

**2013 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT**  
**Kevin Suther, Principal**

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When a tornado struck rural Chapman, Kansas in June 2008, Chapman High School took a direct hit. As staff picked through the rubble afterwards, salvaging what they could, Principal Kevin Suther was among them, offering leadership and energy to get them through the tragedy.

Two months after the tornado, Chapman High School opened, on time, with all students present. Instead of a building, the school comprised FEMA trailers. At the first faculty meeting, Suther didn't dwell on the community's losses but reminded faculty that students have a right to

a quality education, no matter the circumstances. He stressed the importance of best academic practices and the need to not only meet but exceed standards.

For three years CHS faculty and students attended classes in trailers, the cafeteria the only common space. Students braved heat, rain, and snow to get from class to class, carrying their heavy backpacks because there were no lockers. The noise of demolition and construction machinery dominated the scene. To shore up morale, Suther held impromptu "donut days" and "watermelon feeds." He found a sponsor to donate ponchos to protect students in the rain. To counter the powerful sense of isolation, he extended the lunch period to an hour, giving students and staff a chance to reconnect. During that period, the "Trailer School" met the State Standard of Excellence in Reading and Math each year and earned the Governor's Award for excellence.

Suther launched weekly Learning Communities, helped establish norms, goals, and directions, and then allowed teachers to assume leadership. He used classroom visits to evaluate teaching and learning, but to identify new and creative teaching practices teachers can share with others. Quick to act on teacher suggestions, he enabled a math teacher to restructure the math curriculum and supported another teacher to initiate an annual theatrical production that involves middle and elementary school students and generates town spirit.

While keeping the focus on high academic standards, Suther fosters caring relationships with students—both those who will go on to become valedictorians and those who enter school not caring much about it. "Every child passing the doors of Chapman High School should feel like they are wanted," he says, challenging himself and his teachers to find creative ways to reach all students.

When the new school opened in January 2011, Suther helped students accommodate to new structures and settings as he kept expectations for academic excellence high. In the new space, CHS career training opportunities expanded to include printing and construction technology in addition to agriculture, hospitality, and digital technology.