

1. What do you believe highly effective schools should look like?

Manikka Bowman

Effective schools, as well as a district, inspires children to embrace the joy of learning based on their unique academic needs. Aspiration, hope for the future, and motivation and educational excellence should be at the core of every learning experience.

Fran Cronin

A highly effective school is a diverse learning environment where skilled, confident teachers feel supported and able to employ best teaching practices, and where all students feel comfortable, valued, and available to learning. Effective schools balance well the blended goals of nurturing students while also setting high achievement expectations. To accomplish this, a school must operate with intention and attention to aligning student learning needs with culturally appropriate teaching practices and supports. An effective school maximizes all its resources to ensure each student gets what they need to succeed and grow socially, emotionally, and academically.

And crucially, a highly effective school is an exciting learning environment for teachers and students alike. It's a learning culture that inspires curiosity, collaboration, creative thinking, deep communication, and a passion for lifelong learning.

Jake Crutchfield

A highly effective school is not a school without hurdles, but is instead one in which people are able to work together to solve problems and support students as a group. Everyone should be included in that process. It also means that the process should be designed so that everyone who is part of the school can enjoy it. The more one enjoys something, the more one gets out of it. If a student is excited about going to school, if a teacher is excited about teaching a lesson, and if families are excited about seeing their children grow and learn, then everyone involved with the schools will be impressed with the results.

Emily Dexter

Schools should be lively in the morning and quieter in the afternoon. Educators, staff, and administrators should feel part of a team with a purpose; and excited about teaching their students and interacting with families. The curriculum and student activities should be interesting and exciting. There should be events that bring the community together, such as student performances, family events, celebrations, and outside speakers or performers. The school should have professionals with different roles and areas of expertise—education, social work, mental health, family engagement, student guidance, etc. Teachers should have ample planning time and time to collaborate, and there should be enough educators and staff to serve all students. There should be plans and protocols in place to deal with disagreements and conflicts as they arise. There should be clear roles for parents to contribute to the school, varied to match the skills and interests of different parents.

Fred Fantini

Schools that I've seen that are effective have:

- Good leadership

- Teachers that have strong instructional skills and who communicate to their students that they care about all of them.

- Well resourced, including professional development for teachers prioritizing helping them continue to be better at what they do.

- Everyone on the same page in terms of goals and policies

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Schools that parents and children are attracted to so they can support their students. These include traditional, Montessori, immersion schools, extended day programs, STEAM schools, schools lead by teachers, etc.

Schools that have good parental involvement

Schools that have a good technology that can keep and track pertinent data including following children even after they have left the school.

Elechi Kadete

In Cambridge, a highly effective school system would have four layers. First, a strong early education program available to all families regardless of income. Second, a strong K-5 program in which all schools are equally desirable. Third, a strong middle school program. Fourth, a strong High School system where programs such as the Rindge School of Technical Arts (RSTA) are available to all students, currently students in the extension school are not allowed to participate in RSTA.

Cambridge must constantly evaluate each layer to make sure they are functioning as desired and meeting the needs of all students.

Kathleen Kelly

A highly effective school has strong instructional leadership, a collaborative environment that encourages educators and staff to work together by creating time for sharing their challenges and constructive feedback on what is working and not working for their students. Parents/guardians feel welcome when they are at the school. Everyone experiences the school as a learning community and is clear about their role in supporting students to be engaged learners. Content is culturally relevant, appropriately challenging, and “making mistakes” is considered a valued part of the learning process. Students who need additional supports receive supports without undue delay. The school also has strong fine arts, performing arts, and creative writing.

Laurance Kimbrough

Three things I think are part of highly effective schools:

a) Students will be evaluated based on competencies met, not based on grades. Each and every grade level, we should be looking at whether students have the skills to move on to the next grade and can demonstrate those skills through portfolio presentations, exhibitions, or other models of showing understanding. Students should also be able to show their understanding of how our democracy works and what role they hope to play in our nation's future. Finally, as a social justice focused school district, our students should be able to challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, even in the younger grades where it should be developmentally appropriate.

b) Educators have a voice in what gets taught, what initiatives their schools and districts take on, and how their administrative staff are evaluated. As the primary care-takers and knowledge providers for our students, we must treasure and value teachers, counselors, psychologists, coaches, and other staff members. There is no such thing as a good school with poor educators. We must take care of those who nurture our students.

c) Families and other stake holders in the community are actively involved in the school. Families should see schools as a resource. Whether they need referrals for resources or want to volunteer in classrooms, families should feel welcome in schools. Community organizations, non-profits, and companies in the community should also have partnerships with our schools and provide schools with additional information, programming, and opportunities for relationships that enhance the lives of students, families, and educators.

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Will MacArthur

The role of everyone in a highly effective school is to support the two groups of people who spend every day in classrooms: students and teachers. Education is based on interactions between students and teachers, and in a highly effective school, these relationships are educationally productive because they are built on mutual trust between both groups and the confidence and support of parents, administrators, and the school district. I believe that school policy is generally effective when it values both the skills of teachers and the curiosity of students.

Piotr Mitros

Students, teachers, and parents actively engaged in a school experience which is both joyful and rigorous, with activities appropriate to all of their individual interests and backgrounds. Teachers support and guide the students. The administration supports and empowers the teachers. The school board supports and empowers the teachers, the administration and the community and works to create a climate conducive to effective learning for everyone. There is a firm belief in the capacity of every individual to succeed, combined with a tenacious effort to make sure no individual fails. What is done is supported by the science of learning.

Patty Nolan

Joyful classrooms with a buzz of energy and excitement. Students feeling supported, teachers loving their work, clearly articulated learning expectations, regular assessments developed and conducted by educators and communicated to students and families. From a family perspective, it is best described by the definition of a Partnership School from Beyond the Bake Sale.

David Weinstein

In highly effective schools children are developing a knowledge base as they develop as learners who can acquire, evaluate and synthesize new information, at ever-increasing levels of sophistication. All children are safe in the school environment, develop the ability to work through challenges – and are exploring their passions in the academic context. In highly effective schools all children are known as individuals by teachers and other professionals. Teachers have opportunities to develop and improve their practice throughout their careers through mentoring, peer coaching, common planning opportunities, and excellent professional development. Highly effective schools engage with families in varied ways that take into account cultural differences and different family structures and situations. In addition to cultural competence training and language/interpreter support, this means taking into account logistical issues, for example how to engage families in which all adults work.