

100 Days



A Special Publication Of The South Orange & Maplewood School District · February 14, 2024

Today, I mark my 100th day as acting superintendent of the South Orange & Maplewood School District. The custom of marking the first 100 days of leadership began with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who was elected president when our nation was in the depths of the Great Depression and in a time of great uncertainty of the future. Upon taking the oath of office, Roosevelt and his administration got to work immediately on restoring the people's faith in their government and the people who led it.

I will never presume to compare myself to FDR as a leader. But I do see similarities between the first 100 days of Roosevelt's presidency and the past 100 days we have had together here in the South Orange and Maplewood School District. From my first day on the job as your acting superintendent, my team and I set out to restore your faith in your schools and the District that oversees them.

I placed a high premium on being visible and accessible to you – the people of South Orange and Maplewood who entrust us with the education of your children. I recognized that success in our school district is a job that no one person can achieve alone. That is why I sought to improve our relationships with the leaders of our professional organizations, why I am working to hear from the families and students we serve in our District, and why I am working to keep in contact with our teachers who are on the front lines of educating your children every day.

All the while, I have maintained focus on the goals our Board of Education has set for this District – not the least of which, the access and equity goals as recommended by the findings in the report by Dr. Edward Fergus at Rutgers University.

By no means is our work done. The marking of these first 100 days is not a celebration at a finish line. But it is an opportunity to take stock of the first steps we have taken together in putting our District in the right direction. What follows in this document is a review of some of the highlights of these first 100 days.

As you read through these highlights, I'd like you to keep in mind the words of another American president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. My father gave me the middle name of Fitzpatrick in reference to President Kennedy's middle name and the name of the child he and Mrs. Kennedy lost. When he was inaugurated, President Kennedy called an entire generation to contribute to America's future when he said, "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." In a similar way, I invite all of you to contribute to the future of this District.

And in case you were wondering, there is a reason why I chose to mark my first 100 days on February 14th, Valentine's Day. I love this work. I love the opportunity to serve you as acting superintendent. And I love the thought of us working together to lead the children of this District to achieve more than they ever thought possible.

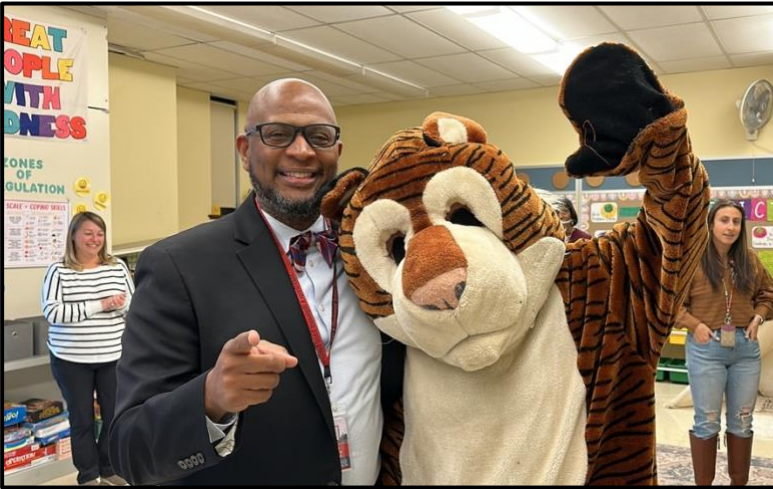
Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to all that we will accomplish together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kevin F. Gilbert
Acting Superintendent
The South Orange and Maplewood School District

10 Schools In 10 Days

Dr. Kevin F. Gilbert was appointed acting superintendent on Friday, November 3rd. The District was closed during the following week. That made Acting Superintendent Gilbert's first official day Monday, November 13th. As the sun came up that morning, Dr. Gilbert's boots were on the ground at Clinton Elementary School to greet families, students, staff, and administrators as they began their day. Wearing a Columbia High School baseball cap, he delivered a simple message to everyone he met. "Hi, I'm Dr. Gilbert. I'm the new acting superintendent." For the rest of November, Acting Superintendent Gilbert began most of his mornings making connections with people at each of the District's schools. At each of the visits, Dr. Gilbert was able to meet with staff, administrators, and – best of all – students. The 10 Schools in 10 Days tour culminated with a warm reception at Tuscan Elementary School on November 30th, his last school visit, where students, staff, parents, and the Tuscan Tiger came out to greet him.

