

My name is April D. McNeill. I have a passion for working with young children that began during in my own childhood. As an adolescent, I volunteered to plan and supervise activities for our church nursery program. I found the experience to be exhilarating. As a young adult, I completed a teacher preparation program in Early Childhood Education at The University of Kansas where I also earned my Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Life. In 1993, I received my Kansas Teaching License and began teaching toddlers and preschool age children in childcare and preschool programs.

In 1997, I became a Personal Care Attendant for my maternal grandfather who had become severely disabled, as a result of a stroke. As I provided full time care for my grandfather, I also provided child care for young children in our home. I thoroughly enjoyed the intergenerational experience of providing both infant and elder care. Coordinating my grandfather's care, which included home based Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Nursing care, gave me the opportunity to experience working as part of a interdisciplinary team from the perspective of a family member. While working as an elder care and child care provider, I started part time studies in Early Childhood Special Education at the University of Kansas.

In June of 2000, I received my Teaching Endorsement in Early Childhood Special Education from the State of Kansas and began working full time as an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher for Kansas City Kansas Public Schools. In my first two years at KCKPS, I provided early intervention services for infants and toddlers in home and community settings as well as special education services for preschoolers in fully inclusive community settings. In the 2002, I took a teaching position working solely with preschool age students in a pilot program called the "Autism Inclusion Classroom". I co-taught alongside an Autism Specialist and a Speech Language Pathologist as we provided a range of services to a diverse group of preschool children in one classroom.

In 2004, I completed my Master of Science in Special Education at The University of Kansas. In 2005, I decided to relocate to the Pacific Northwest because of my love of the natural beauty here. I took a position teaching Developmental Preschool and coordinating an Autism Extended Day Program in Marysville, Washington. It was during this time that I had an opportunity to adopt my son, Skyler. At the time, Skyler was a preschool student who experienced global developmental delays. Parenting Skyler has given me invaluable experiences that continue to inform my role as I work to support my students and their parents. Skyler is currently a high school student. Parenting him continues to bring me greatest joy and great challenges.

In 2008, I began teaching as an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher in Lake Washington School District. There, I specialized in teaching students with low incidence disabilities in an Early Childhood Learning Center Classroom. This was a small, highly structured, preschool special education classroom with a focus on teaching preschool participation and early communication skills. In 2017, I spent one year teaching Developmental Preschool Classroom at Sorenson Early Childhood Center. Last year, I began teaching here at Northwood, working half time as an Early Childhood Special Education Teacher and half time as an Elementary Overload Specialist teaching Music, Spanish, and PE to Kindergarten and First Grade students.

The 2019-2020 school year will be my second year teaching here at Northwood Elementary. I am excited to be returning to teaching full time as an Early Childhood Special Educator.

I love working with young children. I feel privileged to walk alongside each student & family on their journey through the preschool years. Early childhood is such an important and exciting time in a young child's life. Preschool is really the first time that a child ventures outside of the family to participate independently in the wider community. My goal is to make certain that each child has a positive experience here in preschool as we help them develop skills that will allow them to participate in future school experiences.

I am always excited to meet and learn about new students. Each student brings a new puzzle for me to work on. He or she brings an absolutely unique combination of personality traits along with a set of unique strengths and challenges. In working with each student, I am seeking the answer to the following questions: "How can I use this student's unique set of strengths to help him or her develop new skills?" "Which skills will allow this student the most opportunities to participate fully in future school experiences?" As parents, I trust that you know your child best and I welcome any information that you can share with me that will help me in my work.

Northwood is an absolutely beautiful school. We are fortunate to have great administrative support and amazing resources. Our preschool classroom will be filled with light. We will also work to fill it with feelings of safety and acceptance as well as the joy and excitement that will fuel the growth of all of our students. We will be using the Creative Curriculum. It is a research based curriculum that provides opportunities for children to explore and construct their own knowledge based on real life experiences and observations. I look forward to meeting you and your child. Please feel free to contact me by e-mail with any questions you may have at April.McNeill@mercerislandschools.org