



DISTRICTWIDE

NEWSBREAK

Meet C-M's new administrative team

The ad could have read
“**WANTED:** Two educators needed for important jobs, 16-hour days plus nights and weekends. Good team players only. No wimps need apply.”

The new school year in the Canon-McMillan School District began with a new administrative team at the top who believe they have always been on the same path only from different directions.

Dr. Helen Kavoulakis McCracken is the first female superintendent of the Canon-McMillan School District. Greg Taranto, whose first career was in healthcare, is the new assistant to the superintendent.

Dr. McCracken's childhood dream was to become a teacher. The teaching profession was held in the highest esteem by the Kavoulakis family. Her move to administration was a logical evolution in a family filled with educators.

Her 30-year career in the district points to a devoted educator who loves children and believes in putting the students' needs first. Taranto's career in education started a bit later in life, but his dream of being an educator blossomed as soon as he was hired at Canon-McMillan.



**DR. HELEN K.
McCRACKEN**
SUPERINTENDENT

CAREER IN EDUCATION

30 years at
Canon-McMillan:

- Assistant to the superintendent
- Director of curriculum and instruction
- Canon-McMillan High School academic principal
- Canonsburg Middle School and Wylandville Elementary principal
- CMHS reading specialist
- Elementary reading resource specialist



GREG TARANTO
ASSISTANT TO THE
SUPERINTENDENT

CAREER IN EDUCATION

8 years at
Canon-McMillan:

- Canonsburg Middle School principal and administrative intern/assistant principal
- Hills-Hendersonville Elementary School fifth-grade teacher
- Canonsburg Middle School alternative education teacher (grades 6-8) and seventh-grade science teacher

DR. McCRACKEN'S relationship with Canon-McMillan began as a kindergarten student in Borland Manor Elementary School. Her father, Michael Kavoulakis, spent his whole career at Canon-McMillan as well.

His devotion to the district also started first as a student at First Street Elementary School, then as a teacher and later principal at First Street, Wylandville, South Central and the now-closed Hawthorne elementary schools.

Dr. McCracken, like her father, served as principal at Wylandville Elementary, along with many other teaching and administrative positions in the district.

Dr. McCracken said she and her family discussed her goal of becoming superintendent when she went to graduate school and again when she earned her superintendent's letter of eligibility

"My family was always onboard with this," says Dr. McCracken.

"I am quite lucky to have such a supportive husband and daughter. Although my parents only saw me reach the level of elementary principal, I know if they were here today, they would be quite proud.

"Our community values loyalty, dedication, hard work and strong character. These are the priorities with which I was raised, and these are the priorities that make us unique to this day.

"No matter how big we grow, these values will always be a part of what makes Canon-McMillan special."

PERSONAL PROFILES

DR. HELEN K. McCRACKEN SUPERINTENDENT

■ HIGH SCHOOL

Canon-McMillan,
Class of 1974

■ DEGREES

B.S., Elementary
Education, Calif. Univ. of
PA (4.0 average)

M.S., Reading, Calif. Univ.
of PA (4.0 average)

M.S., Business
Administration, Robert
Morris University

Elementary Principal
Certification, Calif. Univ. of
PA

Superintendent's Letter of
Eligibility, Calif. Univ. of PA
(4.0 average)

Ed.D. Educational
Leadership, Univ. of
Pittsburgh (4.0 average)

■ FAMILY

Husband, Jeff, pharma-
cist/owner McCracken's
Pharmacy, Waynesburg

Daughter, Elissa, 17,
senior at Waynesburg
Central High School

GREG TARANTO ASSISTANT TO THE SUPERINTENDENT

■ HIGH SCHOOL

Montour High School,
Class of 1991

■ DEGREES

B.S., Exercise Physiology,
Slippery Rock Univ.

M.S., Cardiac
Rehabilitation and
Exercise Physiology, East
Stroudsburg Univ.

