating care and regard for each other – an encouraging word, a hug, working cooperatively, teaching one another, clapping for each other – all actions that demonstrate what it's all about here and what it should be all about in the outside world.

Spongy

Lifelong learning is the highest goal I hold for my students. A student's ability to understand their own learning style is one key to being a spongy adult who can entertain ideas and information without judgment, then decide what is right and healthy for them to internalize. I try to help my students explore different ways of taking in information so they can figure out what works best for them as they transition into adulthood.

Trial and Error and Eventually—Success!

Allowing students to explore adult conversation in a safe space lets them make mistakes with me that could cause confusion and disrespect out in the world. Knowing how to code switch in different situations is important for feeling comfortable anywhere one goes in life.

Busy Benevolent Bees

I love the ebb and flow of chaotic peace throughout the day. From the buzz of the office as teachers prep for upcoming class to students taking a break in the hall during main lessons to the hum of activity in each classroom while lessons are in progress, the energy is ever changing but constantly productive. It is amazing to know that I am a part of something revolutionary in the realm of education and that my ideas as a teacher matter.

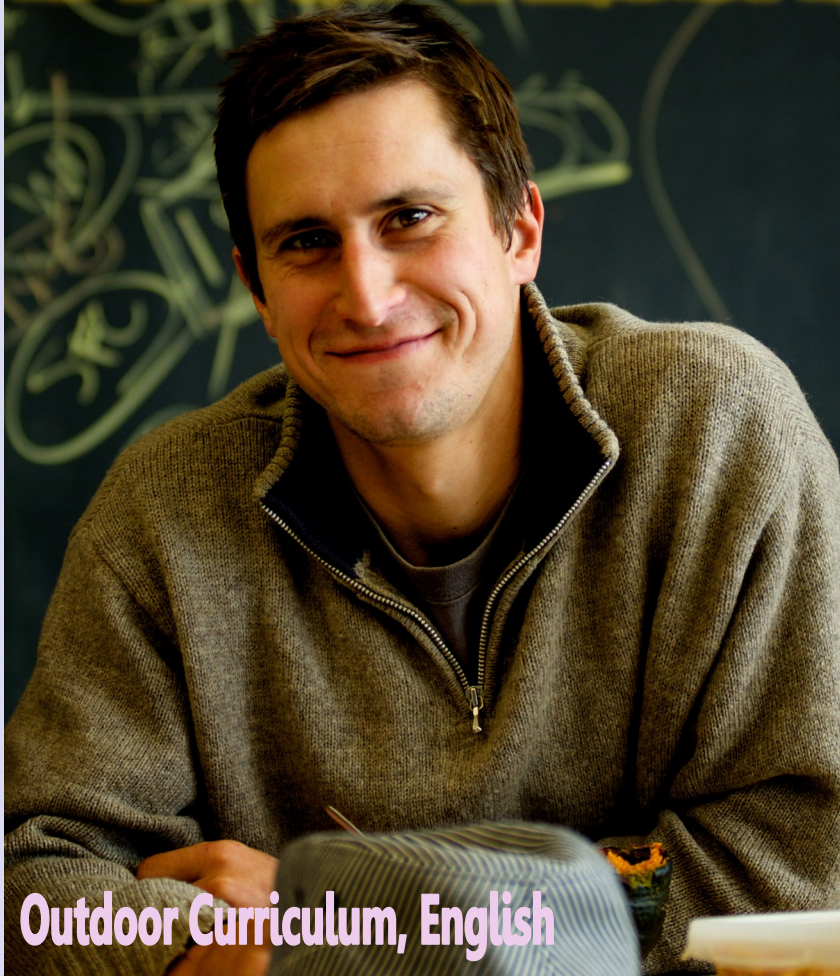
A Thousand Tiny Mutations

Maybe it was when I first stood in morning circle and heard all of the voices say the morning verse in unison or when a student, who I'd never taught directly, said, "Thank you." It may have been the time last spring when I visited the Tiller's Farm and had an epiphany about how students can learn in so many more ways than I was restricting myself to. Maybe it was when I gave the end-of-the-year-speech at the all-school meeting and had never been so sincere to that many people at one time ever before and I nailed the speech. Maybe it has been learning everyday and appreciating the opportunity to bring Sylvera to school with me during these precious months in her early life. Maybe it's the daily love that continues to pour out of the other staff into everyone else's love cups. It could be that there isn't just A SINGLE moment. The entirety of the past year of my life has been quintessential. Youth Initiative has changed me. I have grown in most aspects of my life in the past year and it is mostly due to the wonder that is Youth Initiative High School.

