

2023 New Principal Bios

Clarissa Zellars

Academy at Old Cockrill

Ms. Clarissa Zellars earned her bachelor's degree in mathematics at Florida A&M University and her master's degree in mathematics education at Alabama A&M University. She joined Metro Schools as a mathematics teacher in 2000 and has worked in various positions in the district's Curriculum and Instruction and Federal Programs and Grants Departments, as well as serving as assistant principal at Hillwood and Whites Creek high schools and principal at Antioch High for the past five years.

Nekesha Burnette

Antioch High School

Nekesha Burnette is an experienced MNPS educator and administrator who has prior experience as a teacher and academy coach at Antioch and is currently an assistant principal at Maplewood High.

Ms. Burnette earned her bachelor's degree in biology and master's degree in curriculum and instruction at Tennessee State University and an educational specialist degree in instructional leadership at Tennessee Tech University. During her time with Metro Schools, she has taught science at Stratford, Glenclyff and Antioch high schools and served as an academy coach, Freshman Academy principal and is currently the Health and Electrical Services Academy principal at Maplewood High.

Dr. Deante' Alexander

Cane Ridge High School

Dr. Alexander has 12 years' experience and began his MNPS career as a business and marketing teacher, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and academy lead teacher at Pearl-Cohn. He later served as dean of students at Glenclyff High School and as an academy principal at Antioch High, before moving to Wilson County to take a principal position. He is excited to return to MNPS to become Cane Ridge's next principal.

He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in education from Middle Tennessee State University and his educational specialist and doctorate degrees in educational leadership from Union University.

Dr. Casey Campbell (interim to full-time placement)

Cockrill Elementary

Dr. Campbell has more than 17 years of experience in education as a teacher, dean of instruction, teacher mentor and assistant principal. Prior to coming to Cockrill as interim principal, he served as assistant principal at Gower Elementary School for four years. He holds a master's degree in special education from Tennessee State University and a doctorate in assessment, learning and school improvement from Middle Tennessee State University.

Jon Mahaffey (interim to full-time placement)

Cora Howe

Jon Mahaffey earned his master's degree in special education from the University of North Texas and his educational specialist degree in education leadership from Lipscomb University. He began his teaching career with Metro Schools as a high school English teacher before becoming the transition liaison and later the dean of instruction and assistant principal at Cora Howe.

Dr. Hank Staggs (interim to full-time placement)

Crieve Hall

Dr. Staggs has spent most of his 30-year career serving as a school principal or directly training and coaching school principals. He served as a director at the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, a national educational non-profit, and as a senior director at the Tennessee Department of Education. Prior to the TDOE, Dr. Staggs was director and assistant professor of educational leadership at Lipscomb University, served as an adjunct teacher at several local universities, and worked in both principal and assistant principal roles.

He holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Freed-Hardeman University, and a doctorate in administration and supervision from Tennessee State University. He has extensive experience and training in leadership coaching and previously held certification with the International Coach Federation as an Associate Certified Coach (ACC).

Celia Jolly (interim)

Croft Middle

Ms. Jolly has worked for MNPS for more than 22 years as a teacher at Nashville School of the Arts and Stratford High, dean of students at Stratford, and academy principal and Overton and Hillwood High Schools. For the past five years, she has been the academy principal for Hillwood's Art, Design and Communication/Engineering Academy.

She earned her bachelor's degree in political science at Middle Tennessee State University and her master's degree in educational leadership at Trevecca Nazarene University. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Trevecca.

Dr. Ashley Roby

East Middle

Dr. Ashley Roby has served in Metro Schools since 2005 at both the elementary and middle school levels as a classroom teacher, numeracy coach, Title I facilitator and most recently as the assistant principal at Eakin Elementary.

An MNPS graduate, Dr. Roby holds both a bachelor's and master's degree in education from Tennessee State University and a doctorate degree from Trevecca Nazarene University. She also holds numerous awards and is involved in various professional and community organizations.

Dr. Tonya Dennis

Haynes Middle

Dr. Tonya Dennis served nearly three years as principal at Haynes from 2012 to 2015. In addition, she has worked as a teacher, assistant principal and principal at various other district schools, served as an adjunct professor at Tennessee State University, and as an educational consultant for other schools and school systems.

Dr. Dennis earned her bachelor's degree in English from Tennessee State University, as well as a master's in public administration and a doctorate in educational administration from the University of Akron in Akron, OH. She has obtained numerous educational certifications and is a lifelong learner – both completing and presenting at various professional development workshops and training programs.

