

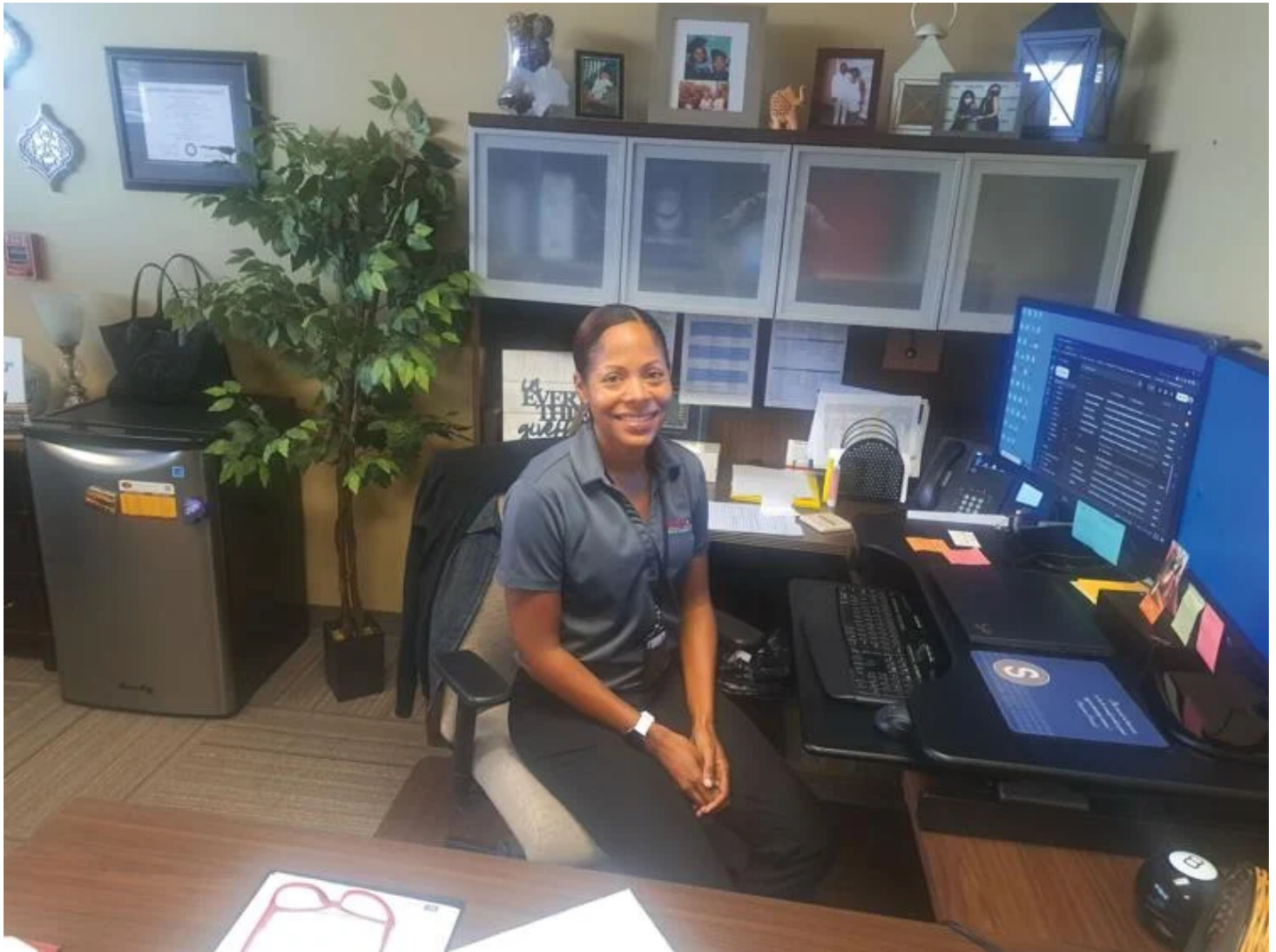
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TOP STORY

Tempe Union board picks a home-grown superintendent

By Paul Maryniak, AFN Executive Editor

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Dr. Stacia Wilson, pictured in August, was named Tempe Union High School District's next superintendent by the Governing Board last week.

