

Muhammad Ramadan

Director of Technology, The Seven Hills School | Walnut Creek, California



From psychology graduate to ed tech leader, Muhammad Ramadan has forged an inspiring career path through innovation and a holistic mindset. Now director of technology at The Seven Hills School in Walnut Creek, California, Ramadan is spearheading positive change by putting the student learning experience first.

Access Points and Ramadan sat down to chat about his journey, his philosophies, and how the changing nature of his role—and others in the ed tech space—is shaping the future of independent school learning environments.

technology specialist and teacher. The transition started when I was at Thaden School, and then from there, my position continued to elevate.

Access Points: What attracted you to Seven Hills, and how are you leading ed tech transformation there?

Ramadan: I was the assistant director of technology at Thaden School in Northwest Arkansas and was looking for that next step. That was the goal of going through the ATLAS ECATD (now known as the ATLAS Leadership Institute) program—to eventually become a technology leader at a school. As the assistant director, I felt like I had the opportunity to influence the way things went at Thaden, but I also wanted the opportunity to do that as a leader myself. Around that time, I happened to get a message from Gabe [Lucas].

Gabe shared that there was a director position opening in the Bay Area. I started reading about Seven Hills, and I was so impressed by their overall mission and philosophy—the focus on whole-child learning. It is a small school, and their description of what they were looking for in a technology leader was a near-perfect fit. It was almost as if I had written it myself. You don't see that very often where there's a heavier emphasis on the educational part and really being a partner with the teachers, with the families, and helping everyone at the school support learning through the use of technology.

A big part of what I wanted to do when I got to Seven Hills was to understand the landscape.



Get to Know Muhammad Ramadan

HOMETOWN: Minneapolis

EDUCATION: B.S. in psychology, M.Ed. in social sciences, University of Minnesota; graduate certificate of information technology, University of Cincinnati

HOBBIES: Ultimate Frisbee, fantasy football, reading, basic video production and editing, casual bike rides

FAVORITE BOOK, TV SHOW, FILM, OR FAMOUS QUOTE: Books: *Born a Crime* and *The Silmarillion* | TV shows: *The Wire* and *SNL* | Film: *The Last Dragon*

FUN FACT: "I've played Ultimate Frisbee on four continents and most recently played in a national championship tournament."

What were the actual needs? I think in many schools, and even here at Seven Hills, there was a philosophy of “What are the new bells and whistles? How do we stay ahead of the game and seem cutting-edge?” I came back to, “Well, let’s think practically. What do we actually need to support the learning? Let’s focus on the program that has been strong and gotten families from around the East Bay to want to invest in the school. What technology can both support that and, at some point, enhance that?” That was my goal. We also rewrote our student technology policy to better reflect our mission. Rather than a list of “no, no, no’s,” it’s more, “Here’s how we act in our nondigital lives. We have the same expectations in our digital lives.”

Access Points: How do you think the role of technology leader is evolving in the independent school world?

Ramadan: One of the big frustrations for tech leaders is trying to speak the language of technology to people who aren’t fluent in it and doing it in a way that doesn’t seem like you’re talking down to people. My hope is that technology leaders learn to be bilingual where they can speak the language of education and the language of technology. In my work with both constituencies, I have to regularly, for lack of a better term, “code switch.” I talk to people in technology, and I can use that language and speak to them in a way that makes sense, and then I go and talk to educators and parents who may not be as familiar with how educational technology

“My hope is that technology leaders learn to be bilingual, where they can speak the language of education and the language of technology.”

works—or cybersecurity or IT—but I need to present to them in a way that makes sense and will be supported.

In my mind, the best way for technology leaders to evolve is to try to find the best of both worlds. I think I have the benefit of being a person who liked technology and understood it but who also spent a long time as an educator. It helps because I don’t seem like this foreigner who’s coming in trying to change things. Rather, I can draw on my experience to say, “I’ve been in the classroom; I know what it’s like. I’ve been an administrator. I’m a parent. I know what it’s like.” I think that technology leaders will benefit from drawing on a range of experiences and learning to effectively communicate with a diverse group of people.

Access Points: How has ATLIS helped you grow as a professional?

Ramadan: I think there are two things that ATLIS has really helped me with. One is clarifying my own thinking about what it means to be a technology leader. Being able to hear what others are experiencing and learn their philosophies encouraged me to sit down and say, “What do I really believe?” I had opinions,

and I needed to formalize them.

One example is that I have a philosophy for any technology department that I work in or oversee, which is Tech CARES. It is an acronym for Tech Connects, Advances, Responds, Educates, and Secures. No matter what comes up, if I always come back to Tech CARES, then I feel like I can make the right decisions for the school or the situation I’m in.

Second, more than anything, ATLIS allowed me to reach out to a network of people and think about the best ways to support teachers, support schools, and become aware of things that might not be on my radar. ATLIS allows me to be a part of forums, go to conferences, and have a tribe—I think that’s one of the things that was really valuable. The first time I went to [an] ATLIS [event], it was like, “Wow! There are other people out there like me, experiencing the same things.”

Access Points: What are some guiding principles you can share with fellow tech leaders?

Ramadan: Tech CARES is one. I also did a presentation for ATLIS during the 2020 virtual conference, and the theme was “Establish Your Brand.” What is your approach? How do people at



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Muhammad Ramadan embodies the evolution of the technology leader, offering firsthand guidance and support in the classroom.

the school see you? A big part of establishing your brand is having underlying principles or a philosophy that people know well. When people talk about my department here at Seven Hills, they know Tech CARES. It's branded on all the emails that we send; it's in the way that we engage with people. It's not just a line that we say. So, that would be my first thing—know your brand and make sure that it truly reflects what you believe.

Another principle that I usually present to teachers and students is the acronym APP, where you

have technology that is Accessible, Practical, and Purposeful.

Whenever you're making a decision about adopting or using a piece of technology, particularly software or classroom tools, I ask the teachers to think about [these questions]: Is it accessible to all? Is it practical for what you're trying to do? Does it actually serve an educational purpose?

Access Points: What motivates you outside of work?

Ramadan: The most important thing to me is that my family is in a good place. I especially want

my children to be healthy mentally, physically, and, to a certain extent, spiritually. I want them to have a sense of belonging and purpose in the world and feel that they can contribute something. I think the most common phrase I say to my 4- and 9-year-old is "Be kind." How are you showing kindness? How are you showing that you are an upstander? Are you just doing what everybody else does, or are you standing out and doing what you think is helpful and a contribution to the world around you, and to your community? >>