

Denise Dunbar



There's a saying around town that Charlotte Sidway Elementary School is the Disneyworld of elementary schools. Because of the atmosphere Principal Denise Dunbar has strived to sustain since she took the helm in 2006, the students love going to school there, the teachers love to teach there and parents love the transformation that happens to their children there. Dunbar's name has become synonymous with the school, where she works with "the most dedicated and passionate faculty and staff there is."

Dunbar says safety and security of all students and staff is first and foremost in their minds every day. Gone are the days where the community's youngest students come to school for nap time and show and tell. Dunbar explains that since standards are much more rigorous than before, "teachers are raising the bar and students are challenging themselves to achieve. Expectations are higher and technology has become a huge component to the educational day." Yet, the curriculum is carried out with the realization that students are just four to seven years old in a building that is home to pre-k to first grade students only.

Sidway's reputation as a model school is transcending well beyond the bridges. Dunbar has hosted several administrators, principals, curriculum directors and Superintendents from the Erie County Elementary Principals Association to visit the Co-Teach Flexible Classroom, and observe Reading Recovery and Early Literacy and the RTI (Response to intervention) model. Several of her teachers have presented to administrators at Erie 1 Boces and have been written about in the NYS School Boards Association publication.

When asked how she knows the names of hundreds of students, she says, "I take time to know students and their families. I try to remember something unique about each child, and spend as much time in the classrooms as possible in order to get to know students in their classroom settings."

Dunbar pours the same heart into the Grand Island community. "I believe that if everyone contributes and is active in their surroundings, our communities will be safer and stronger and

there will be more unity in our world.” She carries this philosophy out in her own community service. She has been a member of the Zonta Club since 2012, serving on the board of directors as well as several committees. She is also a volunteer for the SPCA and John R. Oishei Children's Hospital. She is seen volunteering there almost every Saturday for pet therapy with, Pearl, her Boston Terrier.

Other projects close to her heart include working with Zonta clubs assembling birthing kits for 3rd world countries, raising scholarship money through Zonta’s annual fashion show, and supporting an initiative to bring a satellite location of the Family Justice Center to Grand Island. In addition, she is an active volunteer and member of the Sidway Relay for Life team.

She is married to husband, Mark, and they are parents of two children: daughter Nicole and son, the late Nathan Dunbar.