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CUSD veteran brings new enthusiasm to Mountain View

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Natalie Taylor stepped in as Mountain View's interim principal last February after the school's former head, Clara Dehmer, moved on to a post as assistant principal of student services at Claremont High School.

This year, it's official.

As Ms. Taylor becomes Mountain View's permanent principal, she will likely have less of an adjustment period than most new administrators. It's not just because she had several months last year to get her feet wet. Ms. Taylor's previous post was a decade-long stint as a classroom teacher at Oakmont Elementary School.

We often resist following in our parents' footsteps, and Ms. Taylor is no exception. When she enrolled at Claremont Graduate University after earning her bachelor's degree at Azusa Pacific University, she was initially focusing on women's studies and religion.

"I didn't want to teach, because my mom was a teacher," she said.

She began substitute teaching on days she didn't have class, though—exclusively in the Claremont Unified School District—and was immediately smitten.

"I loved it," she said.

Things fell into place quickly for Ms. Taylor, who switched courses and got a teaching credential. While she was a substitute, she covered Kevin Ward's class at Oakmont Elementary School. Mr. Ward was impressed with the way she handled his students and so the next year, when he became Oakmont's principal, Ms. Taylor was one of the first teachers he hired.

She was a teacher at Oakmont for several years under the leadership of Mr. Ward. After Mr. Ward became CUSD's assistant superintendent of human services, Ms. Taylor taught for three years under the guidance of current Oakmont principal Stacey Stewart. She feels fortunate to have worked with both administrators, whom she considers mentors.

Mr. Ward is the consummate relationship-builder, Ms. Taylor said. She has learned from his example how important it is to connect with every stakeholder at a school, from teachers to students to parents. Her time with Ms. Stewart brought other lessons.

"Stacy is the most intense instructional leader. She is so knowledgeable when it comes to instructional leadership," Ms. Taylor said. "I learned so much about good teaching from her. Between what I learned from Kevin and what I learned from Stacey, I like to think I've become a pretty good balance of the two."

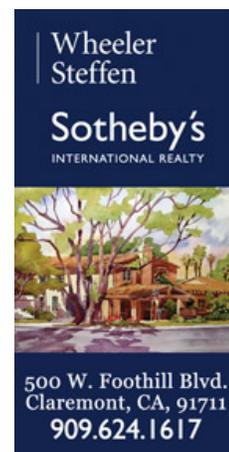
She has not only become good friends with Ms. Stewart but also with her husband Dave Stewart, the principal at Vista del Valle Elementary School. One reason she feels a connection with the Stewarts is they all have a keen interest in outdoor activities.

Ms. Taylor's family includes her husband Heath, her 3-year-old daughter Clare and her 6-year-old son Max (who just

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happens to be best friends with his Oakmont classmate, the Stewarts' son Matthew).

The Taylors spend as much of their time outdoors as possible, snowboarding, waterskiing, wakeboarding and racing cars in the desert. Ms. Taylor, who grew up in Alta Loma, has enjoyed racing since she was a kid because her dad builds racecars for a living.

She has already begun to emulate the way the Stewarts incorporate athletics into their schools. Last year, she instituted lunchtime leagues where students got to compete in sports like soccer and basketball during their break, and she plans to do that again this year. Ms. Taylor will also be following the example of Oakmont and Vista in bringing Project Champion—a program where students of all ages log miles of running during the school year—to Mountain View.

Ms. Taylor is also an advocate for taking care of the outdoors. She began the recycling program at Oakmont years ago and worked diligently with Mr. Ward to transform the campus into the Oakmont Outdoor School.

"I was always known as the green teacher," she said.

This year, Ms. Taylor will initiate the Grades of Green program at the school, where students work to reduce lunchtime trash and engage in recycling and composting. Last year, Vista del Valle won the organization's Trash Free Lunch Challenge and an accompanying \$1,000 prize by reducing the school's waste by 95 percent. Now, Mountain View students will be embracing the less-is-more environmental philosophy.

Ms. Taylor is looking forward to serving as principal for a school with a remarkable amount of diversity. Students come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds, their parents have vastly differing education levels and the schools' many English language learners speak everything from Spanish to Arabic at their homes.

For Ms. Taylor, understanding Mountain View's diversity includes having expectations for the student that are not cookie-cutter but relate to their circumstances. She also firmly believes that it takes teamwork to help everyone reach their best. With this in mind, Ms. Taylor, along with her staff, have crafted a new, streamlined mission statement: "Mountain View believes all learners can reach individual academic success through critical thinking and collaboration."

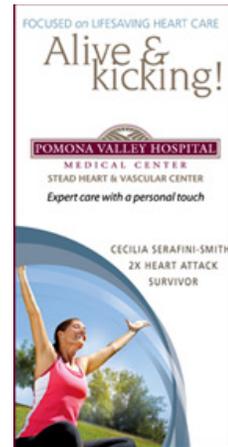
"We want kids to understand we want them to reach THEIR best," Ms. Taylor explained.

Even as she moves into administration, Ms. Taylor considers herself foremost a teacher.

"Anytime anyone needs someone to cover a class, I'm like, 'I'll do it!'"

—Sarah Torribio

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