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Super New Super at Katherine Anne Porter School

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This year marks the 13th generation, or year, for charter schools in Texas and this August Wimberley's own Katherine Anne Porter School promoted its soft-spoken Director of Special Education, Joanna Green, to superintendent.

It's interesting times for Green and KAPS because this year the school also welcomes back its beloved Dave Thomasson, aka "Mr. D", who taught math there in its first three years while working on his masters in charter schools, as its new principal.

Katherine Anne Porter was established in 1998 by Dr. Yana Bland to create a unique and nurturing place for kids who did not fit in with or flourish in the standard school district culture. That was the year charter schools came into existence in Texas, so KAPS has always been on the cutting edge. It is named after Bland's favorite American author.

Bland has been on an extended leave of absence in Malta where she is caring for her ailing father. She stepped down as superintendent when she realized she was not coming back anytime soon. Bland remains the CFO and continues to offer direction and administrative support via Skype on a regular basis.

Thomasson helped search for a new superintendent and interviewed many qualified candidates but said, "We did not need a businessperson. What we needed was temperament and disposition." When Bland suggested Joanna as a candidate, Thomasson said, "Yeah, that could work." A few weeks later Thomasson sings Green's praises.

"Joanna is the best rookie superintendent we could've hoped for." That's mighty praise from a jury of her peers and one of Bland's original first choices for teaching staff.

KAPS is open enrollment — which means a parent or child can elect to attend. The school currently attracts students from between five and seven sur-



Photo by Susan Marx

Joanna Green steps up as new superintendent for Katherine Anne Porter School.

rounding counties, depending on the year. With an average of 125 students and a teaching staff of 20 — KAPS boasts an exceptional student to teacher ratio.

Green said, "One of the things that makes KAPS so great is our mentoring program." Each teacher selects between six and eight students to mentor throughout the year. The mentor tracks grades, keeps in contact with parents and if their name comes up in a meeting, the mentor is able to address whatever is going on personally and immediately.



Green described KAPS as being like a big family made up of small support groups.

Green is a graduate of the University of South Dakota and did her post-graduate work at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. She began her teaching

career as an artist and came to KAPS in 2001 from Connally ISD in Pflugerville.

Green said she started as the special education teacher and assessment coordinator but at her first staff meeting Bland surprised her by introducing her as director of special education.

To hear Green and Thomasson tell it, Bland is a force of nature — full of amazing energy and "very persuasive." Thomasson said he suspected Bland has been assembling this new administrative team all along because Green was her

suggestion for superintendent and was after him for years to come back from the Hays CISD where he was teaching.

Green said, "I fell in love with KAPS at my first staff meeting where someone threw out an idea and it was immediately implemented." It normally doesn't happen that way at an ISD. Green worked closely with Bland on the administrative team in her role as director of special education.

"In the beginning KAPS was for the dramatically 'at risk' (students). Now we have the full spectrum," Green said, "This began when we started attracting home-schooled kids." That raised the bar academically because many of them had an outstanding education.

Green is very excited about her new position and the school year. She has just finished painting her office sky blue and is still sorting through boxes of paperwork even though school officially began for KAPS on Monday.

Green said, "My vision is to continue doing what we're doing — creating life long learners and good citizens of the world." They do that by modeling these behaviors. The teachers learn right along with the students and actively participate in fundraising activities.

This year, Green is launching KAPS' first mandatory weekly lunches with the superintendent. Every week one freshman, sophomore, junior and senior will sit down, round-table style, in Green's office over lunch to talk about ideas the students have, how they think things are going and to learn from them how things might be better.

Green also hopes to have weekly teacher/superintendent lunches as well but these are on a voluntary basis. She sees her leadership role as being a support to the teaching staff and head of outreach in the community. Green also manages implementation of the curriculum and remains in charge of assessments, which includes overseeing KAPS' conversion to STAAR, the state's new standardized testing program.