

# Ernest POLANSKY

## QUICK FACTS

**Hometown:** Albuquerque, New Mexico

**Years as Educator:** 60

**Current Role:** High School Science Teacher at Sandia Prep

**Most Challenging Part of Job:** Keeping students motivated to enjoy the process of learning in the age of Google and instant answers

**Most Rewarding Part of the Job:** Seeing students succeed and keeping in contact with them



A lot of things have changed in the 60 years that Ernest Polansky has been in the classroom. Through every cultural and generational shift, Polansky has embraced the challenge of adapting to a new cohort with open arms. "It keeps me on my toes because I have to stay up on current trends," he says. "I can't just lay back and not do anything."

Polansky began his teaching journey at Sandia High School in 1966, before moving to Cibola High School in 1979, and ultimately landing at Sandia Prep in 1980, where he's been ever since. Though he earned his degree in chemistry, years of inspiring his students in the biology classroom has grown his own love for genetics and microbiology.

This love can no doubt be credited to Polansky's emphasis on lab work and experiments. "That's where the students get really excited," he says, "because they see 'Wow, this really does work,' or 'Oh, it doesn't always work the way the paper and the books say it does.'" In Polansky's classes, students might see cells under the microscope, breed several generations of fruit flies, or grow and observe genetically modified corn, just to name a few. "We can talk about the concepts," he says, "but when you actually see it, that hands-on experience really makes all the difference."

These hands-on experiences spark students' curiosity, especially with kids who are afraid to take risks. "There's an unwillingness to take chances, to be wrong," he's noticed of students, especially since the 2020 pandemic. Helping students find those small breakthroughs keeps him coming back year after year. "I just enjoy working with young people. You have some of them that seem to struggle, and all of a sudden, (they) get that 'Oh, I get it' expression on their face. It's fun to see."