(File photo)

After initially planning a nationwide search and an intricate interviewing process with a tight deadline of next August, the Tempe Union High School District Governing Board decided last week it didn't have to look far for the district's next superintendent after all.

In a surprise special meeting Nov. 29, the board unanimously voted to begin contract negotiations with Acting Superintendent Dr. Stacia Wilson to pick up that mantle.

With her appointment, Wilson may be making history in Arizona – and not just because she’s one of the few Black females to lead a public school district in the state.

She may be one of even fewer – if not the first – superintendents to be home-grown.

Wilson has spent her entire professional career – had her early education – in Tempe Union, starting as an English teacher at Desert Vista High School roughly four years after graduating from McClintock High School.

She even went to grade school in one of the district’s feeder districts as a student at Fuller Elementary, part of Tempe Elementary School District.

The district last week said in a release that “board members carefully considered feedback from employees, families, students, and community partners during the hiring process.”

Board President Armando Montero said Wilson had been an “exemplary leader” since she replaced Dr. Kevin Mendivil.

Mendivil abruptly “retired” in July following an apparent disagreement with the board over how to improve academic achievement. He was hired in September by Chandler Unified School District to be an elementary school principal.

“The Governing Board has full confidence in Dr. Wilson and we believe that her leadership style and skill set are the best fit for the district, our students and families, and the community,” Montero said.

In a prepared statement, Wilson said, “I am truly humbled by this” appointment.

“This district is my home, and has given me so much, both as a student and as an educator,” she said. “I am honored that the Governing Board has entrusted me with this role and I look forward to continuing to positively impact our students, their families, and the TUHSD community.”

In deciding to make education a career as a freshman year at Hampton University in Virginia, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in English secondary education in 1996, Wilson continued a lineage of distinguished educators.

Indeed, her career somewhat mirrors that of her mother, Dr. Marjorie Kyle, who started as an English teacher in Roosevelt School. She eventually earned her doctorate and became a professor for the Maricopa Community Colleges District, mainly at Mesa Community College.

Wilson's paternal grandfather was dean of students at Arkansas University of Pine Bluff and his wife headed a reading program there.

Even Wilson's father, Air Force Lt. Col. Stanley Kyle, Ret., had something of a connection to education – and Tempe Union. As a marketing sales representative for IBM, he sold equipment to various school districts, including Tempe Union.

“He kind of had connections with the district even before I started going to school,” Wilson said in an interview in August.

Her roots in Tempe Union run even deeper.

She is an alumna of Fuller Elementary School in Tempe, went to Fees College Prep Middle School and spent her freshman year at Marcos de Niza High School before transferring to McClintock High.

There, she participated in numerous clubs and activities that included track and field and student council.

After completing her undergraduate work, Wilson spent a year substitute teaching, mostly at Tempe Union campuses, before getting a job at Desert Vista when it opened in 1997.

Because Desert Vista was so new, she explained in an interview, “I started to learn different aspects of the school. I got a chance to work with new teachers coming in...and just kind of mentored them throughout the year.”

She also was part of the school's accreditation process, so she continued learning more about the nuts and bolts of school operations.

At the same time, Wilson worked on getting her masters and doctoral degrees from Northern Arizona University as her career at Tempe Union gradually shifted into school administration.

For a time she was also principal of Tempe High, guiding it to an 'A' rating by the Arizona Department of Education and Arizona Education Foundation designation as an A+ School of Excellence.

Wilson became associate superintendent in 2018 to the man she is replacing.

In becoming superintendent, Wilson will be the third woman in the top job at Tempe Union and the second African-American female to hold the interim superintendent title.

Even before the board's decision last week, Wilson was gratified by its appointment of her to the interim title this summer.

"Honestly, I am just honored and grateful that people had the confidence in me to lead the district," Wilson said.

"I have teachers and mentors and people around the Valley who have just been really encouraging," she said at the time of her initial appointment to lead the district in the short-term.

"I see a lot of potential in our district and we have some great history and great foundations we can build on."

"I want to do right by our families and I want to see us work well together."

"I just want to make sure that all of our students are cared for, that they're challenged, and that they're supported ...so that when they graduate they are prepared for whatever post-secondary experience their family dreams for them – that the students choose for themselves – that they're prepared. ...That's the work that we'll do."