

# VICE PRINCIPAL FOCUS:

## Getting to Know Vice Principal Jonathan Fey



### You grew up in Pleasant Hill. Tell us about your formative years and education.

It is very difficult to talk about my years growing up without talking about my teachers and, more specifically, my music teachers. Everything about who I am has been influenced by these people; learning recorder from Walt Jennings at Strandwood Elementary, performing my first jazz trombone solo with MaryAnnette Venti at Grove Intermediate, and having a second father help me to discover who I am as a musician, human being and as a teacher from James Hodge at College Park High School. I learned something valuable from each of these individuals, things which have stuck with me all through my years. From Walt, I learned to have fun with new experiences, from MaryAnnette the value of organization and the benefits of hard work, and from Jim it was the importance of being a life-long learner. It was these lessons which reminded me to use every experience as a chance to learn something new about myself either positive or negative. I remember after graduating high school, and as a student at Diablo Valley College, was the time I discovered I wanted to become a teacher. I got the chance to return to my alma mater and work with the marching band, the drum majors, and ultimately help teach the jazz program. As a student in my college classes I was constantly observing behaviors of my professors, meticulously taking note of what I liked about their teaching styles and what I did not. It was an interesting experience being in a class trying to learn the subject and at the same time learn something about myself and the profession I wanted to join.

### When did you come to Northgate and why?

I was hired in 2014, about 1 month after Principal McAlister was hired. The story of how I got here is rather interesting. I interviewed during that previous summer. I think I called the personnel office about every other week asking about the status of the job opening and they would tell me to just hold on and wait, that a call would be coming my way soon letting me know. I knew there was an opening at Northgate; but I also knew the district wanted to hire a principal first before deciding on me. They wanted to allow the principal to have input on who to hire as vice principal. It was early October when I got the call from Michael to meet for an interview; and the rest is history. I was very fortunate my former principal from the school I was teaching at was so supportive of me getting this job. That support also extended to releasing me from my teaching position in the middle of the school year in order to join the Northgate staff. The answer to why goes back to how I approach my learning. I have found throughout my career the paths which I have chosen were guided by my desire to do that job better than what I have seen being done. I have had the pleasure to work with some excellent administrators, and I have also had to work with some ineffective administrators. After teaching for 23 years in the classroom, I decided I wanted to be challenged and to do the right job to the best of my ability. I have to say my commute is a lot better than what it used to be so that was definitely a motivator; but I strongly believe my desire to come to Northgate was due to my desire to give back to the Mount Diablo Unified School District for the positive way I was brought up. I am proud to say I am a product of this district and I couldn't have accomplished or contributed all I have done in my career without my experiences here in this district.

### In your role as Vice Principal, what are your responsibilities and priorities?

I would say my number one responsibility and priority number one is to keep our students and staff safe while they are here on campus. While the statement seems simplistic, the enormity of that responsibility is not lost on me. I genuinely care about how students and staff feel about our school. I know if there is anything I can do to make a student smile or to make a staff member's job easier or more manageable, I will do my best to make it happen. I also see my job as being a point of contact for all parents to the school. I believe I have established a reputation within our community of listening to the concerns of the community. I may not agree with everyone, and a decision I make may not be liked by everyone - but I strive to collect as much information I can before making a decision. Once that decision is made, I try to be as transparent as possible so people know what went into making that decision. I have had several bumps along the way being a new administrator and I am grateful for every opportunity to learn. I have a number of areas I currently oversee. Along with handling discipline and being the liaison for the English, Special Education and Visual/Performing Arts Departments; I oversee attendance, the bell schedule, WASC and our school's publications - Sentinel and Yearbook. The biggest job I have is creating and managing the Master Schedule where I am in charge of taking our student's course requests and create class offerings

and room assignments for the entire school. I probably get the most passionate feedback from parents and students when it comes to classes and scheduling - which I totally understand. When it comes to making decisions about when a class can be taught, especially when that class is only offered for one period in the day, it's impossible to find the period which meets everyone's needs; no matter how much I wish it could. The master schedule is also that conundrum of trying to make everyone happy knowing that is an impossible goal to reach. Still, whenever I am working on it I am trying my hardest to attain that goal.

### **What is unique about Northgate? What changes have you noticed since you arrived?**

Northgate has always had a reputation of being a high achieving school, even when I was a student in the district. One thing which is unique has to be our Senior Project and Mock Congress. I was amazed at what our students are accomplishing during their senior year. With my involvement with WASC I get the opportunity to visit a lot of different schools all around the state of California. These types of culminating projects are few and far between - and they are so important towards the measuring of our student's readiness for whatever is next based on what skills and traits we as a school value. From an internal perspective of growing up with this, most of our community would probably believe this is something every school does - you would be surprised at how many schools don't have something like this in place. I am continually amazed at the amount of work which goes into making this happen on the part of our faculty and staff. This isn't just something which the students have to do, the faculty and staff really get behind this which makes it more about being a Bronco.

The staff here at Northgate is the strongest I have come across when it comes to setting the culture for a school. They honestly care about who these kids are and who they will be once they leave these halls. I am constantly impressed with how much they care about each other and for our students. I am so proud to be a part of this team and look forward to coming into work every day because of them.

### **As you think about Northgate's future, what are you most excited about?**

What excites me the most is our desire to look at data to inform and improve student achievement. With the WASC visit, this has been a very busy year at Northgate. I feel like if there was going to be one legacy I would instill at Northgate, it would be the ability to collect and analyze data in order to improve all aspects of our school. Data can come in a variety of ways; from test scores to grade distributions, from survey results to anecdotal. All of these things work together to help tell our story. Our story isn't just one piece of data, it is the combination and culmination of all these perspectives from all of our stakeholders which tell us who we are. I am anxious about what this will bring to our school in the ways of teachers sharing best practices or refining the narrative of what this school represents. What my experience here so far has told me is this school has long standing traditions of excellence which we need to continue to build upon. Are all our test scores great? No, but they are getting better and they only tell one part of the story. What I am anxious to be a part of is the process of turning good into great. We are doing some good things here at this school; but how do we improve what is good in order to achieve greatness in all areas. We may not hit all of our targets, but the process of improvement and growth are sometimes more about the journey and less about the destination.

### **What do you do outside of work?**

What I try not to do outside of work is more work. I am a firm believer you have to work to live and not live to work. With that in mind I am involved as a soccer referee in Pleasanton; but I spend most of my time currently managing my son's little league baseball team and volunteer umpiring all levels of little league. I am considered the baseball rules expert in our league, so I have attended and conducted several trainings on the rules of little league baseball for umpires and managers alike. I have served as a senior umpire helping to train our over 130 junior umpires in our league. I find it is very rewarding to continue giving back for the advancement of our youth. Some of my more serious hobbies include amateur radio, board games and card games. We try to have a family game night every week where the entire family plays together. Speaking of family, I have been married to my beautiful and supportive wife for 21 years. She is a licensed CPA who specializes in Taxes, so she is really busy this time of year. We have three wonderful, fun and energetic children who are currently in 8th grade, 7th grade and 2nd grade. My two oldest are involved with music and all three of them are kept busy with soccer and baseball almost all year round.

