

# Wauwatosa School District: Announces new members of leadership team

Posted on Tuesday, Mar 15, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

*Board of Education approves District's recommendations for appointment of Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief of Student and Pupil Supports, and Chief of Talent, as well as Principals at Jefferson Elementary School and Underwood Elementary School*

**Wauwatosa, WI** — On Monday, March 14, 2022, the Wauwatosa School District Board of Education approved Superintendent Dr. Demond Means' recommendation to appoint the following members of its leadership team:

Mr. Tahir Abdelmawla, Underwood Elementary School Principal  
Mr. Keith Brightman, Chief Financial Officer  
Mr. Stephen Kern, Jefferson Elementary School Principal  
Dr. Nicole Marble, Chief Academic Officer  
Mr. Luke Pinion, Chief of Pupil and Family Supports  
Mrs. Sarah Zelazoski, Chief of Talent

"We are confident in the appointment of these experienced professionals. Their qualifications are a reflection of the values and priorities in Wauwatosa," stated Mr. Steven Doman, School Board President. "Each of these individuals are truly the best fit to lead their respective teams and support Dr. Means as we continue to enhance the public school system in Wauwatosa."

**Mr. Tahir Abdelmawla has been named Principal at Underwood Elementary School.** Mr. Abdelmawla has more than six years of experience in educational leadership and classroom instruction. He has proven success in building teams and

strong, collaborative relationships; creating safe and inclusive environments for learning; and integrating technology and learning adaptation strategies into the educational environment. Mr. Abdelmawla served in the United States Army before launching his career in education at the Golda Meir School in Milwaukee, where he spent several years delivering classroom instruction before moving into the role of School Culture and Climate Specialist and, simultaneously, High School Athletic Director. He then served as Underfilling Assistant Principal before joining the Wauwatosa School District in 2020 as Associate Principal of Longfellow Middle School. His experience with the STEM program at Longfellow, in addition to his innate ability to connect with children, will serve him well in his role as Principal of Underwood Elementary School. Mr. Abdelmawla received his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee. He is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy: Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "I am extremely honored and privileged to be joining the Underwood team," Abdelmawla stated. "As a community, I know that we will continue to provide all of our students the enriching academic and social experience they deserve. I am eagerly looking forward to learning from and with the Underwood community for years to come."

**Mr. Keith Brightman, MSE, SFO, has been appointed Chief Financial Officer and will lead the Division of Finance and Operations.** Mr. Brightman is a Certified Administrator of School Finance and Operations (SFO), and brings more than 20 years of robust financial experience to this role, having served in several districts in southeastern Wisconsin including the School District of Elmbrook and, most recently, Menomonee Falls. Throughout his career, Mr. Brightman has earned a reputation as a thoughtful, analytical and strategic thinker who is well-respected across the state of Wisconsin. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration - Accounting from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, and obtained a Master of Science - Education (MSE) degree in Public Finance/School Business Management from the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater. Mr. Brightman states, "I have long recognized the Wauwatosa School District as one of the strongest in the state. I am excited to join such a well-respected, dynamic district and team. I look forward to working collectively to support the students, staff, and community in continuing to make Wauwatosa a great place to learn, work, and live."

**Mr. Stephen Kern has been appointed as the Principal of Jefferson Elementary School.** Mr. Kern is an experienced principal with a demonstrated

history of success in education. His experience includes six years in an assistant principal role in the Kenosha Unified School District, and 21 years serving as a principal at the elementary and middle school levels in School District 54 in Schaumburg, Illinois. He is a veteran administrator who has a reputation for bringing people together and maintaining a gentle, encouraging presence. Mr. Kern received a Bachelor of Science degree from Western Illinois University, and a Masters of Science in Education from the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. He also received an Endorsement for English as a Second Language from Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois. Regarding the principalship, Mr. Kern states, “I am honored to be joining Jefferson Elementary School. Throughout my interactions with members of the Jefferson community I have been able to see the strong sense of community and pride in the school. I am looking forward to joining the Jefferson team as we find new ways to engage students in learning, embrace new challenges, and empower our students to take ownership of their learning.”

**Dr. Nicole Marble will serve as the Chief Academic Officer and will lead the Division of Academic Performance.** Dr. Marble is a lifelong learner who is committed to achievement and equitable opportunities for all students. She brings more than 14 years of progressively-responsible experience to this role, including eight years as a classroom teacher and member of school leadership committees in Mukwonago, two years as Associate Principal of Wauwatosa East High School, two years as Principal of Madison Elementary School and two years as Director of Secondary Education for the Wauwatosa School District. Dr. Marble has also served as an adjunct professor at Marquette University since June 2021. She is Nationally Board Certified and has obtained several degrees including a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, a Master of Science: Curriculum and Instruction and Graduate Education Certification from Concordia University, a Master of Science: Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and a Doctorate of Philosophy: Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Marble states, “As a community member and parent of students in the Wauwatosa School District, I know that academic excellence for all students is a top priority. It will be a continued honor to work with our educators, students, caregivers, and greater community to enhance students’ learning experiences and achievement outcomes.”

