

LIMITLESS

Associate Principal Dr. Susan Leonard is running for Fairway City Council, in the hopes to continue using her passion for helping others and making them feel included not only at East, but in her neighborhood

by sydney newton & sophie henschel

EAST ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL Dr. Susan Leonard has always had a knack for students who are passionate about any given cause within the school. She's spent her last 5 years at East dedicated to establishing a connection with the student body, working to make them feel like their voice matters. Through advocating for the Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging initiative, fostering student-administration connections and being an ally for students when they bring issues to her attention, Leonard always makes sure to show her support in as many ways as possible.

Now she's running for City Council.

After officially signing up to run on June 1, Leonard is now in the campaigning process with one opposing candidate, David Watkins. The mail-in-ballot voting will begin Oct. 13 and the election will be held Nov. 2.

Since she's always told her students to stand up for what they believe in, even if that means taking risks to get

there, Leonard had the realization that she needs to practice what she preaches, taking a risk of her own in expanding her impact to the city level.

"I feel like I've been telling kids forever to jump out of your box and put yourself in an uncomfortable position and learn and grow," Leonard said. "I hope that people can look at this, whether I win or lose, and [see] that I can be served with a lesson that you're never too old to stop learning and growing and challenging yourself in whatever ways. When I tell you to do this, I even do it myself so I'm not just telling you to do something I wouldn't do."

If elected to City Council, Leonard will continue to work at East as an associate principal. This seems to be a relief for the East community, including alum Annabelle Merchant.

Growing up with Leonard as a family friend and role model, Merchant can't imagine East without her. Merchant feels that Leonard has a unique ability to make both students and faculty feel

seen.

"She's an ally," Merchant said. "And an advocate. Having a supervisor that you feel comfortable enough to approach and talk to in a comfortable manner, it's just really nice to have that. It brings people together."

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SUSAN LEONARD •
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL

If elected as a councilwoman, one of Leonard's main focuses will be improving and expanding diversity and inclusion in her neighborhood.

Though official meetings don't begin until after council members are elected,

Leonard already works to speak for her community by talking to neighbors and getting their opinions on local issues as often as possible. She's seen the harsh realities of discrimination in her own neighborhood, which has inspired her to continue to make a change.

This June, Leonard witnessed an incident in her neighborhood that was a turning point in her pride for her community. A couple in the Ward 3 community hung a pride flag outside their home. A few days later, a car full of people drove by and verbally abused the couple, shouting homophobic slurs. Instead of the incident becoming a source of neighborhood gossip, Leonard watched as her community rallied together.

An anonymous neighbor printed out pride flags pasted on printer paper, with the story of what had happened on the back, and passed them out to every house in the Ward 3 area. Leonard watched as nearly every house in the neighborhood had the flag in their window, with the

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CANIDATE CALENDAR

The process of running for Council has taken place over the past few months



A WELCOMING CITY

Leonard discusses the challenges she believes Fairway could face in the future, and what she hopes to accomplish.

I do believe that we have a moment in Fairway to lean in to our proud history of being the first city in JOCO to break the devastating covenants of the JC Nichols era. I hope we are able to convey that our city is one who welcomes, values, respects, appreciates and honors ALL people and that attracting a more diverse residency will help us to make our great city even better.

**Info from votejoco.com*



hopes that the offenders would drive by and see the unconditional support.

It was inspiring to watch her neighborhood match her own passion to make the area they call home a better place, according to Leonard.

"I love my neighborhood [for rallying] around a cause," Leonard said. "I just want to serve my neighborhood. It's just, how do I make sure that people feel safe, valued, seen, respected, happy and at home in final stages."

Leonard's conviction to be a voice for others doesn't go unseen by her neighbors. East parent and citizen of Ward 3, Lara Shelton, was beyond excited when she heard Leonard would be running to represent their neighborhood. Shelton watched Leonard make impacts on the East community and has full faith in her to be an advocate for the neighborhood — enough to jump on board with Leonard's campaign, digitally designing her stickers and signs they soon plan to give out.

"I think she would listen to all of us

in the neighborhood and hear concerns and take that to the next level," Shelton said. "To support her friends and neighbors in general, but specifically **ward**

a district into which a city, town, parish, or other area is divided for administration, election of representatives, etc.

when referring to the East community, I just see her passion and compassion for kids and their opportunities, and just wanting all kids to have equal and awesome opportunities."

Leonard has always had a passion for leading students to stand up for their beliefs, which she's implemented in numerous ways. She restarted a program to bring together students of color, now called Kick Back, initially sponsored by former East teacher and Coalition sponsor David Muhammad.

"We started this again with [Adrian] Pearson last year called Kick Back," Leonard said. "I'm really proud that we

have that going. I'm hoping that can flourish into a Black Student Union or a HALO organization."

Muhammad, who also worked with Leonard to grow the Diversity and Inclusion Club, has seen Leonard's impact on the East community firsthand. While Leonard has always been someone for kids to listen to, a lot of her work is behind the scenes, according to Muhammad.

As an administrator, Leonard has helped other teachers, including Muhammad, implement programs such as Race Project KC and brought students to seminars such as the K-State Black Student Union conference or UMKC Women of Color day. Muhammad has seen how welcome Leonard's made students feel, and hopes her welcoming personality will extend into the city of Fairway.

"She's always used her platform as assistant principal to empower other people's voices and empower the rest of the community to be a representative

of those who don't have that platform," Muhammad said. "She's a team player. She finds ways to not make it about herself, but about the needs of the community. I think in many ways she'll use her platform on City Council in the same way."

Psychology teacher Brett Kramer thinks that Leonard leads by example, from treating people with respect to always being open to suggestions. She's made the East community feel like a family, he said — and he can't wait to see her use those leadership skills in a broader community.

"Her potential is limitless," Kramer said. "She's just the kind of person that is all in wherever she is. Either teaching or being an administrator or any activity that she's involved in, she just pours herself into it. If she's elected, it would give her the opportunity to influence our community positively in a greater way than just our high school."