Dr. Lauren Wilson**Andrew Jackson Elementary**

Dr. Lauren Wilson has more than 13 years' experience as a kindergarten and special education teacher, literacy coach and assistant principal. She earned her doctorate and educational specialist degrees in administration and leadership from Carson-Newman University, her master's degree in special education from Vanderbilt University and her bachelor's degree in education from Tennessee State University.

Dr. Brent Luther (interim)**Hull-Jackson Elementary**

Dr. Brent Luther has been named the interim principal for Hull-Jackson for the 2023-24 school year. Dr. Luther is currently an assistant principal at MNPS Virtual School and has more than 12 years of experience. Prior to his current role, he was a teacher and an elementary numeracy instructional specialist.

Amanda Keeley**Joelton Elementary**

Ms. Keeley graduated from Merrimack College with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a minor in elementary education. She earned a master's degree in educational leadership from American College of Education. She brings more than 19 years of experience with her as a teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal. She has spent most of her career at Joelton Elementary.

Dr. Tesia Wilson (interim to full-time placement)**Jones Paideia**

Dr. Tesia Wilson is a graduate of MNPS and has served in the district for nearly 20 years. Her extensive experience as a teacher, literacy coach, teacher mentor and assistant principal has given her an appreciation of each role and how each role works together to build an effective, resourceful, and innovative school culture. She previously served as assistant principal at Alex Green Design Technology Magnet and as an adjunct professor at Austin Peay State University.

Dr. Wilson holds a doctoral degree from Lipscomb University, an educational specialist degree from MTSU, and master's and bachelor's degrees from Tennessee State University.

Shelly Robinson

Tom Joy Elementary

Dr. Shelly Robinson has 16 years of administrative experience and has served as the executive principal of Two Rivers Middle School, as well as a teacher and assistant principal in Montgomery County.

She earned her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Trevecca Nazarene University, Her ED.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from Austin Peay State University, her M.A. in Educational Leadership from Trevecca Nazarene University, and a B.S. degree in English from Austin Peay State University.

Kamilah Mathews

A.Z. Kelley

Kamilah Mathews is an instructional leader with 17 years of teaching, coaching and leadership experience. She most recently served as the assistant principal at Inglewood Elementary School. Mrs. Mathews holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, and an educational specialist degree in accountability and instructional leadership.

Dr. Doniethia Williams (fyi to comms, we profiled her for Black Excellence piece

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BemcFtMrVUE>)

JF Kennedy Middle

Dr. Doniethia Williams, herself a graduate of Antioch High School, has more than 15 years' experience in Metro Schools and comes to JFK from Wright Middle, where she has been the assistant principal for the past five years. She has also worked as dean of instruction at Wright, and as a numeracy coach and algebra teacher at Antioch High and algebra teacher at Glencliff High.

Dr. Williams earned her bachelor's degree in middle grades mathematics education from UT Chattanooga and her masters and educational specialist degrees in administration and supervision from Tennessee State University. She also earned her doctorate in educational leadership from TSU.

Bruce Jackson

McGavock High

Mr. Bruce Jackson has spent the past five years as executive principal of East Magnet Middle School and has prior experience as a teacher and assistant principal at Stratford High School and MNPS Middle Alternative Learning Center. He is returning to McGavock, where he served seven years as our Freshman Academy principal.

Mr. Jackson earned his bachelor's degree in political science from Tennessee State University and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from Trevecca University. He previously taught government, economics, geography and social studies and was named Stratford High's Teacher of the Year in 2008-09.

Dr. Nae'Shara Neal**Meigs Middle**

Dr. Neal served as a biology teacher and instructional coach before becoming an administrator. She most recently served as the curriculum and instruction principal and Cambridge coordinator at McGavock High School. Dr. Neal has more than 15 years of teaching experience and was selected to be the master teacher of the MNPS Demonstration School in which she opened her classroom to principals and teachers across the district to model best practices.

Brenda Diaz (interim- will also continue as principal of Big Picture)**MNPS Virtual**

Dr. Diaz also serves as the executive principal of Nashville Big Picture High School, a position she will continue jointly with her new role at MNPS Virtual School. With an almost 30-year career in education, she believes strongly in small, personalized learning environments.

She received her bachelor's degree in English from Rust College; master's in curriculum and instruction from the University of Mississippi; educational leadership endorsement from the University of Memphis; and her Doctor of Education Degree from Union University. Dr. Diaz has been honored as the 2022 Big Picture Learning Ted Sizer School Leader of the Year; 2022-23 Metro Nashville Public Schools High School Principal of the Year; Metro Nashville Public Schools 2018 Out of the Box Leader/Employee Recognition recipient and a Metro Nashville Public Schools 2019 Women Who Overcome Challenges to Impact Others in Educational Leadership recipient.