**Mr. Luke Pinion has been appointed as Chief of Pupil and Family Supports and will serve as the leader of the Division of Student and Family Supports.** Mr. Pinion brings to this role more than 18 years of expertise in

supporting the physical, emotional and behavioral needs of others. He has served stakeholders in several southeastern Wisconsin districts including Milwaukee Public School District, Oak Creek-Franklin Joint School District and, most recently, the School District of Waukesha. During his tenure in Waukesha, Mr. Pinion single-handedly implemented the district's PBIS system, and he developed a social-emotional learning and mental wellness framework that is widely regarded as a model program. Following the Waukesha parade tragedy in late 2021, Mr. Pinion played a critical role in supporting students, families and staff within the district. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Science in Education degree from the University of Wisconsin - Whitewater, where he also received NASP Accreditation to serve as an Education Specialist in School Psychology. Mr. Pinion also completed the Director of Pupil Services and Special Education Program at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. "I am beyond excited to join a district with such a clear sense of community and commitment to all students," stated Mr. Pinion. "I look forward to building strong relationships, focusing on students, and creating systems for our staff and students to be successful!"

**Mrs. Sarah Zelazoski will serve as the District's Chief of Talent leading the Division of Human Resources.** Mrs. Zelazoski has more than 21 years of experience working in education, and more than 17 years of experience serving in a Human Resources role. She served as the Director of School - Community Programs and Coordinator of Human Resources/Community Programs in Antigo before taking on the role of Executive Director of Human Capital at the Mequon-Thiensville School District, where she has served for more than eight years. In these roles, Mrs. Zelazoski has increased teacher retention by 8%, increased employer net promoter scores (eNPS) by 58 points and increased employee racial/ethnic diversity by 4%. Mrs. Zelazoski earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin - Madison, and completed the Human Resources Management Professional Development Program at the University of Wisconsin - Stout. She is a member of the Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators and served as President of the association from 2013 to 2016. "I am excited to bring my knowledge and skill set to a larger school district for the dual purpose of improving the experiences of employees and supporting the success of all students," said Zelazoski. "The Wauwatosa School District prioritizes employee retention, diversity, and inclusion, which aligns perfectly with my values. I believe this role will provide a great opportunity for growth both personally, and for the larger school community."

"It will be a true honor to serve the Wauwatosa community alongside this talented

group of professionals,” said Dr. Means. “This is a tremendous opportunity for our staff, students and families to benefit from the experience, passion and leadership that this group collectively brings to the table. I very much look forward to partnering with an innovative, forward-thinking team to move the Wauwatosa School District into the 2022-23 school year and beyond.”

The District followed a robust screening and interview process to ensure stakeholder voice was reflected in the final decision. As part of the hiring process for the principalships, initial input was gathered from families and staff via listening sessions. The District used this information to develop school profiles, which were then used to assess applicants and identify the top candidates for each position. These final candidates participated in two panel-style interviews – one with District staff and another with families. After narrowing down the candidate pool to two per school, Superintendent Dr. Demond Means and members of the Wauwatosa Board of Education conducted final interviews.

For the Chief positions, again, two interview teams were developed for each role. Candidates participated in panel interviews with each team, which consisted of a candidate presentation followed by a question and answer session. After the initial interviews, each team named their recommended finalists. The final candidates participated in an interview with Superintendent Dr. Demond Means and at least one member of the Wauwatosa Board of Education.

Contracts for the Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief of Student and Pupil Supports, and Chief of Talent, as well as Principals at Jefferson Elementary School and Underwood Elementary School will be effective July 1, 2022.

The District will also be hiring for several other key positions in the coming months, including a Director of Instruction, Director of Student Success and Director of Diversity and Inclusion, as well as a School Performance Data Coordinator, Behavioral Specialist, Grant Specialist and Academic Specialists. Mr. Brightman, Dr. Marble, Mr. Pinion and Mrs. Zelazoski will be critical participants in the interview process for individuals in their respective departments.

### **About Wauwatosa School District**

Wauwatosa School District is a high achieving, forward-thinking, richly diverse public school district serving approximately 7,200 students and families. The District consists of 16 schools: 11 elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools and the Wauwatosa Virtual Academy. Among these are two choice schools:

Wauwatosa Montessori and Wauwatosa STEM. A full STEM program is offered at Underwood Elementary and at both middle schools. Additionally, the District provides education for several county programs including Children's Hospital, Vel R. Phillips Juvenile Justice Center and River Hills School. The educational community's long history of excellence has been recognized both regionally and nationally.

For more information, visit the Wauwatosa School District [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#) pages.