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Education

From Princeton to Sandia Prep: How Heather Mock is reshaping education in Albuquerque



Image: Heather Mock

Heather Mock took on the role of Head of School at Sandia Preparatory School in Albuquerque in 2022 after teaching at the school in the 1990's.

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Story Highlights

- Heather Mock became Head of School at Sandia Prep in 2022.
- Sandia Prep focuses on immediate impact and entrepreneurial mindset development.
- Mock emphasizes authentic learning experiences to address youth mental health.

Heather Mock took the role of Head of School at Sandia Preparatory School in Albuquerque in 2022 after teaching at the school in the 1990s. Before that, she was an educator on the East Coast.

She earned a bachelor's degree in Art History from [Princeton University](#) and earned her master's degree in Education from Teachers College at Columbia University.

Mock met her future husband in New York City when he was visiting a mutual friend. He was about to begin law school at the University of New Mexico, so when she was done with her master's program, Mock joined him in the Land of Enchantment.

After moving, she got her first job [teaching at Sandia Prep](#), where she taught social studies, English, drama, volleyball and track from 1995 to 1997.

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"I feel like the school did for me as a teacher what the school does for kids, which is help them figure out what they love and are good at," Mock said.

She stayed in New Mexico for only two years before moving to California, then Colorado. She oversaw multiple schools in Colorado before her last job in the state as Head of School at Compositive Primary School in Aurora, Colorado.

Mock then moved back to New Mexico to take her [current job at Sandia Prep](#) in July of 2022.

“I thought, wow that’s really full circle to come and give back to the school that launched my career,” Mock said.

Sandia Preparatory School is an independent college preparatory co-ed school for grades 6 through 12.

“It’s not about making sure you know X, Y and Z; it’s about grappling with information, thinking creatively, and learning authentically,” Mock said. “We want our students to lead rich, balanced lives while discovering who they are.”

Albuquerque Business First spoke with Mock to talk more about the school and her role with it.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Albuquerque Business First: What do you do as head of school?

Heather Mock: There are so many parts to the job. It’s not exactly being a principal, because we do have a middle school head and an upper school head, and I’d say they’re a little bit more like a principal. They’re more on the front lines. But at the same time, I still do end up getting involved with a lot of those things, partly because we’re small enough, and I went into this field because I love working with kids. My job is really to make sure our students have the best possible experience – that they feel known, challenged, and supported – while also keeping an eye on the bigger picture so the school continues to align with our mission and vision.

What’s makes Sandia Prep different from other schools?

I do think the biggest and most important part of the school is this idea of immediate impact. Through the Impact Lab – a brand-new program, we are

creating opportunities for our students to have an impact in our communities now, not just when leave to go to college. It shows up in sports teams and different clubs, and I think we do a good job of finding ways for our kids to feel like they're contributing authentically in multiple other areas as well. That's when they feel like 'oh, I can't miss class because we are doing this today'. It's not, just going to be a lecture and a quiz. No, through our impact lab students meet with various organizations and have some agency over who they want to work with. So that, I think is the coolest part about the school. Going along with that, we have a robust innovation and design program, with classes in engineering, running a business, design, and entrepreneurship. And the idea of teaching an entrepreneurial mindset is very present not just in those classes - a lot of our teachers help develop that. Having an entrepreneurial mindset isn't just about starting a business. It's about being able to think quickly. It's about being able to teach our kids to know what to do when you don't know what to do. Because you're not being given these very specific directions in life.

Why do you think it's important to teach and make a difference for kids?

Youth mental health has been deemed a crisis, but when students feel like they are contributing, like they can make a difference and have a purpose, that increases their sense of well-being. ... In some ways it's a scary time to be in education. How can I make sure that my kids still know how to write and communicate? What they really need to know is the why, why is this the best way to communicate what you know. It's not so much about figuring out the right answer, it's about figuring out the right question. ... I've always believed in the importance of that kind of interdisciplinary, real world, authentic learning. You know, when I was first teaching, we would go read poetry at coffee houses, because I thought that's going to be much more meaningful than you just sharing your poem with me. These kinds of authentic learning opportunities are even more necessary today.