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**WESTWORD**  
WEB EXCLUSIVES

# Osburn discusses future, past

*This is part two of two of an interview between West Word's Seth Motel and Assistant Principal of Operations Kaine Osburn, who was selected as Niles West's next principal. Part one of the interview ran in the March 23 print issue.*

*West Word:* Teachers at the staff meeting were obviously very thrilled. A bunch of people stood up and applauded for you.

Kaine Osburn: (laughs) It was very nice.

*WW:* So, they feel connected with you, but what about the students? What do you need to do to not just be the teachers' principal, but also the students' principal?

KO: That's a good question. Like I said, it's hard, for instance, if you're in a gymnasium of 2,000 kids to get up and have a connection with kids, so I am going to look to other ways. I'll be meeting with each class at the beginning of the year. I'll be using technology more to communicate with them in a way I hope is immediate or not distant through the technology. Other than that, I'll just try to have them see me in classrooms, have them see me in the cafeteria, have them see me at athletic events and make it clear that they can come see me at those events and talk to me. The biggest way I'm going to do that is just by being myself. I'm not going to try to come up with something that doesn't fit who I am.

*WW:* Complete this sentence ...

KO: (laughs) Maybe.

*WW:* "The most different thing next year for Niles West students they're going to notice versus this year will be ..."

KO: "That the principal is much taller." (laughs) You ask a question like that? Come on, fill in the blank?

*WW:* The most different thing in terms of the students' day-to-day lives?

KO: Hopefully, there will be better music in the halls.

*WW:* Okay, so I need to ask you a real question now?

KO: (laughs) You can't expect much from fill in the blanks. You know that from life and taking tests that fill in the blanks don't tell you very much about a person.

*WW:* When I walk into the school next year, I'm going to see it, I'm going to immediately know that Mr. Osburn is in charge because ...

KO: (laughs) I don't know that you're necessarily going to know that. I don't think it works that way. I'm not here to make it about me. I mean, I'm not. My goal is not that everybody suddenly knows, "Oh, he's the principal." You know what, I could put a big picture of myself on the side of the building or I could put pictures of myself all over the building and they would know I'm principal, but that doesn't mean that their lives are any better or their experience in class is any better, so I would just hope that the quality of their day-to-day lives they feel is less stressful, more enjoyable and affords them both more freedom and more responsibility, because with one comes the other.

*WW:* What's going to be your philosophy in keeping up with the No Child Left Behind standards [as a former] English teacher who probably gave many subjective evaluations, not just [multiple-choice] tests?

KO: I actually believe that we have the capacity to [succeed at] both—that it's not a tradeoff, but I think there is one thing that American culture lacks and has always lacked, and that's patience. We don't exercise any patience, so we're not willing to try something, stick to it, see how it works [and] measure it over a number of years. No Child Left Behind does not help that because it's a different class every year, and every time the scores change and the cut scores change, you're expected to go fix it, and that's not a very healthy way to operate, especially in education. So, what I'm going to look to, and that's why I said five-10 years is really a reasonable time frame, is engaging collective action of the teachers, and that's one thing I can say honestly I learned very much from the union: Collective action gets you a lot farther than a series of individual actions. So, I'm going to work with the staff to find out ways that we can achieve our goals and that the side effects of the achievement of our goals as a community will help raise those scores.

*WW:* What should students know about you as a person? Is there any one fact that would enlighten people as to who you are?

KO: Let's see. My father was a college basketball coach, and then he became a college professor and then he went to work for the United States Department of Education. I, myself, grew up playing sports and being a high school athlete, and I loved to do things like read, but I wasn't academically oriented. When my life in sports kind of ended, I just started becoming academically oriented because that's what interested me. So they should probably know that I enjoy it all. I enjoy athletics, I enjoy academics and I don't think that that's an either/or proposition.

*WW:* Okay, last question. How do people need to pronounce your last name?

KO: "Oz-burn."

*WW:* If it's "Oz-born," do you respond anyway?

KO: Yes. I would be a year behind in my life if I had spent every time correcting somebody, so I don't worry about it. I know who they're talking about. Most of my life, people didn't even know my last name because my first name, nobody else had it, so they just said, "Kaine." That's how it went, and that's fine, too, but I don't worry about it. I don't take it as an insult. (laughs)



**Osburn contemplates next year's ascension to the position of principal.**  
Photo by Talha Ahmed