

Teach for America Alumni Spotlight

Robert Gunn

Principal, Foster Traditional Academy (Louisville); STL '02 What opportunities, decisions and events have shaped your professional life?

Without question, the opportunity to be a member of TFA has had a profound impact on my life both personal and professionally. TFA helped me reach my goal to become an educator and begin my career serving students, a school and a community with great needs. My work has continued on the same path since leaving TFA after three years in St. Louis. In addition, one of the largest decisions I've made was becoming an administrator. When I began my coursework, I remember having a conversation with one of my professors expressing my reluctance to leave my classroom where both I and my students enjoyed great success. Quickly, she convinced me that I could have a much more profound impact on a building full of students, teachers and a community that could not be attained if I continued my work in one classroom.

What are you passionate about in your work?

I am passionate about seeing students and teachers reach high levels of success. I truly believe that all students are capable of learning at high levels. However, in order for this to occur, many students will need to have great teachers throughout their educational experience as I did growing up. As principal, I am just as passionate about helping teachers remember why they chose this profession while also eliminating obstacles they believe inhibit their success and most importantly, the success of their students. If teachers are equipped with the effective skills, tools and support, more and more students will have the opportunity to be highly successful in school.

Tell us about your favorite aspect of your community?

My favorite aspect of the community I serve is their buy in to the work that our school does on a daily basis. We get little resistance from the community while receiving great support for the programs and initiatives we have implemented to improve the overall student experience at Foster. Our parents trust us to make decisions that will positively impact their children.

What are your hopes and goals in your current position?

I hope to continue to help improve the academic and social environment at Foster. Our current data indicates that we are accomplishing this goal in terms of academic and non academic data. Furthermore, I hope that my service in my current position inspires others to aspire to reach their goals. I constantly remind students that there is nothing special about me and if I could fulfill my dreams, they can as well. Whether they decide to go to college or decide to begin a career after high school, my goal is to insure they have the educational foundation that opens doors to opportunities as opposed to an educational foundation that limits their opportunities. I believe the Foster Creed we recite each morning truly embodies this sentiment:

The Foster Creed

I will rise to the highest expectations
I will take responsibility for my actions
I will never give up; therefore, I cannot fail
I am successful
I am smart
I am college and career bound
WE ARE FOSTER!!

What has been your most significant professional accomplishment? What are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the hard work and effort of our staff. Collectively, we have made the commitment to improve our professional practices; thus, improving student achievement. On the most recent KPREP assessment, we moved from the 1st to the 14th percentile in the state of KY. Additionally, we saw a 14.5% increase in the number of students scoring Proficient or Distinguished in Math and a 10% increase in students scoring P/D in Reading. Furthermore, we saw a 12.5% decrease in the students scoring at the Novice level in

Reading and a 17.5% decrease in students performing at the Novice level in Math. In terms of personal professional accomplishments, I was very proud to be named the Assistant Principal of the Year for Jefferson County Public Schools during my final year as AP.

Your favorite Teach For America memory?

My favorite TFA memory outside of the great in-school experiences I had serving at Blewett Middle School in St. Louis would definitely be getting to know other TFA members and forging great friendships at the Summer Institute in Houston, Texas. Within the classroom, there are countless memories but my favorite would have to be proving to my students that I was going to be a permanent fixture in the school. I was told countless times, especially early on in my first year that I wouldn't last :)

If you could go back in time and give your corps member self a piece of advice, what would it be?

Never lose sight of who you are and your belief regarding the power of education. Constantly remind yourself why you chose this profession and on the most difficult days, smile because you ARE making a difference. Finally, remember that anything worth having and keeping should be earned, not given. If you truly want to make a difference in this world, there is not a more noble profession.