

# Still going strong after four *Straight* years

By Haylee Hedrick  
601657@mygccs.com

*Four years play a big role in our society.*

*It takes four years for high a school student to go from the “newbie” freshman to the ruling senior. The Olympics, made to test an athlete’s true expertise, happens once every four years. The United States presidential election, voting for the face of our country, occurs every four years.*

*Around Jeffersonville, a big moment happened four years ago: Julie Straight was named the principal at Jeff High School.*

*Before Straight was tabbed with leading the school, the Jeffersonville native spent over 20 years in the English classroom, coached gymnastics, girls track and field, cross country and cheerleading teams, and sponsored clubs, such as Renaissance and the Class of 1994.*

*“I’ve always been very involved and I’ve always loved kids and students,” Straight said. “This is where I wanted my professional career to be.”*

## The beginnings...

“When I first stepped in as interim principal, it was very challenging because we ended up down a few administrators (and I) had to bring in some extra help,” Straight said. “The structures were what worked for someone else, (but) weren’t what would fit my style the best.”

In 2012, there were changes that Straight had to devise, such as organizing structure throughout the building.

“When I was named principal at the end of (the 2012) school year, that was a whirlwind of a summer,” Straight said. “Hiring people, re-establishing some leadership, and the way we would just do business here.”

Once she got the ball rolling as principal, she set her sights on several educational improvements, including honing in on higher test scores.

“If you look at data, all of our main metrics moved up,” Straight said of the improvements since her take over. “ECAs continue to go up, our graduation rate (is) up, our P.R.I.D.E. program has flourished. I think that being a part of the Jeff High family is something that a lot of people have pride in.”



Principal Julie Straight speaks at the 2015 graduation ceremony. File.Photo

## What others are saying

Greater Clark County Schools Superintendent Dr. Andrew Melin, who is Straight’s direct boss, has been impressed with the new principal.

“I believe all of Mrs. Straight’s efforts have resulted in the improvement of many important metrics like graduation rate, post-secondary acceptance, dual credit attainment, etc,” Melin said. “As a result, I believe the image of JHS in our community and region is the best it has ever been.”

Melin also praised Straight’s progress of bettering JHS’ culture.

“Perhaps the most significant change I have seen in JHS since Mrs. Straight was named principal is the establishment of a positive school culture with the students, parents, staff, and community,” Melin said. “She has also been integral in expanding our College and Career Readiness initiative, which includes enhancing our counseling program and our efforts to join the Ford Next Generation Learning Network.”

Assistant principal Tim LaGrange agrees with Melin, saying that Straight became principal at a grueling time, and that he was impressed on how she took on the challenge.

“I think first of all she took over the building in a difficult situation, meaning she was the third principal in a matter of a few days,” LaGrange said. “She calmed the waters (and) she steadied the ship.

“I think one of her most positive attributes is that she bleeds Jeff Red Devils,” LaGrange continued. “She loves Jeff High and all of our kids. That is apparent in all of her decisions. I think that from a personal standpoint, she’s a great boss. She’s the kind of boss that you want to work hard for and that you don’t want to disappoint. On a daily basis, she is a very positive leader who cares about the kids.”

Despite the kind words, Straight commends the teamwork that her, and her apt-called JHS family, have had throughout the last four years.

“We really work together: students, teachers, and faculty,” Straight said. “I’m very proud of that, and how far we’ve come. It’s hard to believe it’s not really that long.”

## The future of JHS

Although principals are considered the ‘top dog’ of the school building, Straight explains that to get the full picture, one must include all of the moving parts. She says the staff and faculty go into making JHS such a great school just as much as she does.

One way to see the improvement would be looking at all of the clubs that have popped up, which are student-run, but also teacher-sponsored.

“We have blown up club-wise: we have our debate team, chess club, key club,” Straight said. “Now we have Optimist club, and so many other things that are growing that we’re taking pride in.”

She explains that all of these various clubs give the school a more community and family feel. She would like to think that this feeling within the school has increased since she has been principal.

In four years time, Straight has said to have brought a young atmosphere to the school, increased the positive culture of the building, positively impacted test scores/graduation rates, and implemented P.R.I.D.E throughout JHS.

So what are Straight’s plan over the next four years? According to the principal, it’s seeing continued improvement. Straight said that she doesn’t plan on going anywhere and is content with being a Jeff Red Devil.

“I’m very happy doing what I do,” Straight said. “I like being in a school where I’m supposed to be, and that’s where I want to be.”



Speaking at class meetings, principal Julie Straight continues to push kids to be the best students they can be. file photo