



OnPoint Prize for Excellence in Education
Educator of the Year
Statement of Educational Philosophy Samples

Statement of Educational Philosophy: A statement of educational philosophy is a self-reflective narrative of your beliefs about teaching and learning. It conveys your core ideas about being an effective educator and develops these ideas with examples of what the educator and learners will do to achieve those goals.

Congratulations on your nomination for the Educator of the Year award! The purpose of requesting a statement from you, the nominee, is to give you a voice in the nomination process and help the OnPoint Prize Selection Committee get to know your guiding principles, factors of influence and growth as an educator. The statement is meant to be open-ended; please share what you choose.

Need help writing your statement? This document provides tips and sample statements. Please note the sample statements are the work of other educators whose authorship has been cited.

Thank you for your participation in the OnPoint Prize and for all you do to support your students. We look forward to learning more about you!

Tips to get started from ThoughtCo.com:

- **Brainstorm** about your educational philosophy and your views of education, making notes on those principles you value most. This can help you articulate your philosophy as you organize your statement.
- **Demonstrate** how you have put your educational philosophy into practice in the classroom by citing specific examples and outcomes with students, parents, or fellow teachers and administrators.
- **Reflect** on your experience over your career. Most likely, your education philosophy has changed over time. Reflect on the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, and how you intend to meet them.
- **Connect** with others and talk to your peers in the field, as well as mentors. Having people who know you and your teaching style well review your work can help you craft a truly representative statement.
- **Review** sample essays to help you as you begin writing your own.

SAMPLE STATEMENT #1:

Caryn Anderson, Abernethy Elementary School, 2023 Educator of the Year Winner (K-5)

A former student's parent once said to me, "I don't care if she learns how to add or write a complete sentence. I want her to become a good human." While I teach to the standards and work hard every year to have my students surpass their academic goals, this has always stuck in the back of my mind in my role as a teacher.

As an educator, we wear a variety of hats. We aren't just facilitators of knowledge for our students. We are counselors, care givers, mentors, and role models. We don't just educate our students on how to read, write, do math, learn science, and social studies concepts, but we expose them to the world around them. We coach them to look at things with a critical lens- to apply the skills that they have learned and navigate their surroundings with independence and confidence. And, ultimately, we teach them to be good humans.

Growing up in a small, rural town in southeast Alaska of 8,000 people and 14 miles of roads taught me far more about the world around me than most would think. I learned how to problem solve, think critically, and developed a curiosity in and outside of my community being outdoors for most of the year. But being only one of about 20 people of Japanese ancestry in my town was perplexing as a child. I knew that I wasn't White but I also didn't identify with the Native Alaskan Tlingit or Haida tribespeople in my town. So, I assimilated most with my White friends, culturally identifying with them, as I had no other options. My parents, both of Japanese descent and without resources, did their best to keep cultural traditions alive and well in our household. Many of these traditions are ones that I still have with my own bi-racial children today.

This was my way of life- all through primary and intermediate schooling, college, getting married, bearing children, and many years of teaching. It wasn't until I took an Equity and Bias training in 2015 that life as I knew it, changed for the better. At the training we took a "Whiteness Test" and answered questions that added up to a cumulative number. Lining up in the room by our number in descending order, I found myself in the bottom five percent of people in the room with the only other few individuals of color. Like a wave pounding into the pristine shore, I had a life changing epiphany. For 42 years I had been a person of color except I had a White outlook on life.

This wasn't to say there weren't hundreds of stories I could tell of microaggressions or blatant acts of racism I had experienced in my life, it just meant that I had come to clearly realize that those acts were offensive, unacceptable, and no longer just silly situations I found myself in. Years' worth of anger and resentment was heavy in my heart and I suddenly found myself calling into question my life's choices. Was raising bi-racial children in a mostly White state acceptable? Did my husband see me for the person of color that I am? What was my role as a teacher of color to my

students? This profound moment has developed who I am as a more mindful educator and person that I am today.

Having the privilege of educating children remains one of my greatest honors in life. Shaping young childrens' minds is not just about teaching them the academic skills they need to accomplish their dreams, but it is also about preparing them to think independently with open minds and having a critical lens. It is about guiding them to learn to make choices for themselves that hopefully enrich their lives and benefit the greater good.

