

## Centennial hires principal for Davis Elementary

By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, September 9, 2014 11:00 pm

Promising “I’m going to make you proud,” Shawanna V. James-Coles thanked the Centennial School Board for its unanimous vote Tuesday night to make her principal of Davis Elementary School.

James-Coles spent nearly two decades with the School District of Philadelphia, the past five as an instructional specialist “responsible for 19 school buildings,” said Mark Miller, the board’s vice president.

“She is going to be tops,” he said.

James-Coles, who attended the board meeting with her husband, daughter and son, said she has “felt at home” from her first interview.

She told of her initial meeting with Miller, who encouraged her to “dream big,” and said she was reminded of Langston Hughes’ poem “A Dream Deferred.”

“We’re going to dream big at Davis and do some wonderful things,” James-Coles said.

In response, Superintendent Joyce Mundy said, “that kind of enthusiasm, excitement and vision is what we’re about.”

“We look forward to working with her and are thrilled to have an administrator of her caliber as a part of our district,” board President Jane Schrader-Lynch said.

The opening developed when former Principal Paula Voshell left to become principal at Media Elementary School in the Rose Tree School District. Leonard Schwartz, a longtime principal at Mill Creek Elementary School in Central Bucks, is handling the duties until James-Coles takes over in mid-October.

She began her career as a second-grade teacher and later became an instructional reform facilitator in Philadelphia. James-Coles holds a bachelor’s degree in early childhood/elementary education from Temple University and a master’s degree in elementary education from Cambridge College. She also holds a master’s degree in educational leadership from Lehigh University.



Centennial School District Administration Building. Bucks County Courier Times File Photo.

When she introduced her family to the board, Director Andrew Pollock joked, “this is the last time you’re going to see her. When you’re a principal, you don’t get to see your family much.”

Also Tuesday night, the board praised Andrea DiDio, its director of human resources and public relations, who is leaving for a job with Central Bucks.

Schrader Lynch complimented her for a “superb” job and said “It is truly our loss and Central Bucks’ gain ... If you don’t like it there, you can change your mind and come back.”

The district also is losing Christopher Berdnik, its business director since March 2011. Berdnik is leaving to take a similar position with Bensalem School District and will get \$21,546.56 as part of a separation agreement signed Tuesday.

The money is for 36 days of paid time off at \$592.96 per day plus \$200 to resolve a dispute of whether payment is owed for his services as board secretary.

Miller called it an “amicable settlement. The department is in much better shape than when he came here.”