

Joe MacClay is not afraid of change. He's also not afraid of hard work. Last March it was announced that he would become Rolling Hills Elementary School's next principal, replacing retiring 38-year Council Rock veteran, Craig Ogelby. Though Mr. MacClay did not officially begin his new job until July 1st, he spent last spring commuting back and forth between his "old" school, the 1,000-student Cold Spring Elementary in the Central Bucks School District, where he served as Assistant Principal, and Rolling Hills. (In the Central Bucks School District, elementary schools with student populations over 800 students have both a Principal and an Assistant Principal.) During that transition time he observed every teacher on the Rolling Hills staff and provided written commentary to them about his observations. On September 4th, he opened the building to the students, at a time when every grade level except 6th grade had new staff. And by the way, on September 13th, he became the proud father of a baby girl, his third child. He also has 4 and 6 year old sons.

Mr. MacClay graduated from La Salle University, where he earned a degree in Political Science and History. After college he enlisted in the Navy, where he was later medically discharged. With his career path now altered from what he previously thought, he became interested in the education field and was hired as a substitute teacher in a parochial school. At the same time he attended Holy Family University and earned his Masters and elementary teaching certification. He earned his Master's and Administrative Certification from Delaware Valley College. While pursuing his education he taught Computers in a South Philadelphia Catholic School, followed by teaching 7th grade St. Ephraim School in Bensalem, before earning a position in the Central Bucks School District. He was initially hired as a 7th grade learning support teacher and then moved to 5th grade, which he taught for nine years.

One year ago he started in a new position, Assistant Principal at Cold Spring Elementary. It was shortly thereafter that he learned about the open Principal position at Rolling Hills. "When you are student teaching, you are always looking ahead to when you can have your own classroom. When you are an Assistant Principal, you look ahead to when you can have your own building." With that spirit, he wanted to be part of the process, while not really thinking he'd get the job. That obviously played out a little differently than he initially thought. "For me, I knew the future was either in Central Bucks or in Council Rock. I wanted to be a part of a high-performing, quality school district. I know a lot of people with connections to Council Rock. I guess this was meant to be."

Mr. MacClay said that he wants to use this year as a "learning year" and not make any major changes. But changes, in small ways, are already altering the landscape, from both district and self-directed points of reference. The emphasis on the e-Friday folder and going "paperless" poses unique challenges in an elementary school, where so much mail moves back and forth between home and school. The new Point-of-Service payment method being piloted in the cafeterias has also brought something new to the school that he and his colleagues around the district are managing. Very soon a large recycling container will be put on the property to encourage a "greener" attitude in the school and secondarily, to yield financial rebates back to Rolling Hills. He is also assessing various safety and security issues faced in a building with ten trailers.

Coming from outside of the district offers Mr. MacClay a very objective view of his new school, which includes the facility itself, the staff and the students. He says the transition has been great. “I am not looking to change things for the sake of change. I look around and ask myself, what’s best for kids? What would I want for my children, my children’s’ teachers and in my children’s’ school? I want to take care of the staff emotionally and professionally. I want what’s best for kids. We have to take care of each other.”

With Mr. MacClay’s focus, dedication and enthusiasm it is clear that Rolling Hills is in very capable hands. Citizens For Education wishes him the best of luck!