

## **“More Than a Principal”: How One Woman is Redefining Leadership in Her School and Community**

When you walk through the front doors of Bethel High School, the energy is unmistakable—students laughing, teachers greeting each other warmly, and a strong sense of pride lining the hallways. At the heart of it all is Ms. Pace-Pierce, a woman whose leadership goes far beyond the school walls.

As Academy Principal, she’s not just overseeing schedules, policies, or test scores—she’s cultivating a culture of care, inclusion, and resilience. But her path to leadership wasn’t always easy.

Growing up, Ms. Pace-Pierce was inspired by a family of educators. “I believe that I was destined to teach. My mother has always encouraged me. I have had several positive administrators in my life, many of which were also my track coaches. I have always been surrounded by positive, strong women.”

She carried that drive through college and into her career in education, eventually stepping into administrative leadership—a space where women, especially women of color, are still underrepresented. Despite the challenges, she’s become a powerhouse in both her school and community.

“We have several administrators at Bethel. There is one Executive Principal that oversees the entire school. We have four Academy Principals that serve over the different areas in our schools. Pace stands out to me due to the fact that she is recognized by all students. We have a student body of close to 1800 students. Pace is the one administrator that every student and staff member knows. She interacts with everyone. On any given day there are about 2000 people (students and staff) in attendance. All of them could share a memory with Pace. Pace is a Bethel graduate and she now pours her heart into this building everyday. Pace motivates and encourages everyone to be their best and live to their full potential” said Joan Perry, Data Processor for Bethel High School.

Ms. Pace-Pierce leads with a vision that centers around student voice, equity, and opportunity. She’s also passionate about representation. Whether mentoring young men and women or speaking at local events, she knows the importance of being visible in leadership roles.

“I guess one thing I did not know is how much of themselves that these administrators give. A typical workday for them starts at about 6 a.m. and ends around 10 p.m. To be effective leaders,

it requires them to be accessible at all times. They try to attend all events held after hours (sports, band, choir, etc.). They have meeting phone calls at night once they are at home. They are in the building on the weekends assisting with activities. They give so much of themselves” said Mrs. Perry.

While her calendar is always full, Ms. Pace-Pierce makes time for moments that matter—chatting with students in the hallways, showing up at community events, or simply listening.

“Pace-Pierce is always present and ready to offer support. She is seen in hallways, classrooms, and the cafeteria throughout the day. She is always willing to insert herself when needed” said Dr. Tanya Howard, Bethel High School Principal.

Even with all the demands, she remains grounded.

“I recently realized that if I take my laptop home at night, I will keep working. I no longer take my laptop home at night.”

Looking ahead, Ms. Pace-Pierce is excited about what’s next—both for the school and the community. She’s currently working on the opportunity to celebrate high achieving students during Academic Awards Night as well as AP and Dual Enrollment Night during which we will encourage students to sign up for rigorous courses, and her hope is to leave a lasting impact that lives on in the hearts of her students.

“During my second year of teaching middle school, I connected with one of my students on a personal level. When I transferred to high school the following year we remained in contact. Although she was still in middle school her teachers would call and report to me when she was absent from school. I found out that she was being made to stay home to babysit the children of her older sister (who was in high school). After a period of time it was determined that she would move in with me and my family. She was her mother’s first child to graduate from high school without becoming pregnant, as well as attend and graduate from college. She is now 34 years old and is still a member of my family and takes family Christmas pictures every year with us.”

In a world where leadership is often defined by titles and achievements, Ms. Pace-Pierce is redefining what it means to lead—with heart, with purpose, and with a legacy that will echo far beyond these halls.