M.Ed., Elementary
Education, Calif. Univ. of
PA (4.0 average)

Principal Certification (K-
12), Calif. Univ. of PA (4.0
average)

■ FAMILY

Wife, Melissa, elementary
physical education
teacher, West Allegheny
School District

Son, Jeremy, 8, third-
grader

5-year-old twins, daughter
Mackenzie and son Ethan,
kindergartners at West
Allegheny School District

**“We work as a team ...
we share the same fundamental goals and the
determination to make Canon-McMillan
the best in providing an excellent
education for all of our students.”**

Dr. Helen K. McCracken

MR. TARANTO'S path was very different. He wanted to become a teacher but feared there would not be jobs available when he graduated from college, so instead he earned degrees in exercise physiology and cardiac rehabilitation. He worked as a cardiopulmonary rehabilitation therapist for five years at UPMC-Shadyside in Pittsburgh. His marriage to a teacher reignited his interest and he took night courses to earn a master's degree in elementary education.

He began working at Canonsburg Middle School as a seventh-grade science teacher and his feet were firmly on the education path leading to becoming Canonsburg Middle School principal.

“In our former positions, we were always in communication,” says Dr. McCracken.

“That helped me appreciate Greg's abilities. Our other internal candidates (for assistant to the superintendent) were top-notch, but Greg was the best for us at this time.

“We work as a team, which is not always found in a central office environment, but we share the same fundamental goals and the determination to make Canon-McMillan the best in providing an excellent education for all of our students. We share a similar work ethic and we have staff in place to do that. We two are a team,” she said.

Taranto agrees that they work well together.

“We meet each school day at 7 a.m. and then email or text each other throughout the day, even though our offices are next to each other.

“You can even find us emailing one another at 11 at night or on weekends. A 16-hour day plus nights is not unusual for us. Luckily we have huge support systems at home.”

Taranto adds, “The two most important things in my life are my family and my work.

“On weekends you won't find me playing golf or hanging out away from my family. I spend my weekends at home doing things with my wife and our three kids. My work is both my hobby and my passion.”

His dedication to the district has much to do with Dr. McCracken.

“We all have an impact on our students in preparing them for a very competitive world. The 21st century is a global market.”

Greg Taranto

“**CANON-McMILLAN** gave me the opportunity to be a teacher and I feel loyal to that. I got involved with coaching and curriculum writing here and made the connection with Dr. McCracken who was director of curriculum and instruction. I saw what she was doing for multiple teachers and buildings and that inspired me to work more collaboratively in my building,” Mr. Taranto said.

“Greg’s rise (from teacher to the No. 2 administrator) was faster than the speed of sound, but I think in his new position, he is now starting to do what he was meant to do. This is not a typical pace or path but it is working out as it should,” says Dr. McCracken.

“I come from another direction and bring other ideas, but Helen, having lived this all her life makes everything come together,” says Taranto.

“We know that it’s always what

you’re doing today and the difference you make in the education of the students today, otherwise it doesn’t matter.

“When Helen supervised kindergarten through eighth grades, she empowered, supported and held accountable all those principals. That makes everyone a part of moving the district forward.

“We also tell new teachers they can bring in new ideas from day one and be a leader in their building.”

This first year in their new positions, Dr. McCracken and Taranto don’t plan on making changes without first analyzing the district.

“We have to get everyone onboard before change can happen. We must work hard on the foundation first,” says Taranto.

“We have important standards and practices and all else will

come in time.”

Dr. McCracken was instrumental in First Street Elementary School being named a national No Child Left Behind – Blue Ribbon School last year.

“In my mind, our k-4 program has a lot of consistency, so by design what you find at First Street you find in all seven elementary schools and in my mind we have seven Blue Ribbon schools.”

Now Dr. McCracken and Taranto are a team looking to form collaborative relationships with the district’s administrators and faculty for a strong foundation in the classrooms aligning to the state standards and applying best practices.

“We all have an impact on our students in preparing them for a very competitive world. The 21st century is a global market,” says Taranto. ■