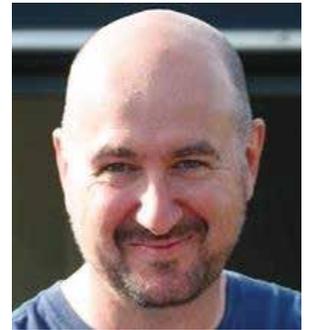


WHO'S THE NEW SUPERINTENDENT?

Hello and thank you for reading. My name is Tony Gasper and I'm proud and happy to have been named the next Superintendent of Schools for the Consolidated School District of New Britain.



As I've conducted some transition visits throughout the district prior to my official start date, I've gotten a few questions repeatedly. I'll share them and my answers here:

Q: Why New Britain? Why leave Wolcott Public Schools?

A: Because I think that I can help. Of my 26 years in Connecticut public education, 18 of them have been in Connecticut's Alliance districts. While I was conducting my due diligence and researching CSDNB prior to deciding to apply, I took note of a lot of work that had been done in the district. I also noted the current levels of performance. I talked to people familiar with the district and its strengths and needs. I considered my own professional background, the growth that I've been able to help realize in other districts and then CSDNB felt like a good fit. While it is evident that a lot of good foundational work has been done, there is certainly much left to do. While I was assistant superintendent in Ansonia, we were able to demonstrate enough growth to be removed from the "in need of improvement" list under the federal NCLB legislation. When I joined Wolcott as superintendent, we ranked 102nd of 166 Connecticut school districts on SBAC reading. Four years later, we ranked 57th...outpacing many districts that were much more affluent and spent much more money on their schools than we. During this time, we also saw a narrowing of achievement gaps.

I decided it was time for me to leave Wolcott to seek other challenges because of the same advice that I'd given to the Wolcott staff. I've asked

them to be confident but never comfortable and to always look for continual growth. Specifically, I asked them to become 2% better at their craft, each and every time they had a meeting with colleagues. So, it was time for me to heed my own advice and seek new challenges and growth.

Q: How long do you plan on staying in NB?

A: During the interview process, I told the Board of Education that I was looking for my last job. I hope that New Britain will be the place from which I retire.

Q: What are your beliefs about educational equity?

A: I have two driving tenets in my thoughts about equity (*as of right now, I'm always reflecting and revising these ideas*)

- ▶ First and foremost is that educational equity is a necessary factor in ensuring basic human dignity for every child. The conditions of a child's birth should not determine the apex of their personal or professional success. There have been policies and practices that have tilted the playing field to preference one group over another. This is true nationally and globally. I'm not talking about the current political bickering about CRT. There is concrete, historical fact. This does not mean that every member of a particular group is a racist and it does not mean that every member of a particular group is a victim. That said, we can and should constantly reassess our policies and procedures to ensure that they are not inadvertently biased. This work is long in duration but necessary. A favorite quote attributed to Martin Luther King Jr. but originally offered by Theodore Parker is "*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*" I would add that it bends only if we continually dedicate ourselves to bending it.
- ▶ My second tenet of educational equity is a patriotic one. If our great nation is to continue to be viable in the global economy, we must compete against countries such as China and India whose populations vastly outnumber our own. Our competing against China and India is like a Class LL Connecticut high school soccer team competing against a Class S school - with the USA being the Class S. By the simple virtue of their much greater population size, these other countries have access to a larger talent pool and more innovation. Gone are the days when these and other nations could be dismissed as "third world countries". They are now industrial and economic powerhouses. We can continue to compete but only if we elevate each and every child on our Class S soccer team to play at an all-star level regardless of the conditions of their birth. Through rigor and educational equity we can overcome the numerical advantage held by these countries. This means that our system of public education must find, support, and grow the potential of each American child to be ready to contribute at their highest possible level. No excuses.

Q: What are your plans for the district? Are big changes coming?

A: First and foremost, I would encourage everyone to disregard any rumors about immediate program cancellations, staff layoffs, or the like. I've heard that some of these rumors are circulating and it's a shame that people choose to maliciously invent things like this. I think that you will find that I communicate regularly with you and I hope that you will apply a healthy dose of cynicism to rumors in the Faculty Room or on social media. I do not believe in the approach known as "disruptive reform". This is the idea that a system is so broken that it must be completely torn down and rebuilt anew. That said, we must accept the fact that, at the current time, CSDNB is the lowest-performing school district in the state on a number of important metrics. We must agree that this low performance is not due to factors of input such as the children that we serve, our budget allocations, or the dedication of individual staff members. We must say to ourselves, *"Despite well intentioned effort from many, many people, the outcomes are not what we want. So, what must we change?"* Therefore, we must all own these outcomes together. Our successes will be team successes and our embarrassments will be team embarrassments. We will not let a teammate fail. When we see a teammate stumble we will help them. When a teammate is not aware of how to surmount an obstacle, we will help them. And, we will challenge each other to higher levels of performance and success. This attitude will be true first and foremost in my office.

As a deeper answer, I'm a big believer that professional culture is at the foundation of all good work that we do for kids. I try hard to do whatever I can to ensure a positive work culture because I believe that this is how we do our best work for kids. In a district as large as CSDNB, it's not possible for one person (even the superintendent) to influence the culture of every department and school. But, to the degree that I can, I'll model a climate of respect, dignity, and teamwork and expect the same from all other CSDNB leaders. This is not touchy-feely leadership that I'm describing. There will be plenty of times when we're uncomfortable...including the superintendent. But, we'll take comfort knowing that the discomfort is part of discovering how to be better...for kids.

“ I’m a big believer that professional culture is at the foundation of all good work that we do for kids. ”

Q: Enough of the boring educational stuff, who are you as a person?

A: I was raised in a blue-collar family in East Hartford and was the first in my family to go to college. My bachelors, masters, doctorate, Fulbright-Hayes scholarship, and superintendent preparation are all from CCSU. My parents made it clear at a very early age that I would not be following my dad's footsteps into the military or the trades. College was mandatory in their eyes.



I've been married for 22 years to my wife, Linda, who teaches second grade in Hartford. I have a lot of public educators and public servants in my family. I don't have any biological kids of my own but, with Linda, I have three grandchildren ages six, four, and seven months. I really enjoy when they're at the house and spending time with them. The six-year-old and four-year-old are getting to the age where their individual personalities are coming through and it's great to be a part of.

I'm an avid motorcyclist. My dad got me a mini-bike when I was nine years old. The first time I brought home a C on my report card the bike got chained to a column in the basement until I got my grades up. I've seen most of the American states traveling by motorcycle. In 2007, as my gift to myself for finishing my doctorate, I rode from Oklahoma to the Oregon coast on unpaved roads on an adventure route called the [Trans-America](#) Trail. Even though it's a silly thing for a 51-year-old person to do, I still compete in regional off-road dirt bike competitions called enduros and I served as the president of my [racing association](#) for four years. Enduros are three-to-four-hour rallies through the woods. Competing gives me motivation to try to keep my fitness at a decent level. In the middle of the pandemic I got an opportunity to ride my street bike and be filmed for a [commercial](#) for a tire company.



Thanks for taking the time to read this introduction. Now, let's get to work!

In partnership,
Tony