

THE LIFE OF AN EAST ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

By: Lyric Curry

An assistant principal's life is a curious thing. Some students wonder how these people came to be what they are and why they do it. What motivates them? We now have the answer. With the help of Mrs. Harres, Mr. Halterman, Mr. Rujawitz, and Mrs. Perry; the secret is revealed!

How long have you been an AP? At East?

Mr. Rujawitz: I was an AP here in the 2019-2020 school year. I was a teacher before I was an administrator. My first year teaching was 2013-2014 school year. I had one year where I taught at Belleville West—I was a special ed teacher in the BD program. After that, I was a special ed teacher from 2014-2019 up there in the second floor of O building.

Mrs. Perry: This is my first year at Belleville East. However, I've been in leadership for more than 20 years. I started my career in East St. Louis, then I was an assistant principal at Cahokia where I became a building principal at the elementary school, then at the 6th grade center. I was moved to try something different. I was a special education administrator and I did that for four years, but I missed working with children one-on-one.

Mr. Halterman: This is my first year and I love it so far.

Mrs. Harres: This is my second year. So, I started with juniors and then I moved up. Before this I taught some high school Spanish at Collinsville. First time being an administrator and first time here.

What's your favorite part about being an AP?

Mr. Rujawitz: I like directly working with kids. I can work with hundreds—if not thousands—of kids. If you're a teacher you predominantly deal with kids who are in your class, whereas now I can create tremendous amounts of relationships with students, families, and teachers.

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Mrs. Perry: I think my favorite part about it is interacting with the freshman students and just being visible on campus which will allow me to meet a lot of the kids that I typically don't see. I always see the 10% of the students that are not doing the right thing, so I try to get around students that I really don't get a chance to see and get acquainted with them.

Mr. Halterman: I think that the office staff is great and I have a lot of support from the other administrators here in the district.

Mrs. Harres: My favorite part is getting to know the students and their families. I think that not being in the classroom allows for a lot of conversations. I really get to know not only the positives, but also their struggles.

When do you enjoy being an AP the most?

Mr. Rujawitz: I would say it doesn't really matter. I am very lucky to love what I do and to be so thankful that this is my job. I sleep at night knowing they pay me money to help kids—you can't do much more than that. And with that retrospect, everyday is the same. There is no time where I like it better than others.

Mrs. Perry: Well this year for Belleville East, since this is my first year here, homecoming was amazing. I purposefully wanted to work at the front table so I could see all the kids coming in. Seeing them all dressed up and excited about homecoming was amazing. I think that looking at the kids in an unstructured setting like homecomings, proms, the basketball games; it just gives me life!

Mr. Halterman: I enjoyed, overall, every day so far. I think the most fun I've had is probably the homecoming week. A little of that fun activity and seeing the kids get out of the classroom and do some activities.

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Mrs. Harres: I would have to say, last year being new, the most *stressful* time for me was when I first started. I came in as juniors when everybody knew each other but I had to get to know everybody. So far, I actually really liked the start of this year. We have that connection and the past behind us and those foundations to move forward. I feel like, in May, when they walk across the stage it'll definitely be the best.

Do you sponsor or coach any other activities?

Mr. Rujawitz: I don't. I used to be the head wrestling coach at Belleville West. Us administrators, we have specific duties. Mine is dealing with any kind of medical or Covid stuff still. I also deal with graduation, residency, and registration.

Mrs. Perry: Not this time, but I did tell Mr. Ford that I will help him out with prom in any way possible because I think it is going to be very magical this year. I think the kids are going to be very surprised.

Mr. Halterman: I do not.

Mrs. Harres: Not necessarily. Some of the things that I do as assistant principal is handout our Renaissance cards. I like that part—it's a positive thing to do to give back to the kids who are doing the right thing. I am also in charge of putting together Lancerfest.

What do you enjoy doing after school? Hobbies?

Mr. Rujawitz: I'm a huge sports guy—I just love all sports. I love the competition and the competitiveness. I love the drama that goes into them. The main thing about being an administrator is we work some long hours. The job is never done at 4:30, but any time I get I like to spend time with my family. If I'm not watching sports, playing sports, or working out then I generally spend time with my family.

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Mrs. Perry: I love reading. I love to escape reality and just open a good book! And I love black history. So I just love reading about our history and becoming more knowledgeable about that. I also have two grandkids and I enjoy spending time with them. Another thing is that I like to watch my daughter's dance competitions—it's really cathartic for me. It brings me joy.

Mr. Halterman: I'm an avid reader. My wife and I tend to read several books throughout the week, but I also like to golf and then play a number of sports. I'm decent at golf.

Mrs. Harres: Well, I have three little boys, so they keep me pretty busy. I really do like going to all their sporting events or whatever they're into. I also like running, it's my way to de-stress. I also love going on vacation in the summer.

What is your biggest achievement as an AP?

Mr. Rujawitz: I don't know if I can answer that. The way I look at it is you're always looking to achieve something. I like to think that my greatest achievement is still to come.

Mrs. Perry: I think my biggest achievement, as a leader, is when I help students out in this profession. They'll see me in the store and they'll come and thank me for helping them out. It's so rewarding and it just keeps me in this profession.

Mr. Halterman: Being my first year, I think one of my achievements is making sure that I build a relationship with the teachers and staff and some of the students that come to my office. I don't think I've worked here long enough to have this greatest achievement.

Mrs. Harres: I think surviving my first year. Anyone starting a new job or a new role, there's a lot of unknowns. It's not necessarily that, but it's that you don't know who to talk to or where to go. I think that has been the biggest struggle, but during the second year it's so much better!

What is something you would tell people about East?

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Mr. Rujawitz: We have a phenomenal school. We have great diversity and so many different elements to this school. This is a coming-of-age kind of campus. We have tremendous teachers here who are in it for the kids and administration who are here to support the kids and the teachers. The beautiful part about it is that we have the ability to create and to become more dynamic.

Mrs. Perry: I would tell them that the kids on this campus are very obedient. We live in a world of technology. Kids are banned from carrying their cell phones, being on their cell phones, other stuff like that. East is really relaxed with that, and it's never been an issue. I think kids should be allowed to use technology. The east kids have been prime examples of how it can work and I'm very proud of the kids on campus for that.

Mr. Halterman: I would tell them that we have excellent staff here. Everyone here seems to work very well together. We also have a lot of opportunities for students.

Mrs. Harres: I think we have the best students and the best staff. We are able to offer students so many different opportunities for whatever their future interests are. It is not a mold, like a one-type-fits-all mold, students can go down many different avenues. We just have a lot of pride being a Lancer!

I am grateful to these leaders for having the time to share their mindsets with us. To really build a relationship with APs, as a student, it's important to get to know them first. This goes for any type of administrator or teacher. With this information, we can get to know the people who are here to help us and create a stronger bond that may benefit us one day!