

Tamara Stras posted in Newton South High School

### **Some news**

Dear NSHS Community,

It is with deep gratitude and mixed emotions that I share that I will be leaving my role as principal to accept a position as Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, in the Cambridge Public Schools, pending School Committee appointment and successful contract negotiations.

While I am excited for this next chapter in my professional journey, leaving this community is incredibly difficult as this school has become such an important part of my life and heart.

Over the past five years, it has been the honor of a lifetime to serve this community. Together, we have navigated moments of challenge, growth, celebration, and transformation. Through it all, I have remained grounded in one core belief: schools thrive when relationships are rooted in trust, collaboration, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to doing what is best for students. I thank you for sharing this belief with me.

I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together. Alongside an extraordinary staff, leadership team, students, and families, we have worked to create a school culture at South where every student feels seen, supported, and valued. We sharpened our instructional practices by engaging in collective teacher efficacy and by engaging deeply in curriculum review cycles with the Office of Teaching and Learning. We supported meaningful grading policy changes across all departments to better align with our values around learning and student growth to ensure the best possible outcomes for every student. Most recently, we have added Career Technical Education, including Dental and Information Support Services and Networking, while also expanding our dual enrollment opportunities. These incredible opportunities will expand future horizons for our young people.

Our collective commitment to equity and belonging led to tangible outcomes that I am very proud of! We increased the diversity of our staff through intentional recruitment and mentoring practices. We rebuilt our multi-tiered system of supports to better

support the needs of today's students, and redesigned our Grade 9 cluster teams to ensure students had the support necessary for success during the critical transition into high school. I am especially proud of the student-centered supports we created together including welcoming new programming such as the bridge for resilient youth in transition last school year. In my first two years as principal, we established a counseling center dedicated to proactively helping students build social and emotional skills. Additionally, we opened a school store run by our students, creating meaningful opportunities for independence, leadership, and inclusion.

Our work with restorative practices helped strengthen student relationships and contributed to a reduction in suspension rates. This year, through focused collaboration and care, we also significantly reduced chronic absenteeism rates among a population of students needing support. These vital accomplishments reflect the relentless dedication of our educators, counselors, deans, support staff, and families, and highlights how positive change can be implemented with shared beliefs.

One of the greatest joys of this role has been mentoring future leaders; from administrative interns to teacher leaders, and watching so many talented educators grow into impactful leaders within our school community has been the honor of a lifetime. I am also grateful for the strengthened partnerships we built with our Southside middle schools to better support students and families as they transition into ninth grade.

Most importantly, I will carry with me the relationships built within this community. The students who inspired me daily, the staff who continually demonstrated compassion and excellence, and the families who entrusted us with their children have all shaped me profoundly as a leader and as a person. This has been one of the hardest decisions of my life to make, and I do so with full appreciation for this community.

I will remember fondly the music that filled our halls during Passin' Time, the laughter during our Faculty Variety Show, the numerous amazing shows, musicals, and celebrations we so proudly engage in. I will miss the conversations, the laughter, and the kindness you all have shown me. While there are far too many memories to list, I will look back on my time here with nothing but love, pride, and appreciation for having known you all.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving as your principal. While I may be leaving this role, I will always remain one of your biggest supporters and champions. I

leave knowing this community will continue to thrive because of the incredible people who make it so special every single day.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Tamara (Tamii) Stras