



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:

Sophia Aguirre, Aloha High School, 2025 Educator of the Year Winner (9-12)

Introduction

On the door of Ms. Aguirre's classroom, students read "Welcome to E20, I am so happy to see you today." The extra space around the door is lined with multilingual resources explaining the benefits of bilingualism, photos of famous English learners, and flags of the various countries represented inside the classroom. When the door opens, students are immersed in a multilingual ecology. Student-made resources decorate the walls in Arabic, Persian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Korean. On the back wall, a large tapestry hangs; painted hands representing every student who has walked through the doors of E20. Twinkling lights dim the classroom, lo-fi music plays in the background, and every student is greeted by Ms. Aguirre with a smile. From the moment a student enters the classroom, they know they belong. Every student, no matter their cultural, social, or linguistic background, deserves an education that prepares them for academic success and life-long achievement. Students in my Beginning English Development and Sheltered Literature and Composition classes recently arrived to the United States seeking new opportunities and safety. The first step in preparing all students for success is to create the ideal environment because when students are impacted by negative emotions, their ability to learn and grow is restricted. Creating a space where students know they belong and are respected reduces stress hormones and increases a student's cognitive capacity. While I cannot control the stress and anxieties beyond my classroom walls, what I can do is provide the space for them where they can thrive and know they belong.

Teaching Methods

I believe every student has a voice and should be given the opportunity to learn how to use it. Learning English can be a difficult and scary process for students. To ease their fear of speaking, I provide daily opportunities to speak in a fun non-academic context. For example, I start my class with a question of the day. This question can be something like "What is the best way to cook a potato?" or "What is your favorite fruit?" These simple questions build a bridge between language and cultural barriers and help students see that they are more similar to their classmates than they imagined. This daily strategy is critical to the work I do in my classroom because answering a question each day builds trust in their community, boosts their confidence to speak English, and provides an opportunity to use their voice to make connections. Building these relationships has supported me to have impactful lessons with my students.

When working in a class with students from all around the world, it is common to experience a cultural clash. For example, in the spring of 2024, my class sizes increased significantly and the diversity of languages grew from 3 to 7! My class included students who spoke Vietnamese, Spanish, Persian, Pashto, Korean, Arabic and Q'eqchi. At first things were great, until one day a fight occurred over

derogatory language. This situation led to an impactful lesson that defines me as a teacher. Prior to this situation, students were analyzing characterization. Instead of continuing the lesson the next day, I shifted and created a lesson called “The Character of a Warrior.” I separated students into diverse groups. Each group included four students who spoke different languages or came from different cultures. Next, I asked each student to reflect on “What does the ideal classroom look and sound like?” and “What does it mean to be a Warrior at Aloha High School?” Students used translanguaging to access their full language repertoire and meaningfully reflect on the questions. They considered what the ideal Warrior would say, think, affect others, act, and look like. I addressed how their derogatory language impacted our classroom negatively and told them, “we come from all over the world, we share parts of our identities and share our differences but no student in the classroom should ever be made to feel ashamed for parts of their identity.” Students were then tasked with creating an informative Zine with their groups. Students worked together to give examples of how to be a Warrior, how to be a student that respects others and values the diversity of each individual.

This lesson taught students to reflect on their character and consider how their actions, words, and thoughts impact the larger community. A colleague of mine had observed this lesson and wrote, “When you shared about vulgar and derogatory language, you had already made a bridge with students, saw the good in them, and so this criticism was couched in concern. You appealed to authentic impacts of offensive language and bad behavior...this was an important SEL lesson.” This lesson improved the culture of our classroom. Students meaningfully reflected on how they connect with the world around them. This prepares them for life-long success because it encourages students to interact with diverse cultures respectfully and use their voice to contribute to a safe and calm learning environment.

Values, Beliefs, and Goals

Building relationships is essential for advancing equity. In addition to daily questions, I learn about my students through bi-weekly one-on-one conferences. I dedicate the last 30 minutes of class each day for work time. During this time, I sit beside each student and ask them “How are you doing today?” “What are you working on?” “What questions do you have for me?” and “What can I do to help you succeed?” These four questions are the most important part of each day. I learn more about each student’s strengths, their lives, and their needs. For example, I have discovered that a disengaged student was unable to begin their assignments because they had limited literacy and could not read in any language. As a response, I taught the student how to use technological tools such as Google Read&Write and Immersive Reader. This helped them listen to the text and respond to the writing prompts by speaking. In addition, I adapted my assignments to be more equitable by giving all students the option to share their learning by creating videos that answered the same questions they would in writing. I also connected with the student’s other teachers to share resources to ensure they succeed despite their limited literacy. Building relationships is necessary for meeting student needs. During another

