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New LafSD Superintendent excited to meet district students & families

By Sharon K. Sobotta



Dr. Brent Stephens Photo Sharon K. Sobotta

Just as students are getting acclimated to their new routines with the arrival of the new school year, the new superintendent Dr. Brent Stephens is settling into the Lafayette School District.

After a three year tenure as the superintendent for Berkeley Unified School district, Stephens began his tenure in Lafayette in July. "I had gotten to the point after contending with the pandemic both at home and in the school district, that a change felt important and necessary," Stephens says. "One of my goals was to find a district where I would have more of an opportunity to work directly with principals and teachers and would still give me a reasonable amount of time to be with my daughter who is a senior in high school," Stephens says. "I learned about the (the Lafayette school district and the) way the community rallies around the public schools and its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (and) it was very appealing to me."

Stephens didn't bring a particular agenda to the district. Instead, he says he's committed to meeting students, family, staff and the Lafayette community where they are at and co-crafting and supporting the vision. "Meeting people is absolutely my biggest goal. I really value being out in the schools, walking the hallways, seeing classrooms and hanging out with parents on the sidewalk. I'm going to be listening really hard and learning," Stephens says. "It's about getting to know the families that call Lafayette home and also about learning their concerns and aspirations."

Stephens is proud of the changes that are happening in the district this academic year ranging from onsite counselors at all elementary schools to universal lunch programs to the work being done to enhance and strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

"There's a lot of great work taking place that predates me. I'm plugging into the lines of conversation. When it's appropriate I can build on what's already there and add some different perspectives."

Stephens started his path as an educator way back when he was a 19-year-old college student at University of California, Santa Barbara with a position as a paraeducator, which he held for about three years. During that same time he had a side weekend gig as a janitor in the college dorms. After working as a paraprofessional educator for three years, Stephens joined his (then girlfriend, now) wife in the Bay Area to begin a credentialing program at the New College of California. He then spent eight years teaching in roles ranging from a bilingual Spanish teacher to a special ed teacher.

When asked about the most important lesson he's learned on his educational journey from working with students from all backgrounds, Stephens had a simple yet profound answer.

"We need to remember that every student is the hero in their own story," Stephens says. "Even when mistakes are made, we can learn and grow from them."

As for the adult generation, Stephens says he's learned that a lot can be accomplished simply by listening to each other. "I believe deeply that the answer is always in the room and that it's really a matter of listening effectively and trying to draw out from the people in the group," he says. "(There's a) sort of collective genius that exists in every group."

Greg Barnes, Assistant Superintendent of Student Success, says he believes Stephens' breadth of experience and approach to getting things done will benefit the district. "I'm particularly excited about the equity and special education work Brent has led over the years to see how it can inform our work in Lafayette," Barnes says. "(From what we've seen in the short time we've worked with Stephens), he is student centered and has a thoughtful approach to decision making."

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