

Dear Chester Elementary Families and Community,

I would like to introduce myself and share how excited I am to return to Chester Elementary as the new interim principal. So, who am I? To the kids I am Dr. Gazda, Dr. G. or just plain Doc. For everyone else, I'm Todd. Although my life has taken me on many different roads, at my core I remain that hilltown kid who swam at the swimming hole in Walker brook over on Hampden Street, played up on the trolley tracks and was the catcher for the Chester Wildcats little team.

For me, this is truly a homecoming. Growing up in Middlefield I spent my childhood, cleaning stalls, doing wood, and cutting hay. After Middlefield Elementary School closed in 1978 (I'm dating myself a little there), I attended Chester Elementary as a student for 3rd and 4th grade and eventually graduated from Gateway Regional High School in 1988. Much later when I returned as an adult, I bought my first house and lived in Chester while teaching in the Gateway district. Years ago, I was fortunate to serve as principal here in Chester (as well as at the Middle School) before moving on to other leadership roles, including superintendent.

I began my career in education nearly 25 years ago when I left the practice of law in New York City to move home and become a middle school history teacher here in the Gateway Regional School District. That decision was driven by a deep desire to work with young people and help inspire, educate, and ignite their passions. Over time, my career has led me into broader leadership roles, however, each step saw me further removed from the daily life of students. Now, I am returning to the heart of why I entered education: to help shape a joyful, student-centered school community and work alongside staff and parents to make a difference in the lives of individual children.

At Chester Elementary, I will prioritize visibility, open communication, and partnership with all of you, families, staff, and community members. I believe that a school should be a place of wonder, discovery, and joy, where every child feels seen, safe, and valued. Together, we can ensure that our students not only succeed academically but also grow as individuals.

I have appreciated the warm reception welcoming me back to a community I care deeply about. I look forward to working alongside all of you to make this a great year for Chester Elementary.

Warmly,

Todd Gazda