

# Reimagining a Better School Year

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

the honored guest for a “Meet the Principal” parade earlier this summer where she and Prescott staff members rode cars to meet Prescott students outside their homes in the Parkrose neighborhood, maintaining social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

At first, the district planned to teach children this year with a hybrid model of distance learning and classroom instruction. It meant that Watson and her team had to prepare the school building for safety by taking actions that would lower the risk of transmission of the coronavirus.

But the plans for teaching in school were scrapped when rising cases of the disease, in Multnomah County and across the state, led public health authorities and Gov. Kate Brown to impose new restrictions.

“It’s been intense, a whirlwind,” Watson said about all the changing preparations.

The racial reckoning brought on by protests over police shootings of unarmed African Americans and injustices in the criminal justice system have a silver lining, Watson said, in that it is causing educators to become more compassionate with children who are experiencing trauma and giving them better



PHOTO BY SHAWNTE SIMS OF SIMSHOT

New Prescott Elementary Principal Nichole Watson (center) and four of the school’s new teachers, (from left) Catherine Bayer, Miranda Lickey, Ruchi Shah and Jasmine Lowe, gather during a “Meet the Principal” community parade on July 31. By adding teachers of bi-racial and Indian South Asian heritage to the school staff, including two Latina women (not pictured) as secretaries and family engagement liaisons in the principal’s office, Watson is already bringing much needed diversity to a school in which nearly half of the students identify as either Latinx, Black/African American or Pacific Islander. The Prescott staff had previously been almost exclusively white.

opportunities to heal.

“We get to be more human, meet people where they are and become more equitable in ways never before,” she said.

Parents and other family supports have already been vital in connecting children to distance learning content and resources, Watson said. Some parents, for example, have organized study pods, where small groups of young learners get help from an alternating group of mentors.

“It’s all hands on,” for aunts, uncles, other parents and community members,” she said.

This is Watson’s second career. She was born in Portland and attended Boise-Elliot, Beaumont Middle School and Benson High School before her employment in the commercial real estate business. In 2008, she decided to go back to school to get a degree in education by enrolling in the Portland Teachers Program at Portland Community College, a program geared to bring more teachers of color into Portland schools.

Watson earned her bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in education at Portland State University and is currently working on a dissertation for a doctorate in education. She lives just five minutes from Prescott, calling her new principal assignment a calling.

“I was drawn to to it,” she said. “I’m right where I’m supposed to be.”

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