

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



The Workshop School Names Ayanna Walker as New Principal

Philadelphia, PA – August 9, 2021 - The Workshop School is thrilled to announce that Ayanna Walker became principal effective July 2, 2021. Walker takes the reins from co-founder and long-time principal Simon Hauger.

“We’re so excited to have Ayanna lead the Workshop School into the future,” said Dr. Matthew Riggan, co-founder of the Workshop School and head of its non-profit affiliate. “She’s a remarkable human being and a great learner and leader who is deeply committed to the education of young people.”

A lifelong Philadelphian, Walker joined the Workshop School in 2019 as assistant principal after numerous successful years in the classroom teaching middle school mathematics and science, where she led her students to success in state and national competitions.

“I found the Workshop School, but in a very real sense it also found me,” said Walker, “I believe so strongly in the Workshop School’s focus on connections, skills, and agency, as well as how we can blend those foundational pieces in ways that prepare our students for success.”

Always a quick learner and dedicated student— *“I always wanted to be the one called on...and to have my paper on the top of the bulletin board”*— Walker took her passion to the classroom as a teacher. Although she realized early on the importance of connections and engaging young people in their work, it wasn’t until one of her principals encouraged her to develop her own experiential instructional approaches that she came to understand the potential of project-based instruction to motivate students.

“That was the first time someone trusted me to go in and just teach,” she recalled. “It was intimidating at first but then I learned to make my own connections, to be creative, and to transfer that energy to students.”

And clearly it worked; Walker’s classes won regional competitions and placed in national events, and her school won the award for PA Middle School of the Year.

“It’s all about allowing young people to experience the world,” said Walker. “They can’t dream what they haven’t seen.”

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But as much as she enjoyed the energy and enthusiasm, she was able to generate with students in her classrooms, Walker began to look for ways to broaden her impact.

“Younger students would stop at the door of my classroom, see how excited the young people in my class were, and say: ‘can I be part of that?’” she recalled. “But if they weren’t my students, most often they wouldn’t get those kinds of experiences. So, I decided to move into leadership, where I could support teachers in creating project-based instructional programs and reach so many more students.”

And that desire brought Walker to the Workshop School.

“Ayanna is smart, passionate, and emotionally intelligent,” said out-going principal Simon Hauger. “Those are the traits that you often see in natural leaders. But more importantly, she’s deeply committed to the success of young people, and that drives her at a fundamental level.”

Hauger will continue to support the Workshop School, serving as advisor for Walker and as a teacher coach, and will also join Riggan in a new venture aimed at taking lessons learned from their experiences in designing and delivering innovative instruction at the high school level—including the power of experiential learning, the importance of building adult competencies, and the value of creating democratic, restorative learning communities— and applying them to postsecondary education.

“We founded the Workshop School ten years ago based on the notion that all students are gifted and talented and that school should be about helping them figure out what drives them, and then work with them to build skill sets to be successful,” said Hauger.

“None of us was particularly interested in being the leader; rather, we were focused on how to build a successful school. When I agreed to take on the role of principal, I never expected to be in the position for all this time. So, I’m grateful that I can finally pass the torch to someone as strong and committed to children as Ayanna.”

Of course, the new school year will bring a multitude of challenges, but Walker is looking forward to working through them with faculty, students, and teachers.

“I want to see an even greater level of community and even deeper connections,” said Walker. “Now that we’ve had a year without in-person instruction, we can work together to understand more fully what we missed, what we want, and what we need as a school community. I know that students have suffered and that some may return with trauma, but through it all, I’m confident that we will find ways to enjoy one another, love one another, and learn together. With my whole heart I know this is where I’m supposed to be.”

Walker understands that the school’s founders are entrusting her with a great responsibility. “Matt and Simon have taken the Workshop School from a brilliant idea to an afterschool program and now to one of the leading progressive high schools in the country,” she said. “They chose me, and I am deeply grateful for that. The Workshop School was always their baby, but now it’s my baby, too. Of course, they’ll always have visitation rights!”

About the Workshop School. The Workshop School was established in 2013 to honor the diverse interests and learning styles of students and to build a curriculum focused on project-based instruction and real-world experiences that prepare them for success in college and/or careers. We strive to create a democratic and just community that values interpersonal connections and respects the talents and abilities of all members of our school family.

An open admission high school primarily serving students from West and North Philadelphia, the Workshop School promotes real-world success by offering a structured sequence of programming that utilizes interdisciplinary projects, exhibitions, internships, youth entrepreneurship, and dual enrollment opportunities. Through these experiences, students develop a broad and diverse set of skills that go well beyond traditional content knowledge and are indispensable to postsecondary success.

Video excerpts from a recent conversation between educator Stacy Holland and Ayanna Walker about her new role as principal of the Workshop School can be viewed [here](#).

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