



An Agenda for Democracy

If political democracy is “government for the people by the people” then social democracy is “community for the people by the people.” Gary Daynes, a professor at Brigham Young University defined social democracy in an article he published several years ago as “the set of conditions that result when unrelated people choose to regularly put themselves in public contact with each other for mutual benefit.” That is what being part of a neighborhood or community (school) is all about. The key word in

Daynes’ definition is “choose” and I never lose sight of the fact that we are fortunate as a school to be able to function believing that everyone involved with WHEA does so by choice.

The first choice students and their families make is to enroll in the school, and teachers and staff also have made the conscious decision to join WHEA as the place to ply their vocation. What follows is the choice of how deeply to invest and involve oneself in the ethos and expectations of our shared learning community. While this certainly

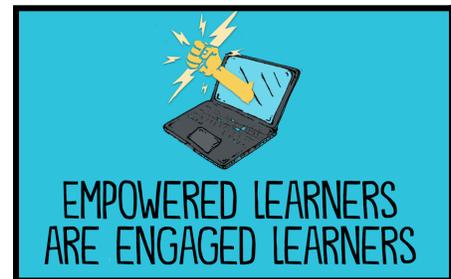


includes following rules and respecting people and property by honoring a core principle of trust and decency, is it fair to expect even more of each other? And what happens if we allow ourselves to settle for a lesser collective ethic of the common good? In thinking about this and the state of our school, I recently found myself turning to some sages in the field. One is John Goodlad, a longtime progressive educator, and influential writer whom I had the pleasure of working with before his passing in 2014. He wrote: “Democracy cannot flourish in an ecosystem of moral neutrality.”

In Goodlad’s book *Agenda for Democracy in Education*, one of the moral dimensions he expresses as necessary is a commitment to providing a *nurturing pedagogy*, which requires providing high

expectations for young people (but also held to by their adult counterparts—parents and teachers) then doing everything we can to support them in meeting these standards. Will we see this realized every day by every member of the school community? No. Is there a belief that each individual in the school has it within them to do and be their best? Absolutely.

Developing these habits of mind and ethical norms we want to see in students both in and out of our school setting does not simply just happen. An Ohio State University professor and expert on youth leadership and citizen development Robert Woyach shares in his book *Preparing for Leadership*, “Young people need opportunities to connect to issues that concern them. They must see how individuals exercise leadership in these areas. Finally, they must see themselves in these leadership roles—to give themselves permission to lead.” **In short, students do not become responsible unless granted responsibility.** This is the motivating driver for why we have made the decision to develop and dedicate time for every student across the tier/grade levels to play an active role in school governance or on a campus action committee. It may take time for some to reach a level of comfort and confidence to serve in these roles but when it clicks it is amazing to see the strength of spirit and rise to responsibility emerge.



Empowering students with voice and agency matters. I believe that engaging them within the fuller scope of helping our school function equitably and effectively can prove to be the most powerful improvement effort we can make to enhance student success and satisfaction at school—and in their civic life that follows. Fortunately, one of the great privileges of being a part of WHEA’s learning community is the chance to regularly witness the magnificent metamorphoses of the young people who often join the school feeling unsure of who they are or even want to be, and then with time and guidance grow to become confident, capable and committed citizens that instill hope and promise for a bright future for our world. **79**