BRIAN HARRIS
The Right Path

BY LISA STAMOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS BALSAMO
At home, Brian Harris and his wife of 30 years, Carol, have two grown children. Their son Matthew, who is 26, is married to Grace. Daughter Brooke, 24, is engaged to marry Chad Barber. The growing family recently enjoyed their long-time family tradition that Brian and Carol started when the children were very young. Just as in years past, they hopped into the family car and drove around town to enjoy the Christmas lights and festivities. When Matthew and Brooke were very young, they'd be in their pajamas and after the drive, enjoyed treats from Dairy Queen. Perhaps one day, there will be grandchildren and more than one car.

At work, Brian has 9,000 children—the student body of Barrington 220—who are in his care every day, all year long. That concept would be daunting for most people, but fortunately for us, Dr. Brian Harris, Barrington 220’s Superintendent of Schools, is the exactly the right man for the job.

“The best advice I received on the job, when I had just started teaching, was to not get too excited about any one topic and to not underestimate any one issue,” Brian said. “In other words, don’t over-react, and don’t under-react.” That even-keeled demeanor is the hallmark of Brian Harris. It’s who he is, and exactly the kind of leadership our school district needs.

The new, first-year social studies teacher working at Waterman High School just south of DeKalb, Illinois, was also the boys basketball coach for his school. A fellow coach gave him some advice. “We had a really good team, and some of the parents starting to give me advice about how to coach the team,” Brian said. “My colleague told me to be respectful at all times, but that I know my team and the players, who I work with daily—so keep doing what you’re doing. If you have to listen to every piece of advice, he said, you might as well go sit in the stands.”

Brian grew up in a small farming town, Tuscola, in central Illinois. The early years at school had him bored. He earned good grades, but there was a lack of challenge in elementary school. “I found myself having many ‘special opportunities’ to meet with my teachers and parents,” he says of the times he needed re-direction. A veteran third-grade teacher told his parents that one day their son would lead people, so getting him on the right path would be important. As he got older, Brian chose to engage himself in extracurricular activities, including basketball, baseball, and choir, which helped.

Growing up in a small, rural town provided Brian with wholesome values, but also presented unique challenges. “There was not a lot of space to spread my wings, there was little if any exposure to culture,” Brian said. Started by his grandparents, the family owned a gas station, an auto parts store, and a delivery service to bring fuel oil to farms. Brian worked many hours supporting the family business, and could have inherited it, but it wasn’t for him.

It was Brian’s mom whose college education gave him exposure to a bigger world. She was a substitute teacher and sometimes Brian would be in her classroom. His dad served in the military and did not attend college, however he had a strong work ethic that also influenced his life. “My mom was the first generation in our family to go to college,” Brian said. “It was she who really pushed my brother, sister, and me to go to school. It was our path to greater opportunities,” It would also be the advice that prompted his lifetime career in education.

A loyal Illini fan, Brian received his B.S. degree in Secondary Education, and minored in Political Science from the University of Illinois. His masters and doctorate degrees in education administration were earned at Northern Illinois University. He began teaching in a small town south of DeKalb, and eventually spent time working as the assistant principal at Barrington’s Station Middle School. He returned four years ago to lead the district as its Superintendent of Schools.

“I am proud to work in Barrington 220. I chose to work here 20 years ago and then came back,” Brian said. “Our district has the potential for greatness in all its aspects—academics, social-emotional, digital citizenship. I’d put our schools up against any other public or private school in the country for academics. We’re in the top 10 percent there. But we’re working to pivot the culture in other areas, and while it is evolving, that will take more time.”

“People need to be nicer to one another! My passion is to teach students to learn how to compromise, and to be able to agree, or agree to disagree,” Brian said. “Abraham Lincoln was a grand compromiser. He had the biggest challenge of any president, the Civil War, with the greatest and most dire consequences. He was self-taught, and his leadership decisions are still with us today.”

Recent improvements within the district include removing institutional barriers so that all students can achieve at higher levels, especially for greater access to AP courses. “Part of my role is to make sure we are leveraging all our resources to achieve greatness,” Brian says. He leads with a student-first policy, that the best interests of the students must come first.

Barrington 220 is a destination school district, and expectations remain high for achievement and learning. Possibly the biggest initiative Brian will lead is bringing the proposed facilities master plan, Blueprint 220, into action. “The district has never had a comprehensive master plan, more just individual project plans,” he said. “The nature of teaching, classrooms, and student’s methods of learning have all changed, due to technology. Our learning spaces need to catch up.” In addition to the much-needed re-structuring of learning spaces in the schools, integrating new safety and security measures is at the top of the Board of Education’s and Brian’s list.

