
CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

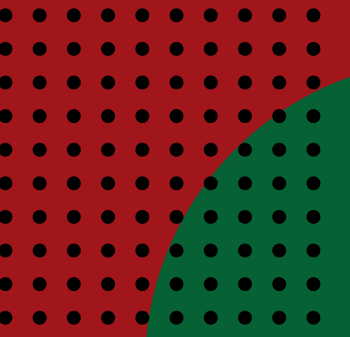


Photo by Jessica Gautreau-Robichaud of Gautreau Photography

Excellence is something we as educators strive for. It isn't something one can fabricate, or haphazardly participate in. Excellence requires discipline, ambition, consistency and vision. It is because of the nature of such requirements that excellence is recognizable to us when we observe it or experience it in our midst. Due to the tremendous fortitude excellence demands, we have made it tradition to acknowledge and celebrate excellence when it shines its light among us. So, today we celebrate **Julie Stewart, Vice Principal of Lou MacNarin School**, for her contributions to education in the Anglophone East School District and for exemplifying every attribute of excellence in education.

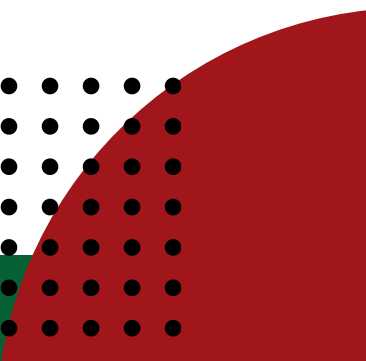
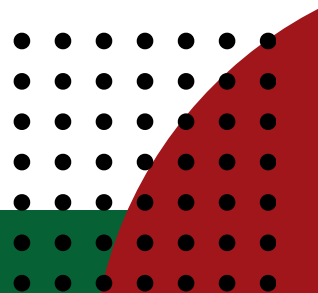
Over the course of her academic and teaching career, Julie has earned an Associate Diploma in Piano Performance from the Royal Conservatory of Music, a Bachelor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Western Ontario, a Bachelor of Education degree from Atlantic Baptist University, and a Master of Organizational Management degree from Crandall University. Additionally, she completed the required graduate level courses and District modules to earn her New Brunswick Principal's Certificate. Julie is also bilingual, having studied French through the French Immersion program and at the post-secondary level.

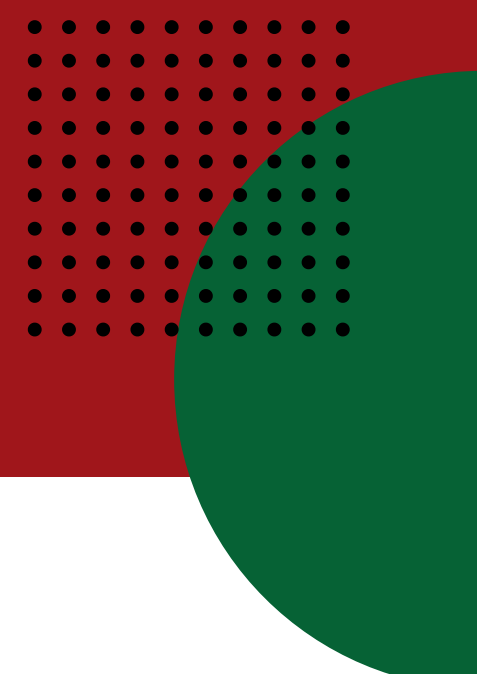
Julie began her public education teaching career as a music and kindergarten teacher in Toronto just over 23 years ago. She met her husband, who was living in Moncton, and moved to Moncton in the fall of 2002, beginning her teaching journey in the AESD shortly thereafter. When Julie first began her educational practice here, being an Administrator was not something that was on her radar or a future aspiration. She also wasn't ruling anything out.

I had the privilege to sit down with Vice Principal Stewart and discuss a range of topics, ideas and pedagogies surrounding education. As our conversation flowed, we landed on some inspiring and insightful revelations, particularly surrounding the importance of representation and what responsibilities and expectations come with being "the first" in any professional environment. Julie is a first-generation Canadian, born in Toronto, Ontario, to parents who emigrated from Barbados in the 1960s. **In the fall of 2023, Vice Principal Julie Stewart became the first woman of color Administrator in the Anglophone East School District.** Throughout the remainder of this article, there will be the sharing of genuine insights about responsibility and merit, expectations and capacity, representation and required excellence, as well as other inspirations such as the influence of family and leaders. Let us begin.

"I've never felt that my being black was a positive or a negative... Be qualified, be focused and represent well. I never wanted anything given to me because of my color, but also never wanted to be denied anything due to it either." – Vice Principal Stewart.

These statements remind us of what it is to be human – to exist in a world where equal opportunity becomes the status quo, and hard work and merit become the standard of success. Equality is ensuring that no matter who you are, what you believe or where you come from, that it is your ability and capacity that are rewarded – that it is no longer acceptable to deny a person access or success due to the color of their skin. I think of my grandfather who was born in 1935 and is still with us (turning 90 this year), who attended segregated schools and lived in segregated communities as a child. To know now that people like Vice Principal Stewart can make it to leadership roles on merit alone speaks to the progress we have made in our society and points to an encouraging future where one day, to quote Dr. King, "people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character".





As our conversation progressed, I asked Vice Principal Stewart if she felt any pressure around “representation” and she responded with humility stating, “the significance or impact of being in this position [female of color Vice Principal] wasn’t really something I put much emphasis on. My focus is on the work to be done”. She then went on to tell me a story that she says opened her eyes regarding the impact her representation had on her community, whether that was her intention or not.

Julie was making her daily rounds at the beginning of the school year. She made a point to stop into several classes with the intention of being present in the building and lending a supporting hand to staff and students getting settled in during the first few weeks of school. She made her way into a grade four class and was observing the learning taking place. As she was leaving, she overheard two young students of African descent whispering to each other, one asking the other “who is that?” The student replied, “she is our Vice Principal”. The questioning student’s eyes widened, and her mouth opened wide. The look on her face spoke volumes. It was in this moment that Julie came to the realization that this was “bigger than just her”. Reflecting on that scenario in the weeks that followed, Julie said, “you stand out as a person of color in education, and that comes with great responsibility and high expectations. I take it very seriously, my role, in representing those who come behind me”.

Lastly, I asked Vice Principal Stewart about her family and what roles they have played in her journey and what, if anything, did they think of the news about her recent success. Julie mentioned that her father, who passed away a few years ago, was “super influential in her life”. She said that when she told her father’s widow of the news of her appointment she was told “congratulations” and “your dad would be very proud”. Julie’s mother and sisters, her husband and in-laws, her extended family, friends, and her church family were all thrilled and celebrated her achievement. For Julie, her family, and her relatives and friends back in Toronto and Barbados this achievement and all that comes with it is big news! To quote Julie when speaking about her husband: “I could not have done any of this without the love and support of my wonderful husband and family. I owe him and them a debt of gratitude!” Julie also wanted to acknowledge administrators, mentors, colleagues, and professors who inspired and encouraged her, and helped cultivate her leadership potential.

As for the future, when I asked Vice Principal Stewart about any plans she might have, she stated, “I am here to serve at the capacity I am in, to the best of my ability, and whatever comes next, I will do the same there too.”

Nathaniel Fells
Educational Support Teacher,
Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
Anglophone East School District

