

Partners in Education: Keana Parquet

By Shawnta S. Barnes – December 8, 2018



Education professionals know the task of shaping children's futures can be difficult yet rewarding. The hours are long, and they don't end when students go home and some educators go home to another educator. This series aims to highlight dynamic education duos who find a way to balance being immersed in the world of education at school and many times at home, too.

Keana Parquet is the principal of Crooked Creek Elementary School in the Metropolitan School District of Washington Township. She believed she would always be a classroom teacher, but someone saw leadership potential in her and cultivated it. Prior to becoming the principal of Crooked Creek, she was also a teacher and assistant principal in this same school.

Shawnta Barnes: Who inspired you?

Keana Parquet: My parents inspire me, and they are also educators. My dad was a professor at Notre Dame, and my mom was an adult ESL teacher. My parents had three biological children and adopted four multiracial children. They held us all to a high standard and education was always high on the list. All of us graduated from college. I try to instill the same values they had in my two sons and the children at Crooked Creek.

The other person who inspires me is Marsha Reynolds. She was principal when I was hired as a teacher at Crooked Creek. She saw me as a leader when I didn't see it in myself. She recommended me to Butler's administration program. She has a way of seeing in people what they don't see in themselves and coaching people to reach their potential. I aspire to coach people like her.

SB: How has being adopted shaped you as an educator?

KP: I was born in Korea and lived there until I was almost seven. I was adopted and raised by a Caucasian family. I think I can relate to people

because of my diverse background. For college, I attended an HBCU, and that was a huge culture shock for me as a person, but those experiences built this vast diverse background that I have. I can code-switch and navigate different spaces. After I married Eric, I was able to travel to Korea and meet my biological mom.

SB: Describe adversity you had to overcome as a leader.

KP: An adversity I had to overcome was becoming the leader of the school where I had previously taught. I went from being the neighbor in the classroom next door to being their principal. The hardest part was coaching someone out of Crooked Creek who I had worked with previously as a teacher. I wanted to stay true to myself. People knew who I was as a teacher; I was no-nonsense but had fun. People say I haven't changed, but I work hard to still maintain that.

SB: What has been your greatest triumph as a leader?

KP: My greatest triumph as a leader is yet to come, but I try to see strengths in my teachers and then use their strengths to grow our school. We had a big switch in teachers this year. Many were moved to different grade levels based on the strengths I noticed. I am hoping to see these results when our data comes out.

SB: Many school districts in Indianapolis are becoming increasingly diverse both culturally and socio-economically. Is there anything you have implemented at Crooked Creek to support the changing demographics?

KP: One of the reasons Marsha Reynolds hired me was because I was trained in Responsive Classroom. After I was hired, I practiced this in my classroom and showed other teachers. Responsive Classroom is not just another thing to do. When it is integrated properly, it can impact every part of the day.

We are also implementing neuroscience in the classroom. One of my former fifth-grade teachers, Deanna Nibarger, is now the district's social-emotional coach. She has been piloting her work at Crooked Creek, along with Nora, Greenbriar, and Fox Hill. She has led professional development and given teachers a common language and strategies to use. Deanna created an amygdala reset room where students can calm down and reset. Each classroom now has a quiet corner with a bean bag seat, timer, and activities to do to help them reset and calm down. We have a neuroscience club after school. This work is a work in progress, but it is helping us build our school community.

Another way I am building school community is through our houses. Everyone in our school (administration, teachers, staff, and students) chose a house to join. Students are part of the same house as they progress through Crooked Creek. This is an idea from the Ron Clark Academy. Each year, I send a few teachers to his school to regain their passion for the profession and to learn what they can do to make learning engaging for students even with our constraints.

SB: What advice do you have for other educators considering principalship?

KP: It is important to make sure you know how to balance work and home especially if you have little kids. This job requires a lot of time away from family. It might be best to wait until your kids are more self-sufficient because you get pulled in all different directions: state mandates, the district, staff, parents, and students. You also have to know who you are and then stand firm in your beliefs.



Principals Keana and Eric Parquet with their two sons.

SB: How do you find the balance between personal and professional life especially being married to a principal?

KP: Being balanced is a work in progress. While we think we are balanced, at times, this is an area we are working on now. Our sons, who are 15 and 17, are about to be out of the house. It is important for us to spend time together doing something that we have in common that is not education-related, so our only focus isn't just education and our kids. We don't plan on retiring any time soon, so we want to make sure we figure this out especially before our children aren't living with us. We enjoy traveling and going out to eat, but want to create more opportunities for us to be balanced as a married couple.

SB: What legacy do you hope to leave as a school leader?

KP: I would hope people would see the love, passion, and high expectations I had for everyone here at Crooked Creek. When they think back to me, I hope they would say I was a good, caring person, and that I did what was best for kids.

SB: Any final thoughts?

KP: Marsha Reynolds always said I was humble. I try to be a servant leader and model what it looks like to be a professional adult caring for kids. I model for them how to work with challenging kids; you can still show you mean business while staying calm. I'm good at building relationships with kids. I feel like I am here for my students and that's my main job.

Click [here](#) to read about Keana Parquet's husband Principal Eric Parquet.