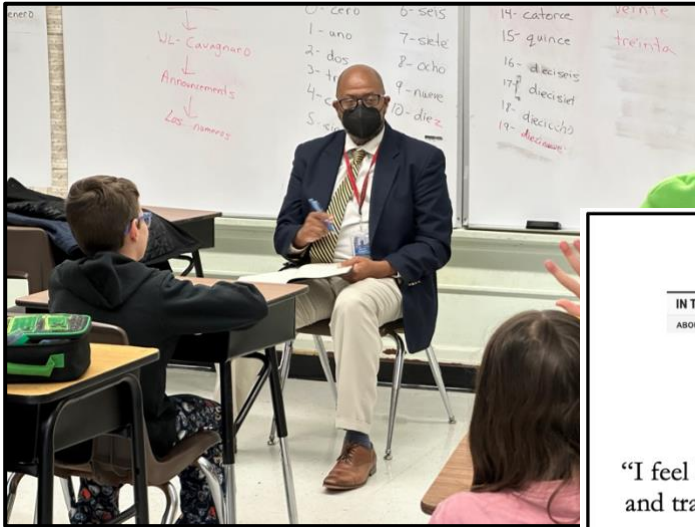


Ruby Bridges Walk

Dr. Gilbert joined nearly 400 Seth Boyden Elementary School students in commemorating the historic bravery of a six-year-old girl named Ruby Bridges. On November 14th, 1960, Ruby Bridges walked to a federally desegregated public school in Louisiana in the face of fierce racism. "I am so proud of our students who remembered the courage of a little girl who took a stand against racism and segregation, and showed everyone that you are never too young to make a big difference," said Dr. Gilbert.

Listen & Learn Sessions With Students

Nobody knows our schools the way our students know our schools. That is why Dr. Gilbert has launched his Listen & Learn sessions with students. These are casual conversations Dr. Gilbert has had with small groups of students to get a better understanding of their experiences of attending school. These candid talks have given Dr. Gilbert a fresher perspective of many of the issues that matter most to them – from their experiences in the classrooms, to the cafeterias, to how they interact with each other.



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New super sees opportunity for real success

By Joe Ungaro on December 22, 2023 · Comments Off

"I feel like I'm in an area with the opportunity to do great work, to shape and transform lives and to build equity in a school district. Here, there is the actual opportunity to be successful."

— Dr. Kevin F. Gilbert
Acting Superintendent of Schools

Holiday Luncheon



Little things mean a lot, as the saying goes. When Dr. Gilbert and his team held a little get-together in December for Central Office staff and the leaders of our professional organizations, many people who attended commented on how long it had been since there was a chance to wish each other well during the holidays.

Empathy For The Bull

Dr. Gilbert attends every student event he can, and he was glad to participate in the evening reception for the “Empathy For The Bull” art exhibit. Art Teacher Curtis Grayson, III and his students were inspired by Ricardo, the Runaway Bull, who achieved national headlines last December when he escaped a fate at the slaughterhouse by running through the streets of Newark. Grayson and his students made a few headlines of their own through the news coverage they received for their expressive artistic creations that made powerful statements about protecting the lives of bulls.



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Education

SOMA Schools Acting Superintendent Focuses on Building Connections, 'Taking Care of This Ship'

Dr. Kevin Gilbert reflects in interview on first 100 days leading district

“One of the things we've been working on really heavily is our communications to be as specific and as intentional as possible.”

- Dr. Kevin F. Gilbert
Acting Superintendent of Schools

THE VILLAGE GREEN
OF MAPLEWOOD & SOUTH ORANGE

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Leader of Teachers Union Says Acting Supt. Dr. Kevin Gilbert Is 'Breath of Fresh Air'

Written By Mary Barr Mann December 28, 2023

“He went to see the parents that had issues with transportation, and he also went to every school in every building and said 'hi' to everyone. We were people for once.”

- Rocio Lopez
President, South Orange Maplewood Education Association

Dr. Gilbert's Listening Tour



Just a couple of weeks ago, Dr. Gilbert launched his Listening Tour to provide opportunities for the District's families to voice their concerns, give their perspectives, and offer their ideas on improving the South Orange and Maplewood School District. So far, Dr. Gilbert has had two successful events at Clinton Elementary School and Seth Boyden Elementary School. **A third stop on his tour is scheduled for Saturday, February 24th from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at South Orange Middle School.** At each tour stop, members of the Superintendent's Office staff have been taking detailed notes, which will be compiled in a summary after the tour. The summary will help Dr. Gilbert develop his plan of action for the coming months.