one-on-one check in I learned that a student was disengaged due to fear for their safety as an immigrant. In addition to the news of ICE raids impacting communities, they shared that they were missing their family and celebrating their birthday alone for the first time. No student can learn under these conditions, so I gave the student the space they needed to talk. Next, I connected them with community resources and a counselor to help process what they were going through. Then made them a birthday card with a message that let them know that they are never alone because they have a community at Aloha High School that is there to support them through the toughest times. Building relationships supports equitable outcomes because it allows me to identify barriers and find the necessary solution to re-engage students.

A one-size fits all approach to education is not viable in the modern world. To be equitable, it is important to see the whole student to effectively meet their needs. In addition to meeting the needs of each student, I build relationships with my colleagues to support them in providing English language learners with an equitable learning environment. For example, I have English Learners who were worried about a socratic seminar assignment. They came to me for help because they were embarrassed about using academic language to speak about a novel in English. I connected with their teacher and let her know about this concern. Together we created a plan to support these students. With the teacher's trust, I was able to work with them on completing the assignment in Spanish while also using academic language in English. During our "Warrior Time" study hall, I invited the students to my classroom and encouraged them to use their entire language repertoire to demonstrate their understanding. As a native Spanish speaker, I was able to assess my students speaking in Spanish about the themes and conflicts in a novel. The students earned a passing grade for an assessment they initially feared they would fail. If I did not have these established relationships with the students or the teacher, these positive outcomes would not be possible.

As a professional development leader, it is important to foster relationships of trust with my colleagues. For colleagues to meaningfully learn from my presentations, they need to trust my expertise and I need to know how to effectively communicate with them. For example, I led a professional development where I welcomed each colleague with music and a happy smile. I started by sharing positive messages written by students and affirmed the impact of their work. Next, I shared a lesson where I placed teachers in the shoes of English learners by presenting a lesson in another language, without using best practices. I asked staff to reflect on what it felt like to sit in a classroom where you could not understand any written or spoken language. Then I applied strategies to show them how to improve their lessons to meet the needs of their language learners. I shared examples of best practices and encouraged them to apply these strategies to support all students in any content.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

I believe culture belongs in the classroom and studying diversity is essential for success. Culturally responsive teaching is an important avenue for eradicating barriers for our most marginalized populations. For a project in Sheltered Literature

and Composition, students read articles about cultural traditions and studied the importance of symbolism and imagery. The lesson taught them how to reflect on elements of their culture and use imagery to immerse readers in their favorite tradition. Students created Zines about their favorite cultural traditions and participated in a gallery walk to learn about traditions like Ramadan, Semana Santa, Día de los Muertos, and Tét. This unit was impactful because when students share about their cultures and learn from others, they are exposed to new perspectives that can shape their identities and views of the world. Another important cultural lesson was “The Cultures of Aloha,” a 50-minute movie I created in collaboration with the English Language Development department. I combined my Beginning English Language Development class with the Early Intermediate level class. Students formed groups and were assigned to create videos that described an element of their culture. Students shared about the music, food, traditions, fashions, and history of their cultures. After filming commenced, students created movie tickets to invite members of the community to watch their movie in the auditorium. This lesson positively impacted students because they were given an opportunity to reflect on their culture and practice using English to share about what is most important to them.

To be culturally responsive, is to cultivate curiosity in the classroom. It is important that students learn to think critically about the world around them and question the assumptions and stereotypes they have been socialized to believe. “True Teen Stories” is another impactful lesson I created for my Beginning English Language Development class. In the fall, students used their voices to share about their experience of coming to a new country and adapting to a new culture. 39 students from 8 different countries wrote their stories and took photos to create a magazine about their lives. These magazines were shared with both the class and staff at Aloha. Students read the stories about their classmates and challenged the assumptions they had about one another. Next, students interviewed each other to further learn about their similarities and differences. This unit positively impacted the community because when students learn to be curious and examine the differences of each individual, then personal growth and critical thinking can begin to occur. The magazine also provided staff members with important insight to students who they could not connect with before due to language barriers.

