“Language is the Roadmap of a culture. It tells you where its people come from, and where they are going.”

- Rita Mae Brown

“Open-Minds, Open-Doors,” CCPS Newsletter

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The Language Department Issue

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LANGUAGES Department Mission Statement

- I am a CCPS language learner.
- I am an active communicator who reads, writes, listens, and speaks in the target language.
- I am an observant learner who appreciates and respects other cultures.
- I am daring in my approach to language-learning. I am willing to step outside of my comfort zone and make mistakes in the learning process.
El Tiempo “the Weather” by Andres Armijo

I invited meteorologist Jorge Torres to my Spanish I class. How I first connected with Mr. Torres was on Instagram. Mr. Torres schedules classroom visits as outreach as part of his job at local news station KOB-TV 4. Because Mr. Torres is fluent in Spanish, I wanted him to present and interact with the class during Spanish lessons on El Tiempo- the weather.

Students were very excited that they had a guest presenter, fluent in Spanish, who presented on the topic that they were studying. Mr. Torres even had two students do a mock-forecast with him as he displayed a forecast video of the Albuquerque metro-area. Mr. Torres displayed a picture of the class on his 5:00pm newscast, and students were very excited about being involved in this way. Learning in context, with hands-on professionals is one of my goals in teaching.
Meet Melissa Torres

Melissa Torres is in her 17th year of teaching Spanish. She is originally from Nebraska, where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Spanish Education. She completed a master’s degree at the University of New Mexico in Language, Literacy, and Socio-cultural Studies.

Melissa has studied abroad at El Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey, in Querétaro, México and at the University of Salamanca, in Salamanca, Spain.

She has taught in Nebraska and New Mexico, both in public and private schools. She enjoys outdoor activities, reading, Nebraska football, and spending time with her husband and two children.

State Supported Teacher Scholarship: A Snapshot and Review of the 2018 NM Teachers Summit by Katherine Smith

“Teaching with Purpose” is a catchphrase used by school leadership, critics, and educators alike. But what does it mean to teach with purpose? According to Dr. Sherah Carr, an education veteran with nearly 40 years of experience, “Teaching with purpose means thinking through the why, how, and so what of instructional delivery”. With that in mind, I considered my personal experience at the third annual NM Teacher Summit thematically titled “Teaching with Purpose”; it was a two-day event sponsored by the NMPED. The Summit offered teacher-led professional development training around areas of interest. Nearly 1,300 instructors attended from around the state joined by a unifying desire to improve personal practice and education. I hoped to come away with functional and feasible practices to use in the classroom and selecting from nearly 300 sessions (KOAT) I attended: mindfulness, teacher self-care, early warning systems, and improving interest of boys in Literature courses. Granted, course curriculum was a driving factor in selecting the final session. But honestly, in the last five years I am in a constant state of questioning— Am I doing this right? Can I do better? How am I going to last?

The greatest offerings were not necessarily content based. In fact, as noted above, the majority were related to mental health and wellbeing. I was provided with staggering statistics on mental health concerns related to students and high risk rates for failure. The majority of information was intended to motivate teachers by spouting guidance to “make time for yourself” and “remember, you matter”. I was told to “breath” and “be more compassionate”.

When everything in our profession centers on the student and what we as teachers are doing wrong, “I” don’t fit into the equation. To be blunt, I resented a health professional telling me to take more time for myself. Really lady, I thought, if you only knew what it’s like on a day to day basis.

However, as the two day session progressed it became evident that whether or not I believed it possible, the other instructors who led the sessions were passionate. They’ve managed to sustain their careers utilizing mindfulness, opening their hearts to students, and I guess- even finding time to take care of themselves. I may not have found all of the solutions to my daily woes, but I did walk away from The Summit with a handful of ideas to bring to the classroom. As a result, I will continue to question my practice and on some days, why I am a teacher. But for the most part, my questions now center on facing the problems with optimism and hopefully modeling for my students a passion for the content. The Summit sessions themselves were time well spent, and I appreciated the opportunity to attend.

Now sitting through the comedy act of PED representatives- that’s another story.

Runners Recognition for Peter Lukes, Leah Plymire, Amber Curtis-Trudell and Heather Bower.
Dr. Kappy Riker was born and raised in Michigan, but became immersed in the Spanish-speaking world at a young age, which informs her passion for speaking and teaching Spanish. She was an exchange student as a teenager in both Mexico, and Spain. Later she earned university degrees, in Spanish language and literature (BA and MA), and then received a PhD with Honors from UNM in Philosophy, emphasis in 20th Century Latin American Novel and Poetry, writing a dissertation that received a Distinguished Dissertation award. Dr. Riker has taught in colleges and universities in New Mexico, Ohio, Utah and California—culminating in 22 years in academia before making a career change to teach in public and private schools—she has taught every grade level, (K-12), mostly Spanish, but also some ESL, and Bilingual Education. Dr. Riker has held various posts throughout her extensive teaching career—both as Curriculum Head, Dept. Chair, as well as serving on numerous committees and presenting papers at symposiums. She has also lived in Argentina and Guatemala, and has one daughter. In Dr. Riker’s spare time she likes to travel overseas, paint, draw, read, bike, garden, and spend time with friends.

