

Alignment: Portrait to Practice

Portraits of Educators: Milford & Winnetka Strengthen Staff Identity & Capacity

OVERVIEW

Milford Exempted Village Schools (Ohio) and Winnetka Public Schools (Illinois) both engaged the Portraits of Educators service to define the qualities their staff must embody to support the district's vision. Through collective input and design work, each district created shared, observable skills for educators and leaders that reinforce their Portrait of a Graduate.

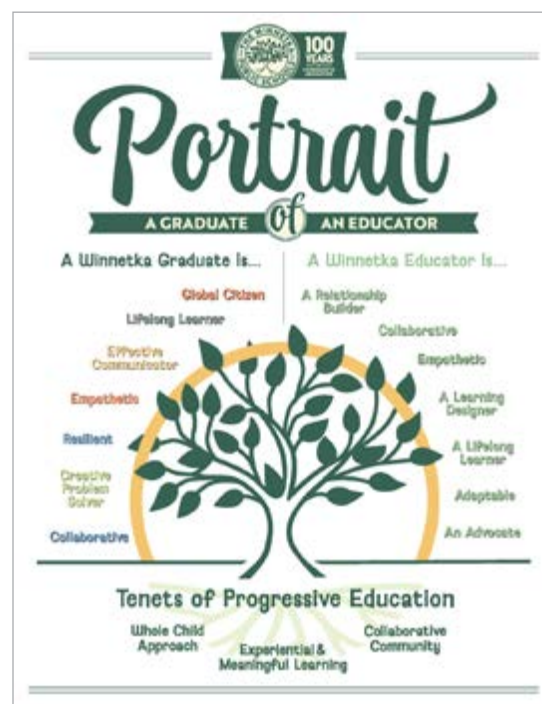
THE CHALLENGE

- Milford aimed to align what staff do with their broader vision for students. They already had their Portrait of an Eagle guiding student-facing work, but wanted a matching Portrait of a Staff Member that expresses what professionals in the district should model. The effort needed to be internally driven, authentic, and reflect staff commitments.
- Winnetka, with an established Portrait of a Graduate and a strong progressive education tradition, saw the need to articulate educator attributes: the behaviors, mindsets, and capacities that educators must hold to make the district's vision a reality in instruction.



WHAT WE DID

- Milford sought input from students, families, board and community members, and staff to co-create the Portrait of a Staff Member. The key characteristics surfaced included kindness, compassion, empathy, flexibility, open-mindedness, student-centeredness, and curiosity. The graphic was designed with student participation. The work was done using existing tools and talent inside the district.
- Winnetka Public convened a committee of educators, administrators, board members, parents, and students to define core educator attributes in line with their Portrait of a Graduate. They held multiple meetings with surveys and group discussions to identify, narrow, and clarify these attributes. The district created a unified graphic displaying both the Portrait of a Graduate and Portrait of an Educator side-by-side, making the connection visible in schools and serving as a tool in classrooms, hiring, professional learning, and more.



KEY IMPACTS

- Both districts now have a common language and observable attributes for what excellence among educators, staff, and leaders looks like. This helps align expectations and performance.
- In Winnetka, the educator attributes are being used to inform hiring, recruitment, professional learning, and strategy. The unified graphic makes the educator's expectations visible and tied directly to student outcomes.
- Milford's process was internal and collaborative. The district reports that staff feel invested because they helped define this resource.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Holistic, representative stakeholder input (including students, staff, community) is vital to ensure the Portrait reflects lived experience, not just aspirational statements.
- Visual and public artifacts (graphics, logos, unified displays) help staff see and remember educator expectations, which supports consistency and culture building.
- Embedding the Portrait of Educator into systems and processes (hiring, professional learning, leader evaluation) helps move it from document to action.
- Doing this work internally can build internal ownership and reduce external dependency.



Call to Action

Defining what is expected from the school district's team matters. A well-crafted Portrait of an Educator (or Staff Member/Leader) translates your Portrait of a Graduate into best practice. It connects vision, values, and action. AASA's Portraits of Educators service helps districts establish that bridge: defining shared staff/leader expectations, aligning human capital, and fostering a culture of excellence and growth.