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Sunday, January 21, 2024

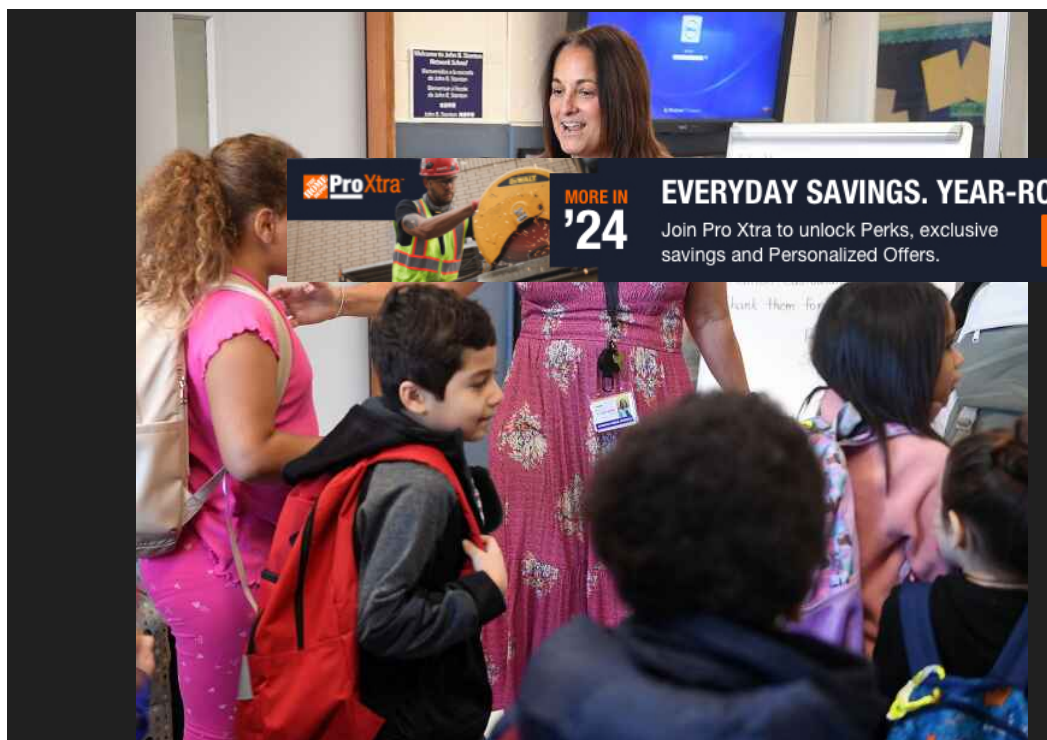
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Norwich acting superintendent focusing on student academics



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Acting Norwich Superintendent Susan Lessard greets students as they arrive at John B. Stanton School on Monday, Oct. 2, 2023. Lessard was the principal at the school before being appointed acting superintendent on Sept. 18, 2023. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)

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October 02, 2023 5:47 pm • Last Updated: October 02, 2023 7:30 pm

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Norwich — During her first two weeks as acting school superintendent, Susan Lessard has met with state and city leaders, talked with the architect designing new schools and found time Monday morning to r

Lessard, principal at the John B. Stanton elementary school, has had a full agenda since she was named Sept. 18 by the Board of Education. That night, the board **placed Superintendent Kristen Stringfellow** on an investigation into allegations she and Assistant Superintendent Tamara Gloster fostered a work climate of intimidation.

Lessard placed Gloster on paid leave Sept. 25 following a meeting with her. Two days later, the board **al** of retired Student Services Director Jamie Bender as acting assistant superintendent.

The board has hired Hartford attorney Kyle McClain to conduct the investigation into the personnel case of Stringfellow and Gloster.

Lessard said Monday she is not involved in the investigation and has not been contacted by the attorney.

“The plans are to move forward and to keep kids at the forefront of all our decisions,” Lessard said.

On Friday, Lessard met with new NFA Head of School Nathan Quesnel to discuss partnerships between the school district, also focusing on students, she said.