Barrington 220 is the largest entity in the Barrington area. In addition to leading it today and into its future, Brian is active in state and national organizations, sharing his knowledge and wisdom with others. Keeping standards high, promoting equal access to resources, and driving a healthy culture within all schools is a big job. Thanks to Brian, we’re on the right path.
Janet Agnoletti, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BARRINGTON AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Dr. Brian Harris is the leader of one of our regional districts in the greater Barrington area. It was by thoughtful intent nearly 50 years ago that the leaders of that era brought multiple districts and organizations together into single regional districts and defined the “one Barrington area” that we know today. Dr. Brian Harris recognizes the nuances of diversity that exist here, but also understands the values of the broader community—characteristics that serve him well in strategically and successfully leading Barrington CUSD 220.

Brian also knows the value of a unified voice in education, in government, and in matters of legislation that impact all our students, parents, residents, and businesses. He and I have worked together, and with many others, to host legislator events, support or oppose state bills, to address drug and alcohol use by our youth, and to plan and practice for emergency preparedness. We share the goal of environmental protection and have found intersections of government and education that enhance the awareness of our young people. Brian is part of the regional team that works to keep the Barrington area healthy, balanced, and secure.

Brian Battle, BARRINGTON 220 BOARD OF EDUCATION CHAIRMAN

Dr. Brian Harris is a perfect fit for our community. I first met him at a meeting with area school districts while he was serving as Superintendent at Wheaton and was impressed with both his knowledge and his communication style. I remember thinking at the time, “Remember this guy if we ever need a Superintendent in Barrington.”

A couple years later, when the need to identify the next leader for our schools was before us, Brian Harris was the first call I made. I remember reaching him while he was on a family vacation in Australia, but he made time for the conversation, because he was excited to consider coming back to Barrington. I believe the selection of Brian as Barrington’s superintendent has been one of the best decisions our School Board has made.

Despite his misguided support for the St. Louis Cardinals, Brian has been successful at creating an environment where talented administrators and teachers are attracted to come to Barrington 220, and excited to work here. I believe Brian has built a culture within our schools that creates innovation and the strong sense of pride that we all feel in our schools.

I like to think that today’s Barrington 220 is the result of all the students, staff, and parents that have come before us. Our schools have a great legacy in our community. Brian’s significant contribution to this legacy will be felt for years to come.
Dr. John Burkey, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LUDA
I’ve worked with Dr. Brian Harris in two capacities. First, I worked with Brian as a fellow superintendent when I was superintendent in Huntley. Second, he is the board president of the Large Unit School District Association (LUDA) of which I am now executive director.

Brian has been very committed to every district he has worked in. It is very clear that being a superintendent is much more than a job to him; he cares deeply for the students and community of Barrington. He is not content with the status quo; he is striving to make an already very good school district even better. He also has taken on the larger responsibility of helping make education better for kids everywhere through his volunteer work with LUDA and AASA (American Association of Administrators). He is an education leader not only Barrington, but also at the state and national levels.

Dr. Brent Clark, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IASA
I am the executive director of the Illinois Association of School Administrators and Dr. Harris is a member of IASA. I have known him for several years as a result. Dr. Harris has established himself at the local, state, and national levels, which is truly a remarkable feat. He has the ability to see the diversity across Illinois and our county, as well as a unique ability to make sound decisions and lead with vision.

Suzanne Corr, PRESIDENT/CEO, BARRINGTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
I have worked alongside Dr. Brian Harris for about four years now. He serves on our BACC Advisory Council. We also coordinate, plan, and manage the annual Legislative Breakfast event in October, along with BACOG leader Janet Agnoletti.

Brian is a charismatic and innovative leader. His leadership has put our district on the cutting edge of the future of education. He does his homework. He explores, researches, and investigates what works and at the same time, he is open to creative and entrepreneurial ideas from the community. That partnership has led to amazing resources for our students here, such as the Fresh Start and Incubator programs. His willingness to embrace good ideas, think outside of the box, and partner with community organizations and local business has improved the quality of our education here. His leadership has played a role in establishing the Barrington School District as a top attraction to families wanting to move here. Brian is approachable, listens to the community, the students, parents, teachers and staff, and uses what he discovers to create something better.

Daniel Domenech, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF AASA
Dr. Brian Harris has been a long-time member of AASA, The School Superintendents Association. He was elected to serve on our Executive Committee and previously served on our Governing Board. His contributions to our organization are much appreciated. He has been
a champion for children and public education. Brian has been an outstanding educational leader. He is also a leader among leaders, proven by the fact that his peers recognize that attribute and have elected him to represent them at the national level.