Nia Perry**Mt. View**

Mrs. Nia Perry has spent the past six years at Cane Ridge Elementary School as assistant principal and has more than 17 years of elementary education experience. In addition to her time at Cane Ridge Elementary, Mrs. Perry is a proud MNPS graduate who has also served as a teacher, instructional coach and Dean of Instruction.

She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Alabama State University, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Teacher's College, Columbia University, a master's degree in public administration from Tennessee State University, and an educational specialist degree in administration and supervision from Middle Tennessee State University. She is currently pursuing her doctorate from Lipscomb University.

Dr. Kelby Garner**Overton High School**

Upon graduating from John Overton High School, Dr. Garner enrolled at Tennessee State University, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. Dr. Garner served as an adult case manager at Mental Health Cooperative for several years. Her caseload consisted of adults with severe and persistent mental illness. After serving this fragile population, Dr. Garner enrolled in graduate school at Tennessee

State University to become a professional school counselor. She felt that she could serve in a preventative manner, helping students learn coping strategies to help with the ambiguity of life. Dr. Garner served many schools as a college and career counselor through the Martha O'Bryan Center at Stratford High's "Top Floor" and Maplewood High's "College Zone." Dr. Garner also served as a literacy tutor at Isaac Litton Middle School and as a professional school counselor in Cheatham County before joining MNPS Virtual School.

Dr. Garner earned both an educational specialist and a Doctor of Education degree from Carson-Newman University. She has served many roles as a professional school counselor, dean of student affairs, dean of instruction, assistant principal, and finally, executive principal at MNPS Virtual School. Dr. Garner is also an adjunct professor at Tennessee State University and Trevecca Nazarene University.

Raquel González

Pennington ES

Raquel González brings 28 years of experience to Pennington, having served as a teacher, science coordinator, assistant principal and principal in Chicago, IL. She holds a bachelor's degree in elementary and secondary education from Northeastern Illinois University and a master's degree in school leadership from Concordia University.

Dr. Michael Pratt (interim now full-time placement)

Stratford STEM High School

Dr. Michael Pratt has served the MNPS community for nearly 16 years, including as an administrator at East Nashville Magnet High School and John Early Middle Magnet. He holds a master's degree in cultural foundations of education from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and recently completed a doctorate in educational leadership at Trevecca Nazarene University.

Matthew Earls

Tusculum Elementary

Matthew Earls is a graduate of Metro Nashville Public Schools and comes to Tusculum Elementary from Overton High School, where he served as an Academy principal and principal of Curriculum and Instruction for seven years. Prior to that, he taught English at Apollo Middle School for seven years and then served as the Dean of Students for one year.

Mr. Earls holds a bachelor's degree from Middle Tennessee State University and a master's degree from Bethel University.

Dr. Rhonda Bledsoe (interim)

Two Rivers Middle

Dr. Rhonda Bledsoe has 16 years of experience in education and has served in MNPS for the last 14 years as a teacher, department chair, and administrator. She currently serves as assistant principal at Margaret Allen Middle and is excited to be joining the Two Rivers family. She brings

experience in strengthening school climate and culture and served on the Leader in Me Implementation team.

Dr. Bledsoe holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Architectural Engineering and a master's degree in administration and supervision from Tennessee State University. She also earned an educational specialist degree in accountability and instructional leadership and her doctorate degree in leadership and professional practice from Trevecca Nazarene University. She participated in Metro Schools' Aspiring Principals program in 2022-2023.

Janelle Brooks

Warner Elementary

Ms. Brooks brings more than 13 years of education experience to her new role at Warner Elementary, most recently serving as the assistant principal at Madison Middle School. In her tenure, she has also served as a teacher, numeracy coach and instructional coach.

Earning her bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt University and her master's as an Ayers Fellow from Lipscomb University, Ms. Brooks plans to graduate from Lipscomb with her doctoral degree this fall.

Marina (Molly) Rucker (interim now full-time)

Whitsitt Elementary

Prior to serving as Whitsitt's assistant principal and interim principal, Ms. Rucker was a teacher and literacy coach at Cockrill Elementary School. She also taught in Knox County Schools. She graduated with a bachelor's degree from The University of Tennessee, a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Lincoln Memorial University, and an educational specialist degree in educational leadership from Lipscomb University.