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# Career, life challenges are not new for Kelli Bush

Next EIS superintendent brings background from classroom, principal's role, central office

ANDREW HARP The News-Enterprise

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Kelli Bush, the new Elizabethtown Independent School superintendent, works at her desk Friday in Elizabethtown. Bush has moved up through the EIS district starting as a teacher at Morningside Elementary School.

ANDREW HARP/The News-Enterprise

Kelli Bush, the the EIS strateg superintendent

ANDREW HARP

Kelli Bush, the newly selected superintendent of Elizabethtown Independent Schools, has a career that could be described as a climb up.

At EIS, Bush rose from teacher to principal to assistant superintendent to superintendent. However, leadership in education was something she hadn't predicted for herself.

“I didn’t always think that I wanted to move ... into leadership,” Bush said.

Bush grew up in Lebanon Junction and graduated from Bullitt Central High School in 1988.

She attended Elizabethtown Community and Technical College for two years. During that time, she met her future husband, Matt, when both were working at Stone Hearth restaurant. They married in 1993.

Bush transferred to Western Kentucky University and studied there for two and a half years. She did student teaching Morningside Elementary School during her senior year.

After graduating, Bush began her career in Nelson County at Boston Elementary School and worked there for six years.

She had been living in Elizabethtown during that entire time. Her son was getting ready to start full-day preschool and then kindergarten, so she decided to look into jobs closer to home.

She began teaching fifth grade at Morningside. Early on, Bush had to take about a year off because of medical issues involving her daughter, Meredith.

After Meredith was born, she ended up being asthmatic and constantly was contracting bronchitis. Bush stayed home to monitor her.

Once her daughter was doing well, she said she knew she needed to get right back into work.

“I needed that purpose of serving others and education has always been the way that I’ve done that,” Bush said.

In 2007, Bush became the principal at Morningside. While principal, she said they were able to see some success by making the school more well-performing than previously.

For her, she said making the transitions from being in a classroom environment to being a leader of the school was a challenge.

She said dynamics between her and colleagues changed which was a difficult adjustment. Learning to lead them was a challenge.

Superintendent Gary French hired her as the assistant superintendent in 2012. She said that transition was one of the more challenging moments in her career.

Bush said she is proud of the curriculum work she has put in as assistant superintendent including taking the new standards and working them to make a curriculum that works for the district.

She said it has been a journey the last few years in trying to learn how best to put strategies out there with teachers and leaders in order to better equip and improve the achievement of students who struggle.

She said she will continue with that plan in her new role.

Bush said she instituted a lot of reading and collaboration in finding the best strategies for the district during her time as assistant superintendent.

“I really look forward to in this role, too, is getting out in the schools and getting in the classrooms and talking with the kids,” Bush said. “I enjoy that as much as anything.”

During her time as assistant superintendent, she said she faced what might be one of her greatest personal challenges.

Bush was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer when she was 43-years-old.

She said she would continue to work throughout that school year, despite chemotherapy causing her to become sick and fatigued. She said work was necessary for her mental health.

“It was so challenging personally, physically, mentally, everything,” Bush said. “One of the things that got me through was coming to work.”

While it was a challenge, Bush said it was also a blessing because it reaffirmed her appreciation and love for the community.

“This district is such a family and a community, the support that I had during that time, it was overwhelming,” Bush said.

Bush worked under French and Jon Ballard, the outgoing superintendent, during her time as the assistant superintendent.

She said she learned from French the importance of relationships, working together and supporting the principals. From Ballard, she said she learned the importance of understanding and knowing all policies, the law and empowering others to make decisions.

After Ballard announced his retirement, she said she was 90 percent confident she would apply for the position, but it was not an easy decision. She appreciates Ballard agreeing to extend his stay with the district to help with the transition.

Bush said she has short- and long-term goals for the district as she approaches her new position.

Regarding COVID-19, Bush said first off, she wants to make sure students and the staff are safe.

However, Bush said she also wants to focus on the social and emotional part and incorporate that into plans for the next school year.

She said technology has been improving in recent years, which has led to students from first to 12th grade having access to Chromebooks on a one-to-one basis, which will help with COVID-19 planning if they need to be implemented.

“One of the things that I feel really strongly about, is to be sure that we not only have those devices available for our students, but also to kind of expand upon that,” bush said.

Currently, the district is awaiting guidelines from the Kentucky Department of Education for school openings next year, which she said will start to firm up plans.

As superintendent, she'll be getting familiar with certain departments that she was not involved in previously as she learns other aspects of the district.

“When you first step into a role, I think it’s so important to just kind of observe, watch, listen, learn,” Bush said.

She also said she’s hoping to, during her time as superintendent, increase the number of students who graduate, increase the number of students who are college and career ready, create more pathway programs for trade careers, grow the arts programming and continue to improve and maintain the Elizabethtown culture between parents and teachers.

She said one positive of the non-traditional instruction is it increased the amount of communication between parents and teachers.

“I know it’s going to be a huge challenge, but I also know that with those type of challenges comes real fulfillment and reward,” Bush said.

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