



Joe Kirt

Joe Kirt earned his Bachelor of Arts Degree from St. Norbert College in DePere Wisconsin. He later earned his MSW from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. In 1995 he earned his School Psychology License from Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

When asked what his personal philosophy is and how he demonstrates it in his practice Joe notes, his personal philosophy, in one aspect matches his career choice. “You can best change the world one student at a time.” Being a school psychologist affords me the opportunity to meet with students on a small group and individual basis. This allows me to form individual relationships with them and often their parents with a long term goal of fostering not only education but personal growth. From the moment students walk in until they leave, each activity and minute needs to be purposeful with the intent of both educational and personal success.”

When asked how he works to raise achievement for all students, Joe states that he is often afforded the opportunity to work with students who are economically disadvantaged and he assists them in developing transition plans to either a post-secondary school or the world of work. Joe is often involved with making referrals to community agencies such as the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Workforces Development Center or Opportunities.

When asked what innovative projects/programs he has developed for and with students Joe notes that ten years ago the dropout rate at Fort Atkinson High School was 12%. Based on that crisis in the school, he along with three other staff members developed the now well known Crossroads Program. This off site alternative program that involves hands on curriculum and work components is tied to state standards. Since the inception of the program there have been 135 Crossroad graduates. This Board just as past Boards has conferred many of these diplomas, right here in this room. The fellow standing beside me is the silent, modest hero who behind the scenes is the most responsible for finding the right match-up per a potential Crossroads student. And that in itself, selecting the right at risk students is a major reason for the high completion rate in Crossroads.

Where Crossroads was not a good match-up Joe was instrumental with Dr. Zaspel in developing the GEDO program, again another alternative pathway to success for at-risk students, who on school grounds can earn their high school equivalency diploma.

When asked about the positive aspects he sees in education, Joe feels the challenge in education that will improve and strengthen teaching is how to meld technology with teaching and how young brains are influenced by it. Joe observes “that many feel that the invention of the television revolutionized education as families purchased TV’s in the 50’s. While it may have greatly shaped society, its impact on education is somewhat less clear. The advent of the computer poses some of the same dilemmas. While the ability of the computer to store and present material is its strength, unless teaching masters the dissemination of its contents, it remains no more than an easily accessible library. We must continue to look at the social forces that cause students to learn and not the mere act of knowledge acquisition. Educators must combine the individualized attention of the one roomed school house while teaching students to access and utilize the knowledge now available through technology.”

When asked about unrealized goals he has for his classroom/professional development Joe notes, “I have the on-going goal of having a 100% graduation rate for our students at Fort Atkinson High School. I don’t believe anything less is acceptable. Given the demands of the economy and labor market this is critical. However, this is of no use if our students don’t leave with a sense of service to community and each other. Imparting of knowledge can be done somewhat easily. Our goal needs to be to produce good citizens.”

As a more personal goal related to school psychology, the implementation of Response to Intervention will be an opportunity to intervene earlier with students struggling in school. “The when, the how, and where services are delivered to students will change in the next few years in Wisconsin and our School District. I look forward to being a part of this exciting and challenging transition.”

From Curt Brokmeier, a colleague, “Joe is a natural-born leader. He has the unique ability to listen to all sides of an issue and then direct people and resources for maximum effectiveness. In his role as school psychologist, Joe is responsible for coordinating the programming of Special Education students, oversight of our alternative learning programs, and serve as chair of the Pupil Services Department. His ability to communicate and relate with both students and parents is a gift.”

From another colleague, Connie Swantz, “Joe goes beyond the normal job expectations of a school psychologist and makes the time to meet with individual students when a crisis occurs. He takes each situation seriously and provides the student with the resources to overcome the problem at hand. Joe is also the first person to begin intervention strategies when students begin to struggle academically. He utilizes unique problem-solving skills by garnering each perspective in reaching a meaningful and realistic solution.”

Susan Probst, a former colleague, “Mr. Kirt never looked at a child as having a disability but rather a student having a challenge. Together, as a team, he would lead us through options and possibilities.”

It is with great pleasure that we recommend Joe Kirt for the Herb Kohl Teacher Fellowship Award.