

Schools

'Innovative' Education Film, Panel Chat In Westfield Wednesday

The program highlights project-based learning, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and communication.

By Russ Crespike, Patch Staff | Feb 25, 2019 2:53 pm ET



(Photo courtesy of Shutterstock)

WESTFIELD, NJ – A film and panel discussion about new, innovative education approaches is being held in Westfield. The evening will begin with a film screening at 7:30 p.m. of the documentary "Most Likely To Succeed," about innovation in education. The film highlights an innovative school in California where students are engaged in meaningful project-based learning and are developing skills essential for success in the 21st century such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and communication.

Westfield Mayor Shelley Brindle has agreed to moderate a panel afterwards.

According to Nicole Breslow, current president of the Westfield Education Fund, some of the WEF board members watched this film together in the fall and found it to be so compelling and inspiring.

"It really speaks to the Westfield Education Fund's mission of powering innovation in our schools and we thought it was an important movie to bring to our community," Breslow said.

Breslow, who works as an educational researcher and provides technical assistance to district and state leaders, said the panel at the event was designed to highlight and learn from a few of the many innovative educators in the schools.

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"There are so many wonderful things already happening in our schools; one of WEF's goals is to help identify existing innovative programs and practices and provide opportunities to share, replicate, and expand that good work," she said. "At the same time, WEF also strives to foster the development of new ideas and approaches to learning. This film illustrates a model of learning that may be unfamiliar to most of the audience. While the context of the school highlighted in the film is different, I think there is so much to learn from their example."

Breslow said the panel is comprised of:

- Dr. Matt Bolton, Principal, Edison Intermediate School
- Laura Paolo, Instructional and Practice Teacher, Westfield
- Dr. Matt Bolton, Principal, Edison Intermediate School
- Laura Doyle, Engineering and Design Teacher, Westfield High School
- Dr. Brian Baldwin, Professor of Science Education, New Jersey Center for Science, Technology, and Mathematics at Kean University
- Mary Montes, 1st grade Teacher, Tamaques Elementary School, Westfield Teacher of the Year 2018

"We selected panelists who have been innovators in Westfield schools and can share their experiences experimenting with new approaches in their classrooms. We wanted to have representatives from each level of our school system and included both classroom teachers and a school leader's perspective, since leadership is critical to creating a culture that supports innovation," Breslow said. "We are also including a professor from KEAN University's innovative STEM program to provide a higher education perspective. In addition to teaching college classes, Dr. Baldwin also works with school districts to help them implement new approaches to science instruction."

When it came to providing a moderator, Breslow said the choice of Brindle was obvious.

"Mayor Brindle was the perfect choice for this given her experience as an innovator, leading HBO through its digital transformation, and for the innovative approaches she is bringing to her role now as mayor of Westfield," she said.

Breslow said she hopes the event raises awareness about the Westfield Education Fund.

"Many people in our community have never heard of WEF or don't know what we do and why we are important," she said. "We hope people will walk away with a clearer understanding of the need for our organization and an interest in supporting our work."

Breslow said beyond awareness the event is designed to spark dialogue about the purpose of school and leads parents to reconsider their definition of student success.

"We want to highlight some of the innovative things already happening in our schools and create interest in expanding that work. We hope the audience leaves with new ideas about what meaningful and engaging student learning can look like and an interest in bringing more of these opportunities to our children," she said. "We also hope the educators who attend the event feel inspired to try something new in their classrooms."

For more information, or to purchase tickets, visit <https://westfieldfund.org/fi...>

The Westfield Education Fund (WEF) is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt foundation run by a Board of Directors comprised of Westfield parent volunteers. They were established in 1991 by community members, in partnership with the school district and Board of Education. WEF supports innovative projects that strengthen and enrich students' academic experience but fall beyond the school district budget. Most of the district's budget is allocated to critical "fixed" costs such as salaries, transportation, supplies and maintenance. Discretionary spending is limited and little remains to support innovation. Westfield Education Fund fills this critical gap. More information can be found on the organization's website.