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Leighton Elementary: Holding the Future of Oswego

By Tiguidanké Kourouma, English and Adolescence Education Double Major

Walking into Frederick Leighton Elementary, the joyous atmosphere welcomes you. From children's waves of laughter, to the bright hallways, down to the warm interactions between teachers and children, Leighton encompasses everything a childhood education should be.

The school is built on a one-level U shape which provides for easy access throughout the campus and promotes engagement between the staff and the students. Each grade level has two sections and the student population is around 300. This close-knit environment helps teachers and staff to understand the student's learning strengths and build a relationship with them in order to determine how to continue their academic careers. Elizabeth Daniels, a student teacher at Leighton, and Michelle McManus, her host teacher, know that their connections with SUNY Oswego and the Oswego community have helped them to be more engaged in their own calling as teachers.

Daniels was excited about the way that the curriculum of her childhood education major at SUNY Oswego prepared her for her student-teaching career at Leighton. In their second-to-last semester, all education majors at Oswego do two full days a week of on-site practicum work. Daniels did this "Block 3" training at Leighton and beamed recalling, "I really enjoyed [it]... you really get into teaching."

Becoming familiar with the environment of Leighton during this preliminary period prepared Daniels for her student-teaching semester, where she has collaborated closely with McManus to prepare lessons. She spoke about the positive environment of the school and how it made her feel safe to embrace her inner child: "In the classroom, I do feel like a kid every day because I'm learning. I teach new things and learn new things every day." Beyond teaching two classes Daniels also volunteers as a coach for the after-school girls' track team.

This important extracurricular planning is something special Leighton brings to the community. With the help of their principal, McManus noted, Leighton holds monthly evening events where 100 to 200 kids attend: everything from bingo to math literacy nights to glow-in-the-dark dance parties. The children love every second of each event and parents can feel safe knowing that their kids are under the attentive care of the Leighton faculty and staff.

McManus expressed her joy over being not only a SUNY Oswego alum but also from the City of Oswego, "I went from starting my career off not being engaged, to getting married, having kids, and having my children go to SUNY Oswego [...] I grew up with the children of Leighton." Her pride in being raised in Oswego, well before she knew she would stay to work at Leighton for 22 years, enabled her to connect more with the students. It is a source of deep satisfaction for her to reflect on the full circle she's taken from where she started, giving back to the community that made her who she is.

Frederick Leighton Elementary is a garden where the entire community comes together to cultivate the growth of some of the youngest members of the city. The teachers, staff, and city support a flourishing future for Oswego.



Campus-City Relations Committee



Leighton Elementary School and SUNY Oswego

Elizabeth Daniels, Early Childhood Education Major
Michelle McManus, Leighton Elementary School