First and foremost, I believe that you cannot begin to teach a child anything until you have built a strong foundational relationship between one another; academic and emotional growth cannot be fostered until a child confides in you, trusts the peers around them, and feels safe in their environment. With sincere mindfulness and dedication, I spend a lot of time and effort bringing my students together in our classroom, building a safe community where my students view themselves as a member of our "family" away from home. Having intentional conversations about identity and sharing who we are as individuals is essential to building a community in which we all contribute to each and every day. We honor each other's pronouns and individual identities. Earlier this year one of my students trusted me enough to ask me to be an ally as he shared his name and pronoun change with his parents at the end of the school day. What an honor this was to bear witness to something so important in this student's life! It truly brought tears to my eyes and so much gratitude in my heart for this student's bravery and vulnerability.

Strengthening classroom community is the essential building block to our school year together. Our classroom community does not stop at our doors. Each student knows that their families are a part of the team and that this extension beyond our doors can look differently from child to child. Every morning we have Classroom Meetings where we briefly share special announcements with each other, so that we can best support each other's lives- inside and outside of school. We hold "housekeeping items" for the end so that any conflicts or problems that are an issue in our classroom can be brought forth and solved together. I want my students to know that we are collaborative and cooperative in our thinking, learning, and problem solving, but that individually they bring different perspectives to the table. I want them to know that making mistakes is a part of the learning process and that this is how we grow. Letting them know that I am human and pointing out when I make mistakes, too, allows them to see my vulnerability. I invite their productive criticisms as we are all in the learning process together as a team.

Leading by example is important. I always want my students to see me model what I expect of and hope for them. Being a teacher of color has left me with a resounding responsibility to my students. With a clear equity lens, I confidently select materials that I expose my students to, and push them to see their responsibilities and power as changemakers for the future. I let my students know that everyone is on a racist continuum and it is our duty to try to identify our biases, living in a culture that was

historically founded on male, White leadership. It is my hope that my students can use their social justice lens to think critically about the cultural influences and information that they gather as they grow.

But it is most important that I am open with my students about not having all of the answers, and as a lifelong learner, I will make mistakes and hopefully grow and learn from them, as this is my dream for each of them. In my classroom, the materials I select to use or create are ones that I select with an anti-racist lens. My read aloud books and small reading group novel studies texts are by authors of color or center around topics that provide a platform for rich discussions on social injustices and racism. The books in my classroom library also come from a variety of diverse authors and topics. I always take any opportunity I get to have conversations about race and bigotry with my students. They can ask questions and we investigate and learn together. Viewing myself as a facilitator, I lead my students to discover their learning through questioning techniques that help them to build their own schemas. This way, their learning is more meaningful, impressionable, and impactful. I want to guide them to dream big, to think and go for those dreams with mindfulness, never letting anyone let them believe otherwise.

In addition to teaching with an equity lens, I utilize various methods and tools to support and assess student growth. In order to access multiple intelligences in my classroom, I try to give my students options to share what they comprehend. Knowing that the majority of my students are visual learners, my classroom is filled with intentionally color coded charts to aid their learning. Color coding can be extremely helpful as an organization and teaching strategy, as well. There are many tools in my classroom that my students can access to aid their learning, such as devices like Sit n' Wiggle cushions, weighted pillows for sensory input, silencing headphones, cardboard dividers, and slant boards to ease pressure when writing for long periods of time.

All of these strategies and gadgets I learned to implement when I taught as a Special Education Resource Specialist at the beginning of my career. In my classroom environment I am deliberate in constructing a setting where my students can become cognitive of their choices. I want them to connect the cause and effect of their preferences to make them more conscious of their future decisions. For example, I have open seating where students can choose where they sit every week. We talk a lot about working while talking and if this affects their work production. Then they can select whether or not to move themselves if they are having trouble focusing. I want the decision to be theirs in order to be most impactful.

In my 24 years of education, I have had the privilege of serving on a variety of committees: Equity, Conversations About Race, Site Council, Instructional leadership Team, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, Safety Committee, and Right Brain Initiative. I've also had the opportunity to serve as a Parent Teacher Association teacher representative several times as I strongly believe that the family school connection is so important to foster. These many roles have provided an

arena for me to share my views on education and make a difference for the learning communities I have been a part of with my firm belief that the most effective way to make change is to be part of the solution.

There were a few significant capstones in my career that I have been honored with. The first was when North Carolina Congressman Ralph Miller visited my classroom when I taught at A.B. Combs Leadership Magnet Elementary School in Raleigh, NC, in 2003. My second grade students had written persuasive letters to Congressman Miller to encourage him to put into effect a law protecting freshwater turtles statewide. Much to our delight, a law was passed later that year doing just this.