Conclusion

According to bell hooks, “Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation by each of us claiming identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.” When students leave my classroom, my hope is that they take pride in their identities and understand the beauty of their cultural diversity. My students come to the United States for better opportunities. Many are escaping poverty and persecution while simultaneously adjusting to a new culture, language, and school system. This transition between worlds can cause anxiety, isolation, and stress leading to poorer academic outcomes. In a world that is constantly changing, hate and fear persuade students to hide who they are. My goal is to give students the tools to be confident in their

identity and use their voices to stand against ignorance. Through building relationships and creating a community of English Language Learners, my students know that who they are is acceptable and when in doubt, they know they have a community to support and build them up. When students leave my classroom, they will have the skills needed to pass high school but more importantly they will know how to interact with diverse communities, tell their stories, build relationships, cultivate curiosity, and use their voices to create a more equitable and inclusive world.

SAMPLE STATEMENT #2

Rhiannon Young, Corbett Middle School, 2025 Educator of the Year Winner (6-8)

Relationships, Connection & Sense of Purpose

In education, relationships matter more than ever. Our new normal, at least for a while, is an educational world with much uncertainty. The most important link in all of this is for students to feel connected. This connection will keep them tethered to their academic life. Relationships are not isolated in the walls of a school; they are the most necessary element in continuous learning in any circumstance. To support this, educators need to stay connected with each other to navigate a world of learning that is changing. As an educator, my role is to help provide the structure for these relationships to thrive. We have to rely on each other to quickly master new technology, learn how to best engage with students in various formats, and prioritize what we focus our instruction on. What a school values most, what is placed at the core of its community, is what unites it. I feel that it is my responsibility to uphold the principles established to ensure that all students can reach their full potential, no matter the climate. I want to foster a community of learners with a sense of purpose and belonging.

One of the most important strategies to do this is with project-based learning. Project-based learning that is experiential and with ample student choice lends itself to a wide variety of ways to showcase learning. This is the most fundamental instructional strategy to create inclusion in a classroom. By utilizing a workshop format during reading, writing, and math, individualized goals can be made, and small group work can be implemented to provide the highest level of learning opportunities for each individual. Throughout the day, if needed, additional services can be utilized to support individual students. This may include an intervention time in a small group setting with a classroom teacher who is familiar with the goals and expectations of the class. It could also be push-in support from a learning specialist who is offering additional assistance. It also allows for a natural incorporation of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Rather than stand-alone lessons that highlight the importance of these topics, they can be integrated by subject matter or a lens into a topic. Ultimately, high-quality instruction needs to be designed to address student growth. For instance, when studying historical events, we examine diverse perspectives and the impact of social inequalities. The teacher needs to collaborate with an entire team to determine the most important strategies or

curricula to make this happen. To create a culturally responsive environment, I incorporate diverse texts, encourage students to share their own experiences, and facilitate respectful discussions. I also work to ensure that all students have equitable access to resources and support, regardless of their background or learning style. It's a process – an ongoing one that is built upon trust, open communication, and reflective practice.

I also want to create opportunities to build connections. How does visiting a local Bureau of Land Management site to study biology help us feel more connected to the importance of water quality? How does tasting the food of a culture provide a sensory connection beyond what we see or hear about it? All of these experiences take more effort and planning beyond typical classroom instruction, but they matter. They allow students to build a stronger connection to what they are learning.

I believe in my students and, therefore, expectations are high, but they have the support to meet those expectations. They need feedback to help in this process. The first part of this begins with building a relationship founded on trust, but it does not end with just a simple letter grade at the end of an assignment. Important aspects of the feedback need to be focused on time spent on quality instruction, the monitoring and assessment of student progress, appropriate and effective use of technology, and if there is a personalized and motivating learning environment for students. This can be done through casual meetings, formal observations, short interviews with students, and the evaluation of student data. This is an important process to determine the effectiveness of instruction.

This ability, to be able to determine what is fundamental in learning, is important so that students do not fall behind in the most essential skills. To keep students engaged, not overwhelmed, and developing the most important academic skills, I have to prioritize what we focus on. I also have to maximize my teaching strategies in a limited amount of time. Students need to know that the work they are doing is important, whether it be within a classroom setting or from a distance. Student self-efficacy has commonly been understood as an important factor for achievement. This sense of purpose and self-efficacy doesn't end with the student in a school. This matters and what I feel has become the most important focus of my role as an educator.

My educational philosophy centers on building meaningful relationships, creating an inclusive and engaging classroom, and fostering a sense of purpose in every student's learning journey. My approach emphasizes the importance of connection, feedback, and real-world experiences in cultivating a thriving learning environment. I want every student to be a lifelong learner and have critical thinking skills. I want their sense of purpose to lead to a strong social responsibility. This is even more important in the current educational landscape, which demands adaptability and resilience.