



Arizona Principal Creates Buy-In for Change

Community outreach makes school merger pay off

In seven years as principal of Redfield Elementary School, Christine Bonow has shown an “ability to develop and implement a shared vision,” says a supervisor. Bonow inherited a divided culture following the merger of two elementary schools, and set out to build a cohesive, positive identity that would support students’ well-being and success. Under her leadership, Redfield Elementary went from a B to an A rating, decreased discipline referrals, and established a culture that staff and families alike say makes kids feel safe, nurtured, and supported.

Here’s a bit more about Christine Bonow and her leadership journey.

On what led her to the principalship:

After being a classroom teacher and instructional coach, I felt I could effect change on a different level. I have worked for great principals, and felt I could take what I had learned and support students and teachers in a more meaningful way.

On the most rewarding part of her job:

The most rewarding part of my job is my kids at Redfield. They come to school every day ready to learn, regardless of the obstacles. If I’m having a challenging day, I just need to walk into a classroom or visit the playground, and I remember immediately why I do this job.


How did it feel to lead your school from a B to an A rating?

Our staff worked hard to examine the student data and create a game plan, not just for the students in grades 3–5 who participate in the state test, but for all students. Whether it’s students who receive special education services, gifted services, or language support, all students can achieve at the highest levels.

Her advice to new principals:

Take time to build relationships! As a new building leader, it’s easy to want to make quick decisions about everything you feel needs to change. But you will never get true ownership or buy-in for an initiative if you don’t take time to listen to the people who were there long before you. Take time to listen to the community—parents, teachers, classified staff, volunteers, and most importantly, the kids! When everyone feels involved, change is much more sustainable.

What the day looks like when I’m not at school:

It definitely starts with sleeping in. On the weekends, I love meeting my girlfriends for brunch and spending time with family. I’ve stopped trying to find “balance” between life and work. Once I gave myself permission to stop trying to find the perfect balance, I became a much happier person. Working parents need to find what works best for them. 

Christine Bonow

Principal
Redfield Elementary School
Scottsdale Unified School
District, Arizona
Scottsdale, Arizona

The Stats:

- Years as principal: 8
- 2017 National Distinguished Principal

Education:

- Arizona State University, B.A. in Family Studies and Elementary Education
- Northern Arizona University, M.A. in Elementary Education with an emphasis in literacy; M.A. in Educational Leadership

School details:

- Number of students: 510
- Grade span: Pre-K through grade 5
- School vision: Achieving academic excellence in a community of engaged learners.

Programs:

- Redfield Gifted Pre-K Academy: An enriched, rigorous, accelerated learning environment provided by a certified teacher trained to meet the needs of gifted youngsters.
- Self-Contained Comprehensive Gifted Program (Grades K–5): Designed to meet the special academic needs of students identified as gifted.
- Kids Club: A licensed before- and after-school program administered by Scottsdale Unified School District’s participating elementary schools.