The second distinction I was honored with was a Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund scholarship. In 2006 I traveled to Japan for three weeks to learn about the educational system and bring that cultural experience and knowledge back to my community in Oregon; I used the information I gained overseas to host a Japan Cultural Day at my school. We began our day with an all-school assembly that included a Taiko drum and Kabuki dancer performance. Then students rotated through cultural centers (food, arts, crafts, music, language, and dance) with lesson plans I developed for staff members and volunteer parents to implement with K-5 classes in our building. Our school district's high school students taking Japanese classes came and volunteered for the day to assist in the event. I still receive letters from former Powell Valley students sharing their fond memories of that special day.

At the end of every school year, I hold a graduation ceremony in my classroom. At this event I read *The Red Ribbon*, a book about a kingdom that was initially filled with sadness because the townspeople did not know how to lean on each other and work together to build a community. It ends with the townspeople finding the rewards in the community by working together. I read this book to remind my students that the key to success and happiness is really about finding joy in working together and being thoughtful of one another. I let them know that once they are "family" in our classroom, they will always be family. No matter how many years go by, where they go, what they do or become, I will always be here to support and love them. If they should ever need a reminder of what wonderful things they bring to this world, I will be there to remind them.

The true gifts in teaching are the long lasting relationships that you build with your students and families. I have been fortunate to bear witness to graduations, bar mitzvahs, graduate school acceptances, and other life milestones for the students I have been so lucky to teach over the years. Influencing a child's life, in whatever big or small ways that I can, is rewarding on so many levels. The following quote is what I chose for my motto graduating from high school many years ago and is one that I continue to live by every day. It truly captures the essence of who I am and what I believe in.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world." - Mahatma Gandhi

SAMPLE STATEMENT #2

Willie Williams, Roosevelt High School, Educator of the Year Winner (9-12)

While I was earning my Masters degree from Southern University A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I got an opportunity to teach four undergraduate classes as a Teacher Assistant. I vividly remember my first day when my Professor commissioned me to “assert my dominance” on the first day of class. Prior to this opportunity, teaching was nowhere near my radar. Little did I know that this chance would turn into a superb career.

Since then, my passion for learning, serving the community, and investing into the lives of students has spanned over the last 10 years as an educator throughout Baton Rouge, La; New Orleans, LA; and Portland, Oregon. I am currently a full-time educator, the Interim Athletic Director, Black Student Union Advisor, Coach, and Mentor at Roosevelt High School in Portland. Along with being the Interim Athletic Director at Roosevelt, I teach Senior Inquiry (Government and Economics) and Ethnic Studies (U.S. History). I also teach Upward Bound (virtually) at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana where I support first generation college students preparing for post-secondary education. My goal as an educator is to facilitate learning experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and engaging for my students. I strive to create a positive and inclusive classroom environment that fosters respect, trust, and empathy. I value diversity and recognize the importance of creating a culturally responsive classroom that celebrates the unique backgrounds and experiences of each student. Understanding values are extremely imperative as values guide an educator’s actions and decisions in the classroom and help to create a positive learning environment.

In order to create a learning environment that is effective and engaging for everyone, it is important for me to recognize students’ different learning styles and preferences. Additionally, just like students, teachers have different learning styles and methods of which to communicate. Using a variety teaching styles is important to me because it helps to ensure that all students can learn and succeed, regardless of their learning style or preference. There are several teaching methods that I apply within my classroom setting. I always attempt to utilize more than the lecture method to explain concepts and ideas in a structured manner. While teaching on the gentrification unit this year, I was able to bring in a Portland legend dubbed the “Honorary Mayor of NE Portland,” Mr. Paul Knauls to speak on the impacts and effects of gentrification, specifically in the Alberta District of NE Portland. The students really enjoyed the connection they were able to make with Mr. Knauls from times of the past to the present.

Secondly, I employ the discussion method. In this method, I encourage students to actively participate in the classroom discussion by asking questions and sharing their opinions, especially in regards to current events. My students know that I LOVE current events and I constantly remind them to be informed citizens of our society

and by knowing what's going on around them. I encourage critical thinking about issues of equity and social justice, and create opportunities for students to take action and make a positive difference in their communities.

Third, I make use of the demonstration method. In this method, I demonstrate a concept or idea, using visual aids such as videos or props and get students involved by making their own posters or social media content. I believe that this method is useful for teaching practical skills and complex processes. Fourth, I engage my students with group work. In this student-centered method, students work in small groups to complete a task or solve a problem. This method promotes collaboration, teamwork, and communication skills, all of which are essential to their everyday lives. Lastly, I apply project-based methods within my class. With this method, students work on a long-term project that requires research, planning, and execution. Some topics that we have researched so far this year include gentrification, racial justice, community history, immigration, and climate change. This method helps to develop problem-solving, research, and time-management skills. I can't stress how important it is for teachers to use a variety of teaching methods to cater to different learning styles and engage students in the learning process.