Observing a Lesson with Dr. Riker by Greg Butz

While preparing for a different type of observation, Dr. Riker approached me to see if I would be willing to also observe an activity her students were doing. What incredible risk-taking (two people observing the same lesson?!?!). I was also impressed with how quickly her students understood the instructions in Spanish, how they began their activity, and the engagement they demonstrated in the process.

Upon arranging sentences in groups, students competed to see which group could come up with the most sentences. Awesome creative flair. Great job Kappy!
Leandra Purvis

Alba Ortiz. Earned her bachelor’s degree in philology and languages in Bogota, Colombia, then she taught at the IB International School in Stavanger, Norway. In the US Alba has taught at the middle, high school and college levels. Alba earned her Master’s degree in Spanish Language and Culture as well as a Graduate Certificate in Spanish Translation at the University of Nevada Las Vegas. Now, teaching at CCPS, as Department Head Alba also loves to challenge her students to reach their potential by inspiring them to believe in themselves and have a great time while learning a new language. Alba had the opportunity to attend two IBSWCs (IB Student World Conference) to later apply new IB concepts.

IB Student World Conference
By Leandra Purvis

The IB Student World Conference is an international conference that was held in Rotterdam in the summer of 2018, which focused on the theme “Vital Cities, Vital Citizens”. For the first time in the state of New Mexico, one student, Leandra Purvis (class of 2019), from Cottonwood Classical was awarded a scholarship to attend the conference.

“The IB Student World Conference is one of the best, if not the best thing that can happen to an IB student. IB preaches the ideals of being a well-rounded, open-minded student who will be ready to face the world and become a leader after graduating. We constantly see this idea being talked about inside the classroom, but there is nothing like actually experiencing it outside of the classroom, out in the real world. During this conference I grew not only as a scholar, but as a person living on this planet. This conference opened up my mind to different ideas that I had never even considered before, ranging from how science fiction can shape the future, to different ways to help the families involved in the refugee crisis, to simply understanding how teenagers my age live in other countries. It gave me the opportunity to experience other cultures in an environment where I felt welcomed and where ideas could be shared and built upon, and we could talk about real-world issues that matter to us and future generations.”
Teacher Liaison Updates by Greg Butz

Last week, NMPED kicked off their fall teacher liaison conference. This is my second and final year serving as CCPS teacher Liaison. The session was held at the Sheraton Hotel, and it coincided with a Teacher & Family Outreach session. There were even parents and relatives of CCPS students present! Educational Leaders shared different news with us, followed by a question and answer session by Secretary of Education Ruszkowski. Cottonwood Classical was recognized for being an excellent example of what charter schools can do (along with three other schools).

What does a teacher Liaison do? Formally, we are responsible for distributing materials that PED sends our way like $100 supply emails, Dream Team or STARS applications. Informally, I’ve seen this role as bimodal. I’ve done my best to advocate for Cottonwood Classical, and inform the educational leaders in this state aware of the things we’re doing and how we are raising the educational bar in New Mexico.

Are you interested in representing our school next year or becoming more aware of educational policy? Stay tuned for the teacher Liaison application in the Spring, or join me during a virtual webinar training on Oct 18th from 4:30-5:30.

When An Author Visits by Evelyn Hostutler (7th grader at CCPS)

The student run Literature Live Club was proud to invite a guest speaker, an author, to our club. A large thanks to Mr. B, whom contacted Ms. Margaret Tessler over the summer and asked if she would speak to us and answer a few questions. When she came to Literature Club she brought all of her published books, tons of stories, and advice on how to improve and stick to our writings. After Ms. Tessler gave us her speech she prepared about herself and writing, she allowed the club members to present their own short stories. Many club members and even one of the teachers read a story and she offered helpful criticism and comments. As club ended the “thank you dinner” started. A few club members, parents, and Ms. Tessler went to dinner at Cheddar’s to thank Ms. Tessler and ask a few more questions. Ms. Margaret Tessler was a delight and the Literature Life Club is very thankful for her visit.

Meet Dr. Byron Warner

Byron Warner was born and raised in Nashville, TN, where he lived for about 22 years. He is an 11-year veteran of the institution of marriage, and has two handsome kids.

During college he studied abroad for one year in Guadalajara, Mexico, and has lived in various other countries for a total of five years. Before coming to CCPS in February 2016, he taught Spanish and ESL at the University of Kentucky, University of Georgia, Belmont University, University of Maryland University College in Germany, and Yeungnam University in Daegu, Republic of Korea. Byron is an academically trained medievalist, but feels much more at home teaching in the CCPS high school classroom.

How about current and imminent projects?

Many of my students will prepare or are already preparing, a play to perform for other classes at CCPS. My IB students will perform Wolff's Flores de papel (Paper Flowers). One of my Spanish III classes is participating in the PeacePals letter-writing program, partnered with a Montessori high school in Mexico.