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Keith Bigsby

Ed Bennett Eds Official

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The leader of the Omaha Public Schools' largest middle school will soon lead the district's largest high school.

Ed Bennett, currently principal at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School, will lead Central High this fall.

OPS interim Superintendent Virginia Moon appointed Bennett to the position, he said Tuesday.

Keith Bigsby, 56, is retiring as Central principal at the end of the school year.

Bennett, 43, has led Buffett for the past two school years.

The west Omaha middle school has some of the district's highest marks on state tests. But, of all OPS schools, Buffett also has the smallest percentage of students living in poverty.

The school, with grades 5-8, has about 1,400 students, about a third whom qualify for federal lunch subsidies, an indicator of poverty.

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Central has about 2,400 students, and about 58 percent of them qualify for federal lunch subsidies.

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MATT MILLER/THE WORLD-HERALD

Bennett is originally from Newton, Iowa, and taught English for three years in Bennett, Iowa, after going to the University of Iowa.

He and his wife moved to Omaha and Bennett taught English at Northwest High for three years. Then he left education and was an insurance agent for two years.

He came back in 2000 to be a curriculum specialist for three years at Bryan High and worked at district central offices for two years.

"I really missed schools," he said.

Bennett also worked as an assistant principal at Buffett before his first Central stint.

His Central predecessor, Bigsby, is retiring after 30 years in education, including several stints at Central.

"I've always been a big believer that you don't overstay," Bigsby said. "We've got some great young people looking for opportunities, and I want to give them to them."

Bigsby said he wants to work with the Central High School Foundation. In what capacity he would serve the organization, however, has not been determined, he said. A believer in building partnerships, he believes there are still untapped assets among Central's downtown neighbors.

"I just want to reinforce the idea that I'm not going far," said Bigsby, who calls himself the school's biggest cheerleader.

Indeed, his youngest daughter, Maureen, a Central junior, is not too happy with his decision, he said.

His middle daughter, Michaela, now at Midland University, graduated from Central last year. The oldest, Casey, a 2005 Central graduate, is a teacher at Morton Magnet Middle School.

Bigsby started his career with the Omaha Public Schools as a marketing teacher at South High School in 1982. After three years there, he was selected to head the district's first Academy of Finance program at the OPS Career Center.

He began his first stint at Central in 1992 as head of the school's business, marketing and technology department. In 1997, he moved to the district's Vocational Education Department, serving for two years as an administrative assistant.

He became an "educator on loan" to the AIM Institute in 1999, where he helped develop and implement an OPS information technology curriculum and programs that were disseminated to school districts throughout the state.

He returned to the district in 2001 as an assistant principal at Bryan Middle School and then spent the 2005-06 school year as an assistant principal at Central. He was principal of McMillan Magnet Middle School from 2006 to 2010 and was named Central's principal in 2010. He also spent 22 years coaching boys and girls basketball at South and Central.

Bigsby said he has had the opportunity to learn from some great principals at South and Central, including Gaylord E. "Doc" Moller, who led the downtown high school for 27 years, and Jerry Bexten, who retired as Central principal in 2006. There are many good,

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young educators in the pipeline, he said.


One issue will be to find a way to manage the growing workload. Bigsby said he routinely puts in 15-hour days, including six on Easter Sunday.


He said he looks forward to more time for chores and other interests, including watching his daughters play soccer. His last day will be July 31.

“With all the changes coming to OPS,” he said in a statement, “I felt this was the right thing to do for myself and the district — time to move on and give someone else a chance. I am very proud to have had the opportunity to be a part of the best urban district in the country and have had the chance to lead the finest downtown high school in the country.”

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