



Nikki Gardner Approved as New Principal of Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center

June 20, 2023

Antioch CCSD 34 is pleased to announce that at the June 20, 2023 Board of Education meeting, Mrs. Nikki Gardner was approved as the new Principal of Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center, effective July 1, 2023.

Mrs. Gardner has served as the Principal of Washington School in Harvard Community Unit School District 50 for the last four years. While in this role, Mrs. Gardner oversaw the successful implementation of a tiered social emotional support system for preschool students. The Pyramid Model, amongst other programs she implemented, were recognized as gold quality standard for Pre-K and the school's Birth to 3 program received recognition as a Blue Ribbon Affiliate program. She is passionate about early childhood education and is a strong advocate for the implementation of inclusionary practices as a means to improve student learning opportunities and helping the youngest learners thrive in their foundational experiences.

Prior to her principalship at Washington School, Mrs. Gardner served as an Assistant Principal for six years at Pleviak Elementary School in Round Lake CUSD 116, where she was a member of the school's Problem Solving Team and School Improvement Leadership Team. Before becoming an administrator, Mrs. Gardner spent 15 years in the classroom, where she taught kindergarten through third grade, at Mark Twain Elementary School in Springfield, Missouri.

Mrs. Gardner earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Southwest Missouri State University. She received her Masters degree in Elementary Administration from William Woods University in Fulton, Missouri and is currently working on her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from Concordia University Chicago.

Born and raised in Southwest Missouri, Mrs. Gardner currently resides in Ingleside with her husband Keith, with whom she shares three daughters, Kelsi, Kieli and Kaiti. She enjoys reading and spending time with her family, which includes their annual beach trip to Florida. Mrs. Gardner's goal is to always lead with authenticity, grace and kindness. She is looking forward to joining D34 and serving as the principal of Mary Kay McNeill Early Learning Center, where she will focus on building quality relationships with staff, students and families.