BAILEY MCGOWAN
ESL



DAVID HIBBARD RODE



Outdoor Curriculum, English

No One Will Believe You if You Can't Believe Yourself

The highest principle I am trying to teach my students is the same thing I am teaching myself. Integrity. There's a lot of knowledge, values, perspective, and opportunities out there and at some point we all have to decide who we are going to be, what we are going to champion, and how we are going to relate to the world. We have to decide where we stand and how we will stand. I believe that if we take this task on consciously, connect to our deepest values, and then live within integrity, we will be healthy and change the world.

Keep Your Eyes Open

Awareness is the key to integrity. Without awareness, our insistence on our values and beliefs can begin to look like ignorance. With awareness,

we can begin to deepen our understandings of ourselves and of the greater world and we can choose where we will stand with more clarity, resolve, and perspective. We are able to stand in our beliefs more firmly.

I'm a Humanist, What Can I Say?

This question is too big. I love the people. But I love people everywhere. What I love most about YIHS is that it is an organization that is human. It is flexible, dynamic, loving, encouraging, creative, and most of all, it allows us all to explore in a genuine and sincere way. I also love how deeply this place embodies a completely different approach to what it means to learn. Learning here is not about memorizing facts. It is about a lived experience of growth. There are no experts. There are no specialists. We are all journeying.

The Collective Ear in Blossom

Moments--in classes, morning circle, student meeting, committees, on camping trips--when everyone is listening deeply.

Find Your Power

I teach my students to find their own strength. It is important that students start learning about themselves by researching what inspires them. They are encouraged to make my classes their own and take their ideas further than my curriculum dictates. We discuss how to take their big ideas and make them bite size. I offer them daily demonstrations on technique, supply them with materials, and then get out of their way. I am always nearby, but I let them struggle until they find a question to ask me, or find a solution on their own. By the end, they have learned something about themselves, are proud of their problem solving and more confident in their abilities.

Polish It Up

I teach the importance of presentation by teaching my students the process of taking their artwork all the way from idea generation, to installation. It is important to me that art students know the public will view their final work. I want them to be able to express themselves, both verbally and in written reflection, where their ideas originated and the process they went through in creating and displaying their artwork. Art Night is good for YIHS art students to hear feedback and practice expressing their thoughts to a variety of artist and non-artist public.

People & Art

I love all the folks that make up the school! Students, faculty and parents. I am truly honored to be part of YIHS. Also, I especially love that I am able to teach art how it should be taught, with proper materials, small classes, 5 1/2 hours per week of class time, and students who want to be in my classroom.

A Magical Night of Fish

I loved Art Night last year, at the end of my Sculpture Installation class. The students had really gone all out on their chicken wire armatures. In fact, several had to work on them a few times after school to finish by 6:00 that Friday. They cut it close, but they made it! All that scrambling was well worth it to see the beautifully painted fabric mache' fish, hanging waist level in the spot lit hallway. I am so proud of those kids! The fish looked magical that night.



PLEASE REMEMBER THESE
FRIENDS OF YIHS



NOT JUST THE
WHERE
behind your food. But the
WHO & the WHY.



Ihm Family Farm
One of our 650+ Wisconsin
farmer-owners



Organic Valley dairy farmers like the Ihm family believe in the importance of providing healthy, local organic dairy products for the communities they live in. For more than 25 years, our farmer-owned cooperative has been committed to producing nutritious organic products in harmony with the earth and with respect for animals. Learn more about our mission at OrganicValley.coop.

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LOCALLY
ROASTED

Driftless Wisconsin



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