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Principal changes for Moraga

By Sora O'Doherty



Brian Sullivan with family Photo provided

Joaquin Moraga Assistant Principal Brian Sullivan has been hired to replace retiring Elaine Frank as principal of Donald Rheem Elementary School for the 2017-18 school year. The Moraga School Board also hired Stephanie Richards as principal of Los Perales Elementary School. Both new principals started their positions in July.

Elaine Frank served at Rheem for 20 years, 30 years total in the Moraga School District. Superintendent Bruce K. Burns commented on Frank's time in Moraga: "Frank's leadership established a very special Rheem School community. For more than 20 years, Principal Frank has dedicated herself to ensuring Rheem students not only received a high quality academic education, but also one where there was concentrated focus on each and every student's social and emotional well-being. How Principal Frank dedicated herself to Rheem School has been her trademark, one that created an exceptional learning environment."

In honor of her service, the multipurpose room at the school has been renamed the Elaine Frank Roadrunner Hall. It will be graced with Frank's gift to the school: a seven-by-seven foot quilt she sewed from her collection of 20 years of Rheem spirit wear. The campus has also been beautified by a mosaic commissioned by the PTA from tile artist Mark Panelli, who is the uncle of two Rheem students. The mosaic is installed on the outside wall of the office, with a plaque dedicating it to Frank,

with one of her oft-repeated phrases: "I love this school!" The mosaic features a butterfly theme to echo the kindergarten Butterfly Parade. Kim Habas, president of the PTA, said they love that theme because it symbolizes kindergarteners going from chrysalis to flying out into the world. And, she added, that is like Frank, who is launching herself into a new life.

Frank is enthusiastic about the arrival of new Principal Sullivan. "I am often proud of the positive spirit of Rheem students, but I had a unique opportunity to be especially impressed by their caring and enthusiasm," Frank said. "Rheem's next principal, Mr. Brian Sullivan, stopped by to tour the campus with me and also to meet the students during their lunch time. The kids were wide-eyed and curious as they saw me escort the tall, tie-clad man onto the Multi-Use Room stage. Then, I told them that this person was someone very special ... 'the next principal of Rheem school ... Mr. Sullivan!' With that announcement, the room immediately erupted into rousing cheers and hearty applause. In that one spontaneous moment, without skipping a beat, the students welcomed Mr. Sullivan with a big-hearted, 'Rheem Team' outpouring of trust and enthusiasm.

"During lunch recess, I received a call on the walkie-talkie from a yard supervisor, 'Who is that man out on the field?' So, I explained. The response: 'OK, just wanted to make sure! The kids are just swarming him!' I had to smile."

Sullivan served as vice principal at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School for one year. Before that he was at Saint Agnes School in Concord for 10 years as both teacher and vice principal. Born in San Francisco, Sullivan grew up in Concord with his bother and sister. He now lives in Moraga with his wife, Kelly, and their three children who attend Camino Pablo Elementary School.

Sullivan loves the real team spirit at Rheem, shared not just by the staff, not just by the students, but by everyone. Sullivan is a team guy, having played college basketball Eastern Washington University and coached high school basketball for 23 years.

After Eastern Washington, Sullivan attended Saint Mary's College for his administrative certificate and master's degree before teaching at Northgate High School for seven years and De La Salle High School for 17 years. Highlights of his career include being part of three state champion teams. Sullivan loves connecting with kids and seeing them years later, whether it be one, two, or 20 years.

Richards had a long career in Oakland schools before coming to Moraga, and she couldn't be happier with the warm welcome she has received thus far. Even on her second interview, Richards was impressed when the Superintendent of Schools phoned her to warn her of the Canyon Bridge problem.

Richards graduated from Antioch College in Ohio and began teaching in Oakland in 1998, first substitute teaching, then teaching at Acorn Woodland Elementary School. She was chosen for the Bay Area New Leaders to receive a full scholarship under which she received her administrative credentials in two years. She then worked as co-principal at Education for Change Public Schools in the Fruitvale area of Oakland and was Assistant Principal of Achieve Academy.

Richards, who lives in Oakland, is excited to share what she has learned in Oakland, but also thinks that the new job will be an amazing learning opportunity. She looks forward to getting to know the students, the families and the community. Impressed with teaching she has observed at Los Perelas, Richards says the new job feels right. She added that she doesn't want to go beyond being a principal because for her the connection to the classroom is very important. She has met with the PTA, and she is continually impressed.

"I feel very blessed that I get to wake up every day with a smile, Richards concluded, "so blessed to be able to do the work I am so passionate about."



Elaine Frank Photo Sora O'Doherty

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