

The Great PRINCIPAL SWAP at Lynnwood High School

PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA
Creating a Culture, Managing Resources



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Editor's Note: "Eric's Heroes" is a weekly series airing every Wednesday on Seattle's KOMO News in the 6 p.m. newscast. If you have a good story about a good person doing good things for the right reasons, share it with Eric by sending an email to heroes@komonews.com. We thank Eric and KOMO TV for sharing their story with us.



Change is hard. It is also inevitable. But consider the dilemma that faced Lynnwood High School.

I want to take you back to last June. It was the end of the school year.

And there was Dave Golden, strolling through the commons area at lunchtime. The place was bustling with students wolfing down their food, talking, engaging in the usual horseplay and hijinks that makes the high school years stick with us for a lifetime.

The students know him as “Mr.” Golden. He has a shaved head and round glasses and he wears a suit and tie. He walks among the students with an ease that makes you realize he’s been doing this for a long, long time.

He stops at one table and points to our camera. “They’re doing a story here...” and the students all say, “Ahhhh.” And as Mr. Golden walks away, one girl pipes up with, “We love Mr. Golden. He does great things here!”

He is the principal at Lynnwood High, and has been for 17 years. And before that, he worked at a bunch of other schools. He’s a career educator, a man who’s dedicated his life to our youth and better preparing them to inherit our world.

He’s sitting at his desk, a big room with a big window. He’s reading his final entry of the year for the school newsletter.

“There have been a few thousand happy, sad, crazy, quiet, outrageous, studious, spirited students who have

shared their teenage years with me and I have loved every minute of it,” he says.

When he finishes he breaks into a big smile.

There is a bunch of seniors in line to sign up for something having to do



WHO'S THE BOSS? Lynnwood High's Dave Golden (L) and Mike Piper make the move.

with graduation. Mr. Golden cruises by and notices that something isn't right. He says to one of the kids in line: “What are you doing? Yeah you. Come here, Albert.” He’s smiling as he says it.

The students in line watch on.

“You’re not a senior,” he says to Albert. “You’re not even CLOSE to being a senior!”

“The first person I said something to was my wife. I said, ‘Honey, what do you think about this?’ She said, ‘That’s an interesting idea and kind of cool.’”

All the other students erupt with a chorus of, “Whoaaaahhh!” and Albert slinks away. It doesn't take long to figure out that Dave Golden was born for this job.

'THAT'S AN INTERESTING IDEA'

But there was a problem at Lynnwood High. Well, perhaps not a problem so much as a “situation.” There was a younger man at the school, a guy named Mike Piper. He was the assistant principal.

“This is the end of my fourth year as assistant principal,” he says. “I was in the district for 10 years teaching at a middle school close by. I started my internship into administration here.” Everyone knew that one day Mike Piper would be a principal, too. He was a

rising star in the business, a guy who had the right stuff. You didn't have to be a genius to figure out that other schools would come knocking. Soon, somebody was going to steal Mike Piper away, and it was going to be a big loss for Lynnwood High.

“I knew that Piper would be getting a job offer sometime in the year, or the following year,” said Dave Golden.

Mike Piper agreed. “I knew that I was at that point where I was going to become a principal somewhere.”

So Mr. Golden got to thinking. He wasn't ready to retire. He loved the school too much and still felt he had a lot to offer. Still... there had to be an answer. And then, Mr. Golden hatched a masterful plan.

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Then he spoke to some students. And the Superintendent. And a bunch of teachers.

Only then did he speak to Mike Piper.

Mike smiles, a bit shyly, as he remembers their conversation.

“I was caught off guard because he said, ‘I want to talk to you’, and he closed the door and I thought it might be something really big. And it took me a while to get what he was talking about.”

A WAY TO SECURE THE SCHOOLS’ FUTURE

The idea was very simple, and, when you think about it, wildly humble.

Mr. Golden wanted to trade jobs with Mr. Piper! The principal would become the assistant principal. The assistant principal would become the principal.



Lynnwood High’s principal swap was a creative solution that benefited everyone.

Dave Golden remembers. “He said, ‘Oh come on now, you don’t want to do that, you are principal of the school and you’ve been principal as long as I’ve been here...’”

But there was no escaping the fact that the idea was genius. Lynnwood High would keep its future, and the

future would keep learning from the past.

Mike Piper didn’t take a lot of convincing. “To know that I would get to stay here, a place that I love, was a great feeling.”

When I asked him if the whole thing was a surprise, he didn’t hesitate. “It doesn’t surprise me at all. Because Dave has never been a man of ego, he’s never been, ‘I’m the boss’, and that’s never been his reason for doing this. He’s always been guided by what’s right.”

“ I’m proud of Lynnwood High School, That’s where my pride comes from.”

Mike Piper likes and respects Dave Golden. Seems like everybody does.

As perfect as the plan seemed, there were some realities about the present. I asked Mr. Golden if he was going to take a pay cut.

He said, “Yeah. Yep. For sure, because I’m not the principal anymore. Yeah, there will be a pay cut involved.”

And so there it was. There would be cost involved with doing the right thing.

SCHOOL COMES FULL CIRCLE

A month later we visited Lynnwood High again. And there was Mr. Golden

with a box in his arms, leaving his spacious office with the big window. He took it through the commons area and up some stairs to a smaller office with no outside windows. He plopped the box down.

“I’ve got my assistant helping me,” he said. “My temporary assistant, soon-to-be-boss.”

And, there was Mike Piper, carrying his own box into his new digs, the big office next to the main office, with a giant window looking out to the parking lot and the grass beyond it. Looking around he said, “My biggest resource will be Dave.”

And so, we’ve come full circle. It’s September, the first part of a new school year. Everyone’s coming to terms with The Great Lynnwood Principal Swap, marveling at the very idea of it.

Steve Miranda, the Dean of Students

shakes his head. “I’ve never heard of this. I’ve never heard of it in business or in schools or anything else. It’s amazing.”

The students gather at lunchtime this year just as they did last year. The way they always have. They wolf down their food and engage in the usual horseplay and hijinks.

Mike Piper, the new principal, sits at his new desk. “I would say there’s a healthy amount of fear and nervousness about it. So I don’t feel like I’ve got it all figured out. I’m hoping for growing and learning...”

The new assistant principal is settling in, too.

I ask him if he’s proud of this thing he’s done. And, because he always knows the perfect thing to say, Mr. Golden offers this: “I’m proud that our team is still together. And the fact that I think we’re going to do a great job together. That’s where the real pride comes in.”

It’s modestly, of course, but not false modesty. Change is hard. It is also inevitable. The great ones know that.

“I’m proud of Lynnwood High School,” he says. “That’s where my pride comes from.” ■