WATERLOO SCHOOLS NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Emily Frederick, Director of School & Community Relations
FrederickE@WaterlooSchools.org | (319) 433-1803 ext. 10103

Waterloo United High School Principal Announced

WATERLOO, Iowa — The Waterloo Community School District has named Zach O'Brien as the inaugural head principal of Waterloo United High School. The appointment, which follows a national search and a multi-phase interview process, is effective July 1, 2026, pending board approval.

The highly competitive selection process attracted candidates from across the country and included four interview committees composed of 54 diverse stakeholders, including district administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and community members. Finalists also participated in two public town hall forums, providing opportunities for community engagement and feedback as part of the district's commitment to transparency and collaboration.

"Selecting the inaugural principal of Waterloo United High School is one of the most important leadership decisions our district will make for the next generation," said Jared R. Smith, superintendent of Waterloo Community Schools. "Zach distinguished himself through his unwavering commitment to students, his deep understanding of our district and his clear vision for building a unified high school that prepares every student for success."

Waterloo United High School, scheduled to open for the 2028-29 school year, will serve as the district's comprehensive high school and a central hub for academic programming, career and technical education and student activities. As head principal, O'Brien will serve in a full-release leadership role during the 2026-27 and 2027-28 school years, focusing on strategic planning, staffing, academic alignment and the development of the school's culture and identity.

O'Brien brings nearly 20 years of experience with Waterloo Schools, having served in roles including instructional strategist, English teacher, PBDA coordinator, assistant principal at Waterloo West High School and, most recently, head principal at Bunger Middle School.

"I am deeply honored to serve as the inaugural principal of Waterloo United High School," O'Brien said. "Waterloo Schools has shaped my career and my purpose as an educator. This opportunity represents more than opening a new building—it's about bringing our students, staff and community together to create a unified high school experience."

O'Brien brings a breadth of leadership experience spanning special education, at-risk programming, and both middle and high school administration, equipping him with the

comprehensive perspective needed to lead a unified campus. In addition to his work in school leadership, O'Brien founded and directed Iowa Blue Star Basketball, expanding access to competitive basketball and ensuring local students could participate regardless of financial circumstances.

O'Brien and his wife, Heidi, a nurse educator in the intensive care unit at UnityPoint Allen Hospital, call Waterloo home, where they are raising their two daughters, proud future Titans.

The selection of O'Brien marks a major milestone in the district's transition to Waterloo United High School. The district will now begin the next phase of leadership development, including the hiring of a Waterloo United assistant principal with a focus on the Waterloo Career Center and a dedicated Waterloo United athletic director. The two opportunities will be posted in March.

The Waterloo Community School District will continue to share updates with the community as planning and development progress.

# # #