

Karie Burns

Surprise Elementary School

2016 Rodel Exemplary Principal

A tip for parents

“ I would tell parents to focus on being present. Although they may not be able to be present for all of the activities at school, they can be present when their child is talking about it. Being present while they are doing their homework doesn't mean you are standing over their shoulder, it means being knowledgeable about what they are learning. Be present when your child is doing something, when they look up they want to see you watching them.

Bragging rights

“ I am extremely proud of the culture we have at Surprise Elementary. It has been a focus of ours from the very beginning, but what I think makes it different is that the teachers take pride in the culture too and it has become a focus for them as well. The teachers pride themselves on creating a positive climate, so they take it upon themselves to help maintain it.

A tip for new principals

“ One thing I would tell new principals is to not let all of the other pieces of the job get in the way of why you wanted to be a principal in the first place. Remember to keep your focus on the students and on the teachers and it will help when you have over 100 decisions to make each day.

Setting high expectations

“ We communicate high expectations everyday on the announcements, in all of our communications with parents, during grade level meetings by asking tough questions, and by being in the classrooms. We set the high expectation in the beginning and then make sure all of our choices along the way are supporting those goals.



Karie Burns

Surprise Elementary School
Dysart Unified District

890 students in grades PreK-8

Experience: 15 years in education including five years as a classroom teacher, four years as an instructional coach, two years as an assistant principal, and four years as a principal

Degrees: B.A. in Education from Arizona State University; M.A. in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University

Rodel, in partnership with Social Venture Partners Arizona, developed the Rodel Exemplary Principal Initiative to recognize outstanding school principals and populate a pipeline of highly skilled school leaders for Arizona's most challenging schools.

The Rodel Exemplary Principals are selected for their demonstrated ability to lead high-need schools to success by inspiring their staffs to develop a campus that is high achieving, safe, orderly and welcoming.

Each cohort of Exemplary Principals provides professional development, field experience and mentorship to a class of Rodel Aspiring Principals. After learning from the best, Rodel Aspiring Principals are better prepared to lead their own high-need schools.