To effectively assess learning, reduce bias, accommodate different learning styles, encourage student engagement, and provide feedback for improvement, I incorporate an array of methods in assessing student learning. I typically assess my students on projects. Projects such as research papers, presentations, and group projects can assess students' understanding of subject matter while also assessing their creativity, problem-solving skills, and ability to work collaboratively. I also use performance-based assessments. Performance-based assessments evaluate students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations. Examples of performance-based assessments include experiments, simulations, and verbal presentations. I find joy when students start off by saying that they cannot present in front of the class because they are shy, and then end up overcoming that fear and realizing that they can do whatever they put their minds to.

Observations is another method that's used. Observations involve observing students as they work on assignments or participate in class discussions. This method provides insights into students' understanding of subject matter, problem-solving skills, and ability to work collaboratively. Lastly, to garner honest feedback, I have students to self-assess. Self-assessment involves having students reflect on their own learning and identify areas for improvement. This method helps students develop metacognitive skills and take ownership of their own learning.

Being a graduate student who's in school for administration at Concordia University Chicago, I understand the importance of being an effective educator. Throughout the years, I've prided myself on reaching the unreached: those students who feel out of place, outnumbered, and rejected. I can relate to our marginalized students. I believe that my success in class covers everyone moving in the same direction and

not leaving a soul behind. I found that when students know that you have their back and that you are there for them, they will live and rise up to any standard that you may have for them.

As an African American male teacher, incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion into my classroom involves creating an environment that supports diverse backgrounds and experiences of all students. Some strategies that I use involve embracing diverse perspectives into the curriculum. I ensure that the curriculum materials and learning resources include a variety of perspectives, including those of underrepresented groups. Doing this helps validate the experiences and identities of ALL students.

Another strategy involves fostering a sense of belonging. Creating a classroom environment that is welcoming and inclusive is top priority. This can involve setting expectations for respectful communication and behavior, celebrating cultural and ethnic diversity, and creating opportunities for students to share their experiences. I'm BIG on relationships. I can literally say that I have a personal, genuine relationship with everyone of my students. They know that it's authentic and that I truly care for them. I found that building positive relationships with students is an immeasurable strategy that's effective.

Taking the time to get to know my students on a personal level, learn about their interests and backgrounds, and actively listen to their experiences helps students feel valued and respected in the classroom. Another approach involves engaging in student-centered learning which provides opportunities for student voice and choice to abound. I allow students to have a say in classroom decisions and provide opportunities for them to share their perspectives. This helps students feel empowered and engaged in their learning. I routinely use culturally responsive teaching strategies to present topics in class. Using teaching strategies that are culturally responsive, such as incorporating examples and references that are relevant to students' experiences and backgrounds connects students to the content.

As a way of integrating my culture into the class and being from Louisiana, we annually celebrate Mardi Gras, even in Portland, Oregon. For the last three years, we have celebrated Fat Tuesday, as I share my culture with my students by cooking some chicken and sausage gumbo and having king cake shipped from Gambino's Bakery in New Orleans. 95% of my students never tasted king cake and are not aware of the history of Mardi Gras. By the end of Fat Tuesday, they are smitten with the deliciousness of my gumbo and hooked to the sweetness of our king cake.

With the historic pandemic gripping our world in 2020, the reality of classroom teaching drastically changed overnight into a distant learning experience for both students and teachers. I had to adjust my teaching methods and approaches to effectively engage students throughout this process. Now, more than ever, I realized that creating engaging and interactive content was crucial during this phrase. I

created and shared interactive and engaging content like videos, podcasts, quizzes, and games to keep students engaged and motivated. I provided regular feedback and support to my students. The measures in which I did so were through emails, messaging, or video conferencing, and offering extra help to students who were struggling. I also made it a point to focus on student well-being. I prioritized student well-being by checking in with them regularly and providing resources and support for mental health and stress management. Lastly, understanding the difficulties that distant learning presented caused me to adapt to students' needs and circumstances. I adapted to the diverse needs and circumstances of students by providing flexible deadlines, accommodating individual learning styles, and adjusting teaching methods to suit the online learning environment.

I often think back to my days in graduate school when the opportunity to teach was given to me. I would have never thought that I would become a teacher but little did I know the impact this profession granted me from Louisiana to Oregon. I am fortunate to have the ability to teach from an equitable lens in an inclusive environment while making sure no student is left behind and all student's voices are heard.