The George W. Minns Center for the Instruction of Foundational Education

The George W. Minns Center for the Instruction of Foundational Education is dedicated to fulfilling the original educational mission of George W. Minns, first principal of Minns’ Evening Normal School, a teachers’ college and the predecessor of San José State University. A Harvard-educated lawyer-turned-teacher and passionate advocate for education, Minns believed that the wellbeing of the state and nation—still young during his 19th century lifetime—lay in public education and, ultimately, with teachers.

“At the time of the 1861 founding of Minns’ Evening Normal School, Minns’ teaching philosophy stressed teacher enthusiasm along with high pupil engagement and self-sufficiency. Minns believed that solid comprehension of basic skills was essential in order for one to continue to learn. ‘It should never be forgotten that correct spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, grammar and facility in expressing oneself in good plain English are indispensable. They are the foundation of all future acquisitions.’ They are worth any quantity of heads full of mere smatterings ofologies and sophisties, he said.”

Most significantly, Minns held that the purpose of education was not to memorize but to learn to think for oneself. “Self-development should be encouraged to the fullest extent. The pupil should be told as little as possible, and induced to discover as much as possible. Encourage him to conquer difficulties himself. Every victory so achieved adds to the strength of his mind, and what he acquires in this way he makes permanently his own.”

The Minns Center believes that these educational tenets still hold true today. The Minns Center seeks to ensure that the future of education in our nation remains in the able hands of passionate, world-class teachers by supporting all students in the Connie L. Lurie College of Education in the development of essential educator skills such as:

- Maintaining enthusiasm for subject matter
- Generating student engagement in classrooms
- Asking students to find their own solutions to problems in the classroom
- Displaying appropriate levels of appreciation for gifts of red apples

For more information—and to help the center put teachers first—please contact the Connie L. Lurie College of Education at 408-977-1857.