

# PRINCIPAL FOCUS

## Getting to Know Principal Michael McAlister

(Part 3 of 3)

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- Michael McAlister, Principal, Northgate High School



### **What does a high-functioning and dynamic Northgate faculty and staff look like to you? How are we doing?**

In the best of all possible worlds, Northgate faculty would, with everybody else, continually engage our "5-Cs". Meaning faculty, staff and students would Communicate, Critically Think, Create, Collaborate and Connect in ways that constructively impact not just the classroom but the entire community as well. While this is a bit of a new goal for all of us, there's nothing new about the approach. I would also add that we are moving ahead nicely in this direction. This is especially recognizable when one notices how we've vertically aligned all classes to support the culminating 12th grade activities of Mock Congress and the Senior Project. This means that the 5-Cs are being put into play the moment a student arrives so that over the freshman, sophomore and junior years, we prepare our seniors for their capstone activities. Very few of even the best high schools can claim this.

### **What is your roadmap for the future of Northgate? What are you excited about as you think about the future?**

I want to see Northgate assume a position among the most elite public high schools in the state of California. There's no reason why this can't happen based on the talent of this faculty and staff, not to mention the caliber of student and the kind of support we get from the community. This will take lots of work, but it's possible if all of Northgate's stakeholders are pushing the cart in the same direction.

### **What's your biggest challenge right now?**

The biggest challenge I currently face involves people who don't appreciate either what the cart is offering or the direction in which it's moving. I believe to my core that the community group that is looking to push the cart, so to speak, in a very different, and harmful, direction is beginning to hurt the school, the faculty and Northgate's students. NUSD's secessionist movement has become a major distraction to many of us seeking to improve our offering. I've been vocal about how this effort is a very bad idea that undermines what we are currently trying to do here and I will continue to suggest that despite their use of alternative facts, a breakaway from this District will cost each family a great deal of money just to be able to continue offering what we already have in place. Also, families should know that sports, the arts and AP classes should cost extra for each student wishing to take advantage of them. So, too, should taxes increase. I see this threat as something that needlessly distracts us from the business at hand: giving our kids the best possible education we can give them. It makes far more sense that we, as a community, recommit to the external funding sources we have in place in order to facilitate the kind of change that will benefit our entire community for years to come. Parents should know that we're a very different school than we were even three years ago. The same could be said of the District. Fighting an unwarranted war against a foe that no longer exists is a waste of our precious time and resources.

### **What does Northgate do well? Where do we need to improve?**

Northgate does a good job of offering a place for each kid. No matter what group a student is in, no matter what interests a student might have, there is a place for him or her. As much as Northgate is a place where

excellence is celebrated, it is also a place where compassion and generosity flourish. Students, faculty and staff know deep down that we are here for each other in order to make ours a better community and a better world. I would add, however, that in the process of building this community of care, we often lose sight of the important stuff. Too often we live under the tremendous weight of needless stress while at the same time we are driven to distraction. Our mindsets are often fixed instead of flexible, our resilience compromised by an inability to experience loss as a way of uncovering our grit. The school can't teach this lesson on its own. It takes an entire community. But again, I look at the community we have as an amazing asset in our effort to offer excellence for, and expect it from, all of our kids.

**Is there a specific message you would like to convey to Northgate parents? How can parents contribute to this community?**

The one thing I'd like for parents to know is that Northgate's kids, faculty and staff need you, and they need you right now. No matter if it's a gift of time or a financial offering, we need your help in supporting the school. I realize that at this very moment, this school community is feeling divided, maybe even confused about how to authentically do what's right for Northgate's kids. I get it. There are significant differences of opinion that are being forcefully articulated about how to best do this. But I would argue that we help our kids achieve as citizens, as socially well-adjusted people, and as academically enriched students when we focus on our inherent generosity of spirit. The simple truth is that Northgate is working. Meeting us with whatever you can give truly makes a difference.