



## DR. IDA LIEBERT

*Her leadership style is based on a simple premise: is it good for the children?  
If it is, then she will make it happen.*

Dr. Ida Liebert, an educator for over 31 year, served as the principal at Kilmer Elementary School from 1990-2001 and as the principal at Prairie Winds Elementary School from 2001-2006. Those with whom she has worked acknowledge her unparalleled leadership, her focus of always putting children first in any decision, and her desire to address the greater good.

A former Lewis-Palmer administrator met Ida when she was the principal at the school where he student taught. He remarked, "As I entered the school, I remember feeling a sense of home. One of my professors once told me that you will know the type of leader that is at the school the minute you walk in the door. She was spot on. This was a great school with a good person as the leader."

Dr. Liebert's career with District 38 began when she was hired as the principal of Kilmer Elementary School. She had the daunting task of filling the shoes of a highly respected principal. At one point, she told her staff, "Look! I am not six feet tall nor do I wear a tie, but I am going to do my best." An administrator remarked, "Ida impressed me with her philosophy of student learning, professionalism, and astute intelligence." Ida listened to parents, students, and staff believing that the parents and the community must share in the responsibility of educating students.

In 1999, Dr. Liebert was chosen as the principal of Prairie Winds Elementary, which was challenging as she served concurrently as principal of Kilmer while overseeing the design and construction of Prairie Winds. Ida was intent on designing a school whose physical structure would enhance school programming. She challenged potential applicants asking, "Can you work in a room without a desk, or can you teach in a school without walls?" She wanted a collaborative staff intent on encouraging student exploration and providing active learning experiences. She was revolutionary in creating a nontraditional classroom structure in which multiple grade levels were organized in houses to better enhance and individualize student learning and in looping classrooms in which students would have the same teacher for two consecutive years. A former teacher proclaimed, "Dr. Liebert was masterful at pushing us beyond limitations. Our school was never short on innovation."

Dr. Liebert listened to parents, student, and staff, hearing their needs and concerns and supporting their innovative ideas. These innovations included establishing programs such as the Responsive Classroom, Balanced Literacy, and the Hewlett Packard Hands-on Science curriculum. Kilmer staff developed rubrics which were aligned to the National Literacy Model,

both as an instructional tool and as means for norming. The program is teacher intensive and requires specific training. Ida not only trained teachers in district schools but has also trained teachers throughout the country.

Dr. Liebert along with other teachers identified discernable weaknesses with the elementary science curriculum. Ida proposed that the district explore other science programs, especially ones which would better align with the scope and sequence of the current middle and high-school science programs. Ida applied for a \$30,000 Hewlett Packard grant which funded teacher training and provided hands-on science kits for all of the district's elementary students.

According to a former teacher, Dr. Liebert was "the first to recognize the need for an autism program in the district." She began a pre-school program at Kilmer for these students, and when she became the principal at Prairie Winds, the program followed her there. She then integrated the specials needs students in classes with students of the same age. A parent of a special needs son remembers, "The very first person we met when we moved here was Ida, and we met her at Kilmer when she was the Principal. Right away we felt that we were in good hands. Throughout the years we saw that she was the real deal, living up to our first impression."

Teachers assert that Dr. Liebert was a forerunner in attaining innovative technology. Hers was the first networked school in the district as well as the first wireless networked school. She created an Apple Early Language Center, a combined a mini-classroom and library, where students honed their reading, writing, and listening skills through the integration of art and technology. Her staffs piloted the Response to Intervention program, 6-Traits Writing Instruction and Assessment, and Professional Learning Communities. Dr. Liebert also started a bully-proofing program and has provided conflict management training for both adults and students.

One of Ida's ideas was to acquire and restore a 100-year-old school house, the Pine Grove School, for use as a living classroom to enhance Kilmer's pioneer and Colorado history curriculum. Dr. Liebert was able to purchase the school for one dollar and have it moved to Kilmer from County Line Road. The community was so excited about this little school house that they provided the funds for its restoration. After the re-opening of the school, fifth-grade students served as docents teaching Colorado history to the third graders.

One of Ida's students from almost 20 years ago stated, "At a fairly large elementary school, Ida knew my name and the names of all the other students and, when needed, she directly interacted with us in a way that has had a lasting and meaningful impact on my life." This student described his difficulty with reading and how Dr. Liebert assisted him by loaning him numerous books. He continued, "I was, and still am, a kinesthetic learner and in class I was constantly fidgeting and playing around." These actions caused him to be sent to the principal's office. They both soon discovered that he was bored and was not being challenged. Ida then placed him on a gifted and talented track where he "could spend extra time in class learning more, rather than disrupting the class." He added, "This kind of delicate and thoughtful approach helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses and also kept me interested in

education. Someday soon, I will be a college professor, and I hope to embody the spirit of leadership, education, and students-first approach that I learned from Ida."

Ida's family has been very supportive throughout her entire educational career. Ida's husband of 46 years planted the seed for Ida to apply for the Kilmer principal position. Expressing her gratitude in working with Ida, a former teacher stated, "We learned to love without limits, forgive a child's trespasses, invest in our families as much as our students, and always believe in our students abilities whether the data said we should or not." Many of Ida's teachers have pursued careers in administration because of Ida's impassioned, inspirational leadership.

By Susan Odenbaugh