



# ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

R O U G H R I D E R S

## Leadership Team

Wednesday, April 21, 2021

**Justin Ralston**  
Principal

Good afternoon Council Members,

**Stacy Fells**  
Chief of Staff

Thank you for the opportunity to speak from my experiences as a school leader over the past 4 years in DC Public Schools. My name is Justin Ralston and I have the honor of serving as principal of Theodore Roosevelt High School located in the Petworth neighborhood in Ward 4. I am also a proud resident of Washington, DC. We serve students and families from all 8 Wards and enroll the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest high school enrollment in DC Public Schools. Our school is comprised of approximately 50% African American and 50% Latinx students with enrollment nearing 800 students. We also share a building with Roosevelt STAY, an opportunity academy that serves nearly 700 students. Within a 2-block radius of Roosevelt High School we have 6 DCPS schools: Powell, Dorothy Height, West (currently in a swing space at Sharpe Health) and MacFarland. When school is in session there are easily over 3,000 students in this small area in addition to many families and our staff.

**Cory Carter**  
9-10<sup>th</sup> Grade Assistant  
Principal

**Darryl Powell**  
11<sup>th</sup> Grade Assistant  
Principal

**Tawana Alston**  
12<sup>th</sup> Grade Assistant  
Principal

My number one job as a principal is to ensure safety. During my time as a school leader in DC, I have continued to be challenged by the role that school security plays in helping ensure this single most priority.

**Simone Wilkinson**  
9-10<sup>th</sup> Grade  
International  
Academy & Dual  
Language Assistant  
Principal

I want to be clear, there are some incredible security guards that go above and beyond their call of duty. They are deeply connected to the students, families, and communities. I have seen security guards attend our sporting events and other extra-curricular activities out of uniform – as a spectator to cheer on our students. I regularly am speaking to security guards each morning to hear about different events that have occurred in the community that may impact our school day. My concern has not been so much about the individuals, but about the system that we have created to help ensure safety. Often, our students that are negatively impacted by school safety and security are not reporting their concerns, which means they will internalize this struggle and find their own methods of dealing with it. No student should experience this.

**Devon Wade**  
Director, Specialized  
Instruction

**Phallon Lattimore**  
Director, Strategy &  
Logistics

1. **There is a significant lack of bilingual security guards.** I have advocated this since I began working in Washington, DC. I continue to leave my offer on the table to host hiring fairs at Roosevelt High School that specifically target our Spanish and Amharic-speaking families. To date, in 8 years, I have had ONE security guard for a partial year that was part time who was bilingual.

**Julian Hipkins III**  
Director, NAF  
Academy

2. **School community voice in security guards.** I want to ensure that our students, staff, families, and I have a voice in who our security guards are. This is currently not the case. I often do not know who our assigned security guards will be until the week before school. I had to advocate for the past 7 months to get a security guard back in our building that was reassigned who had served in our building for the past 8 years who is deeply connected to our community.

**Reginald Stevens**  
Director of Athletics

**Emanuel Salazar**  
Lead Dean of Students

3. **Safe passage must be more than a phrase.** Students have reported that they do not feel safe getting to school and returning home. Each year we receive reports from students about their safety getting to/from school in addition to a “war tax” that can be charged to ensure their safety through various neighborhoods. As with many schools, we serve students from all 8 wards meaning this is a highly complex task, especially for a student to navigate. I am expected to have staff distributed along Georgia Avenue for Safe Passage to the metro; however, I am unable to use security guards to do so. Additionally, there are minimal to no supports for morning arrival and Safe Passage. I have found myself walking throughout the neighborhood in the morning to help ensure that our students have

**Shemia Anderson**  
Pathways Coordinator



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clear, safe routes to get to school. The support of DPR Roving Leaders has been incredible to helping support this work, but we need more support to ensure this is truly a safe passage to and from school each day.

4. **Training needs.** There are significant needs for cultural competency, de-escalation skills, strengths-based training and community building of any member who supports the safety and security of our students, staff, and families. We need to be uniform in our approach to rebuild a sense of safety, trust, and respect with our students and families.
5. **Let us build off our work.** Thanks to the advocacy of students, families, and community groups, Chancellor Ferebee and DCPS Central Services, we had the opportunity to create an application for Safe and Positive Schools for school year 2021-2022. This plan was developed collectively after holding student, family, staff, and Local School Advisory Team discussions. We now have a lead dean of climate and culture who is a trained bilingual clinical social worker that will oversee our race and equity work, school safety and climate work, Restorative Justice work, and professional development at Roosevelt High School. We were able to maintain our school climate team (that we expanded over the past two years) to also include an additional behavior tech to support this work. Additionally, we are excited to be continuing our partnership with Georgetown University to offer a course called “Street Law” that helps ensure students develop the art of defending their point of view with factual evidence.
6. **Safety AND Security are significant factors in students and families believing in a school community.** In a district filled with educational choices, we must do everything we can to build the real sense of security and safety for every student, every family, every staff member, and every community member through this process. Unfortunately, failing one time in this area is too much and can bring irreparable damage to the relationships we have built or are working on building with our community.

Thank you for taking time to explore this incredibly important topic.

Justin Ralston

Principal

Theodore Roosevelt High School, DC Public Schools