

AAEA

MEMBER

Spotlight

Jeff Wasem

Principal, Creekside Middle School, Bentonville School District

In 2000, Jeff started teaching 7th grade world geography/reading at Birch Kirksey Middle School in Rogers. He transitioned into Assistant Principal roles at Elza R. Tucker School (2004-2006) and then, Greer Lingle Middle School (2006-2012), also located in Rogers. In 2012, He became the Principal at Old High Middle School in Bentonville School District. This year, with the help of a team focused on service, passion, innovation, collaboration, and empowerment, Creekside Middle School was opened. He is now the principal of this newly founded Middle School.

Mr. Wasem has always been interested in this career field. He stated that during his freshman orientation, he asked the program adviser what he needed to do to become a principal. She advised that his first step should be enrolling in the teacher education program. Mr. Wasem's inspiration was initially sparked by his father who worked in Hospital Administration as an Officer in the Air Force. They lived in Illinois, Turkey, Sicily, Holland, and Texas. He loved watching his dad lead. Jeff states that his father was the best leader and he loved to observe and learn from him.

Read more about Jeff Wasem on the next page...



- **What is your favorite thing about your job?**

"Relationships with people and learning are the two most important parts of a school. I love meeting new people, and I gravitate towards change. Building relationships with students, teachers, parents, and the community energizes me."

- **What is the best advice you have ever received?**

"I have been fortunate to learn from so many great people - Roger Hill, Diana Peer, Mike Poore, Debbie Jones, and the list just goes on. My grandpa drove a bus in St. Louis for thirty years. He told me to get my education. He told me nobody can take learning and knowledge away from you, ever. Also, Gloria Frazier encouraged me to create the job description for my next job and go pitch it to someone. Still working on that one."

- **What major changes have you seen in education during your career?**

"Two major changes that I have seen are school choice and the influx of different data pieces. We have so much data, which can be good - it can be used to triangulate for cross verification. However, we can get to a point where we are not utilizing any of it with fidelity. I was having a conversation about this with some colleagues this week. Mostly the data is good. We need to have some very serious conversations about the 'best' data and become laser focused on a few accountability measures. When I think of Apple, the first thing that comes to mind is the iPhone. Apple has mastered the art of the iPhone. We should empower teachers to have conversations about what data will lead to the highest levels of student learning and focus energies on one or two sets of data, and utilize the data with fidelity."

- **Tell me about any awards or recognition you have received.**

"Professionally, I am most proud of Old High Middle School being designated as a National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform Diamond School to Watch. Last year, I was honored to receive Master Principal Designation by the Arkansas Leadership Academy. I consider both of these honors as recognitions to be shared by the entire school community."

- **What's something that amazes you?**

"The abilities of teachers and students amaze me. I encourage all school leaders to maintain perspective about the incredible work taking place in classrooms by continuing to teach classes. Also, the ability of students to create beyond their wildest dreams. I believe strongly that the student who can cure cancer is sitting in our school."

- **What have you done that you are most proud of?**

"Being a dad. I am proud of the 13-year old my daughter is, and the young woman she is becoming."

- **When people look back at your life, how do you want to be remembered?**

"A man of faith who served his family first, who loved them well - even in difficult moments. I want to be remembered as a giver, not a taker. I want to be remembered as an advocate for public school education."

Jeff, we at AAEA truly value your work as an administrator, and we are so excited for others to learn about your success and wonderful personality!