NFA students in the Project Outreach student service program will tutor Norwich students in reading as part of a partnership.

The Norwich school district received a new 21st Century Community Learning Center grant to create a new internship program, hiring 10 high school students from NFA, Norwich Regional Technical High School and College to tutor elementary school students. The students will be paid \$22 per hour and work two hours a week, Norwich school district spokeswoman Zakkyya Williams said.

A second eight-week session will be held in spring.

The Norwich school district implemented a new reading curriculum by Savvas Learning Co. this year and she said she will work with school administrators and teachers in each school to make sure they have support.

At the Oct. 10 Board of Education meeting, Lessard will present data from last spring’s statewide achievement tests that emphasize student growth through the school year, aiming at 100% growth from last year’s scores to this year’s.

Several issues have arisen already in the new school year, including a dramatic jump in immigrant students. The district saw an increase of about 200 students in the multilingual learners program over last year, while 107 students were not proficient and left the program over the past three years, Williams said.

The district started the school year with 709 MLL students and now has 767, with more anticipated during the year, Williams said. Adult education English classes also are full, she said.

Lessard said she will work with Norwich Adult Education Director John Glover to discuss ways to engage and assist families moving into the city.

“They make our schools richer,” Lessard said of immigrant families. “We welcome them and their families into our community. They enrich our schools.”

Lessard’s appointment came as the city is designing the first two new elementary schools in a voter-approved construction project to build four new elementary schools. Architectural plans are being designed for the new schools and a new Stanton school.

Biden

04:24 pm

Conn. man, 66, injured after crashing snowmobile into tree in southern Vermont, officials say

04:23 pm

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Lessard said it is critical that school staff give input before the architectural drawings are finalized. She has scheduled an online meeting with a several school staff and the architect Oct 12 to discuss placement of classrooms, offices and support services in each building. She said school psychologists, social workers and counselors must have a say in where they are placed in each school.

Lessard on Friday met with City Manager John Salomone to discuss how the new schools will serve the public, proposing that gymnasiums, libraries and classrooms to be used for public programs have easy access to parking lots.

Lessard has served as principal at Stanton since 2017 and is familiar with that school and with central office staff. She wants to visit all city schools to meet teachers and families. She will ask principals if they would like her to hold office hours in their buildings.

She suggested the visits take place either at student arrival or dismissal times, so she could meet parents dropping off or picking up students.

“I went to dismissal time at Stanton to meet families,” Lessard said. “Those are good times to have feedback and talk to parents.”

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READER COMMENTS

Lon Lipman October 3, 2023 at 17:13

[Report](#)

Ms Lessard is a confident supportive leader- thankfully she stuck with Norwich during the Stringfellow reign and can steer the district back on its feet and progress forward with teacher, staff and students' wellbeing and success at the forefront of her agenda.
Submitted by Gabe Lipman

Richard Golden October 3, 2023 at 16:40

[Report](#)

” In the first place, God made idiots. That was for practice. Then he made school boards.” Mark Twain

Joanne Philbrick October 3, 2023 at 15:14

[Report](#)

I truly don't understand the thought process of so many. I would like to rent 15 minutes in your head to try and make sense. The Norwich BOE has been a debacle for quite some time. That was then and this is now. We need to move forward and that doesn't mean throwing more money at a lost cause. School is no longer about education and teachers can't teach. We are raising a generation of idiots who are completely addicted and reliant on their cell phones. Everybody gets a trophy and no one is held accountable. Stop babying everyone. Life is hard. Some are winners and some are losers. It has or shouldn't have any bearing on the color of skin and country of origin. This is America. We speak English here. And if you work hard and do the right thing you will achieve success. Lastly. Are we no paying for a sup't and ass't sup't who are on adm leave as well as the new acting successors?

Michael Freeman October 3, 2023 at 06:01

[Report](#)

Kudos to acting school superintendent, Susan Lessard, for jumping in to make a positive difference in the Norwich Public Schools.

Michael Freeman October 3, 2023 at 05:57

[Report](#)