

NEW BEGINNINGS
GETTING TO KNOW THREE D23 LEADERS WHO HAVE MOVED INTO NEW ROLES

From District 23's Fall 2023 Community Connection Newsletter

Dr. Craig Curtis

New assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, former Ross principal



Q. Overseeing curriculum and instruction for all four schools is a big change from being a principal. What made you want to pursue this challenge?

A. I went to college to enter a profession where I could impact the lives of others. I loved working with children and building relationships through collaboration and positive communication. When I began this journey as a teacher, I was dedicated to helping students be the best they could be. Later, I realized I wanted to expand that reach by assisting teachers and families. Now I feel it's the perfect time to take the next step and impact more lives, through connections with leadership, staff, families and students across the district.

Q. How did being principal of Ross, and a teacher earlier in your career, help prepare you for this leadership role?

A. As a teacher and principal, I have believed education is about the relationships you create. Whether building a lasting relationship with a student, collaborating with staff or communicating with families, it's important to gain trust and buy-in. Maya Angelou said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I have established tremendous relationships within the District and community that will help me in this role. I am thrilled about this new challenge!

Q. What exciting things are on the horizon for D23 curriculum? Any new updates coming soon?

A. There are absolutely some curriculum updates on the horizon this year. First and foremost, as a part of our curriculum adoption cycle, we will be reviewing our science curriculum across the district. This will involve convening a representative group of educators to examine the Illinois

Learning Standards in Science. They will conduct a needs assessment of our current curriculum and determine the best steps for proceeding in the future with our science curriculum.

Q. What are your hobbies or interests outside of work, and what do you like to do in your free time?

A. I have several interests outside of work. I enjoy downtime with my family and sports. When I have the chance, I enjoy going to the movies or watching the few television shows my wife and I have in common. My wife and I both have a love for sports, so watching sports on television or viewing sports live are always fun activities for us. Who knows? You may even see us out in the community checking out a local sporting event!

Stephanie Gage

New Ross principal, former MacArthur assistant principal



Q. How do you like being principal of Ross?

A. I absolutely love my new job! Second and third graders come to school with smiles on their faces and an eagerness to learn. I find our students to be polite, humorous, inquisitive and an overall joy to be around. The staff, well, I could not ask for a better team. They are some of the most dedicated, hardworking and fun-loving educators I have ever had the pleasure to work with. From the moment students and staff walked back into the building in early August, I knew that I was in the right place.

Q. What do you enjoy most about working with second and third graders?

A. Second and third graders are not only excited to come to school, they are honest, encouraging, curious and wanting to please the adults around them. When I visit classrooms, I witness them collaborating, questioning one another and exploring new ways to solve problems. They are not afraid to try new things. If they see another student looking sad or without someone to talk to, I have seen Ross students walk over to the other student and positively encourage them. I love second and third graders because their independence is sprouting. At times, they need a little support in making the best possible decisions, and our staff is great at allowing their personalities to develop and shine, yet guiding them in the right direction.

Q. How has your transition from MacArthur to Ross gone?

A. The transition has gone smoother than I anticipated. I can credit much of that to the fact that I was already familiar with the mission and vision of D23. I did not have to get acclimated with the previous year's goals *and* try to figure out what was expected of me as the principal at a new school. I was able to spend a portion of last year and much of the summer with my awesome predecessor, Dr. Craig Curtis. Since he was taking over as an assistant superintendent, he was present on campus to walk me through the transition. Another benefit of transitioning from MacArthur to Betsy Ross is that I worked with many Ross staff members on committees the previous year. We were able to get acquainted without the anxiety that comes along with having a new administrator on the team. I had the pleasure of watching the Ross team collaborate before we knew that the opportunity for me to come on board would arise.

Q. Do you think the experience of being an elementary teacher earlier in your career will help you be an even better principal? How?

A. Yes, I truly believe that my elementary teaching experience will help me to be a better principal. Knowing the developmental stages of children, at the second and third grade level, helps me to better understand what they are and are not capable of doing and it helps me to respond to each child's strengths and areas of growth more effectively. I am cognizant of where students should be academically, socially and emotionally by the time they leave Betsy Ross. Although I loved my four years of serving as an assistant principal with middle school aged children, I did not realize how much I missed the elementary school aged children until our first week of school. Also, my elementary teaching experience helps me better connect with our phenomenal staff. I, like them, had the responsibility of teaching all core subjects to my students. Because of my experience with elementary standards, we can quickly and accurately solve curriculum questions together. Learning the standards and expectations for student growth is a huge hurdle that I do not fear because of the experience I have had with those same Common Core/NGSS standards and expectations.

Q. What are your hobbies or interests outside of school, and/or what do you like to do in your free time?

A. Outside of school, I spend most of my time with family and friends, especially my daughter, Brittanie. I have a variety of hobbies and interests including reading, cooking, sewing, crafting, most outdoor adventure activities and attending plays. My daughter and I also enjoy traveling. When she was younger, we would identify a region of the United States and spend two weeks on a driving adventure and exploring various cities throughout that region. This past summer we had the awesome pleasure of spending a week in beautiful Fajardo, Puerto Rico. One of my goals for myself over the next six months is to take golf lessons. I have the outfits, clubs, golf balls and everything that goes with it. I may never play like the infamous golfer Annika Sörenstam, but I do have fun learning about the game.

Mike Kaper

New MacArthur assistant principal, former Schaumburg District 54 social worker



Q. What made you want to join the District 23 community and MacArthur Middle School?

A. It was an easy choice. This is the district my wife and her siblings went through, and they had great experiences. It is also where my own children (Claire and Colin) will attend. It is an honor to have the opportunity to lead and help develop the youth in the community I care so much about.

Q. What do you like about working with this age group?

A. When thinking about identity, I believe these early teen years are pivotal. Youth begin to define themselves and learn academic, social and emotional skills that will help them thrive. Additionally, when we create safe environments where they feel comfort and belonging, they can have moments of bravery to try new things. This is important during these crucial years when students find their purpose and their reason why. Their trajectories can be changed so they go on to accomplish amazing achievements and experience peak moments.

Q. How will the skills and experience you gained as a social worker help you as an assistant principal of middle school students?

A. That's a great part about my foundation as a social worker, there are so many skills that are transferable to the role. For example, while it may feel like I have been an assistant principal for just a cup of coffee, I have already leveraged my background knowledge of listening to learn from others, being empathetic in my responses, identifying root causes and antecedents to behaviors, and utilizing trauma-informed and restorative practices while working through student incidents.

Q. What are your hobbies or interests outside of school, and/or what do you like to do in your free time?

A. During my free time, you can often find my wife and I playing with our children at the various parks around town. A personal favorite is the play place at Lake Arlington. I also dabble in

playing some video games for self-care, which I try to justify to my wife as a way of connecting and understanding some of the video game terms the youth use.