

November 5, 2024



Perseverance against the odds in 1907 made this scene possible today.

Photo by Brian Hammer

## Letter from the Executive Director

Have you thanked a teacher lately? Or someone else in your life who recognized your potential, helped you see what it takes to achieve a goal, or sparked your interest that has fueled your life's passions?

At this time of year, I think a lot about teachers, having grown up in a family of teachers and recognizing how teachers have made a difference in how I approach life. Though I also remember coming home from the first day of kindergarten and telling my parents how disappointed I was because my teacher had not taught me how to read on that first half-day of school. Memories are a bit fuzzy, but I'm hoping I grew to understand in some way that year that learning was a process.

And then there was Madame DeCock, my French language teacher at Marshall High

School in southwest Minnesota, who instilled in us the power of committing to a goal (learning French) by listening and repeating aloud, always aloud, a recording of the next day's lesson in short, 20-minute chunks for homework every night.

Madame DeCock was also an early adopter of the student-as-teacher model by asking one of us, at random, nearly every day to lead the day's lesson from the podium, while she sat attentively at her desk. She intervened and guided only when necessary. If you learn by teaching, this model worked extraordinarily well for us.

Her classroom was a master class in emotionally intelligent teaching, and in management for that matter: Instill a sense of common mission; create clear expectations; hold everyone equally accountable, while supporting everyone; and celebrate accomplishments or simply our hard work. In our classroom, on select Friday afternoons, she put on a vinyl record, turned up the volume, and sang along with us in French, at the top of lungs, to our favorite French song. If you've forgotten the lyrics to "Les Champs-Elysee," I can help!

Teachers do amazing things that create lasting impact on individuals and communities.

I hope you've had someone similarly transformational in your life.

The bucolic scene in the photo above is made possible by a Minneapolis biology teacher - Eloise Butler - who saw a need in 1907 to conserve native flora and fauna and petitioned the city's Park Board to set aside land in the city for that purpose. It's now a beloved site that educates generations young and old about what was, is, and could be with more awareness of the life systems they support, including humans.

I've begun a new tradition of visiting the Eloise Butler-inspired garden on the last day of the season in late October each year, to be inspired, to slow down, and to remember a great teacher who by definition is aware of how small and large acts can create lasting change and a sense of hope for the future.

**Integrity** begets 'Trust';

**Responsibility** begets 'Inspiration';

**Compassion** begets 'Retention'; and

**Forgiveness** begets 'Innovation'

Today is election day in the United States, a precious right we have to participate in free

and fair elections by casting our vote, a privilege in a democracy that may sometimes feel insignificant never is.

- Brian Hammer, PhD, Executive Director  
Contact: 612.843.5017 | [bhammer@t2pri.org](mailto:bhammer@t2pri.org)

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**Contact:** [bhammer@t2pri.org](mailto:bhammer@t2pri.org) | +1 612.843.5017 | [t2pri.org](http://t2pri.org) |

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