Dave Dorn, BARRINGTON CHIEF OF POLICE

Dr. Brian Harris and I met through his role as the CUSD 220 Superintendent and my position as the Chief of Police for the Barrington Police Department. I have had the pleasure of working with Brian on many projects, namely focused on safety initiatives in the Barrington schools.

Brian has a genuine desire to improve overall safety in the Barrington School District. He is very sincere about his goals and driven to be on the cutting edge in student and staff safety. Our departments have come together with his leadership to implement many new safety initiatives and programs in the Barrington schools. Since Brian’s arrival back to our community, he has been instrumental in solidifying a positive relationship between the schools, police, fire, and other village groups. I am personally grateful for this partnership with public safety and look forward to working with Brian in the years ahead to keep the Barrington School District in the forefront of school safety.

Dr. Kenneth Ender, PRESIDENT, WILLIAM RAINEY HARPER COLLEGE

Dr. Brian Harris is a good colleague and a good friend. He is trustworthy and extremely loyal to the agenda we have jointly developed for the Northwest Education Council for Student Success. I’m proud to call him a colleague.

Margarita Geleske, CHAIRWOMAN, BARRINGTON 220 EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

I was a chairperson and trustee of the Barrington 220 Educational Foundation. Dr. Brian Harris, as superintendent, meets regularly with the Foundation. As a member of the Uncharted Learning, NFP team, I continue to work with Brian on initiatives for entrepreneurship programs: INCubatoredu and ACCELeratoredu for high school, mxINCe edu for middle school, and freshINCe edu for elementary school.

Brian’s first day at Barrington 220 as superintendent included an introduction to an innovative program inaugurated at Barrington High School, INCubatoredu. What began as a public-private partnership to bring real, hands-on learning into business education at our home high school of Barrington, has blossomed nationally. Over 120 high schools throughout the country offer INCubatoredu to students. Uncharted Learning is the not-for-profit organization that supports all INCubatoredu schools, as well as mxINCe edu, freshINCe edu, MobileMakersEdu and MobileMakersStudio schools.

Brian is an extraordinary collaborator. He understands that individual points of view need to be heard and honored, all while working toward a larger goal. He is thoughtfully thorough.
Carol Harris, WIFE

Brian and I met while in college and celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary this past summer.

There are many things that make Brian a special person in all areas of his life. One exceptional gift Brian has is being able to juggle and balance all aspects of his life both personally and professionally. He is a very caring husband and prioritizes what is important in our lives. Additionally, involvement in our church is an important part of our life together. Brian also is a dedicated dad to our son Matthew and his wife Grace, and our daughter Brooke and her fiancé Chad. He spent many years having fun coaching both our kid’s youth sport teams. He was able to attend all their extracurricular activities involving sports and music. He is an alumnus of The University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and a big Illini fan! You can follow him on Twitter @illinibri.

Barrington has been an important part of his 30-year career and it has been wonderful for me to watch Brian doing what he loves every day. He has thoroughly enjoyed his many years in District 220 as an Assistant Principal at Station Campus in the 1990s, and now as Superintendent of Schools.

Brian is confident and decisive. Those are two great qualities that I admire in him. Those two qualities have helped to make him the great husband, dad, son, brother, friend, and leader that so many of us look up to. I am so proud of Brian for being chosen for this Quintessential Barrington honor!

Stephen McWilliams, BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dr. Brian Harris is a trusted mentor and supervisor as Superintendent of the Barrington School District. Brian is a strong educational leader with an unwavering focus on helping students develop the skills and knowledge to be successful beyond graduation from high school. I vividly remember a discussion that Brain and I shared during his first few months as the Barrington 220 Superintendent. During this conversation, he expressed his clear vision...
to provide multiple opportunities for all students to accelerate their learning. He challenged the Barrington High School leadership to improve existing on-ramps and develop new ones for students to participate in AP and other college-level experiences.

**Brad Stetson, BARRINGTON BANK & TRUST, CEO & CHAIRMAN**

I have had the distinct and unique pleasure of knowing and working with Dr. Brian Harris through numerous community groups and organizations. Brian’s professionalism, confidence, and caring personality is demonstrated in each meeting and conversation, whether it be amongst the School Board members, students and parents, local and state officials, or community and business leaders. His impactful and insightful knowledge of today’s educational environment and experience is critical to our students today…and tomorrow. Brian is extremely approachable in any setting or venue; willing to listen or provide valued information and direction to conversations on how the school and the community can utilize one another as a tool and resource to create value; enhancing the student experience; and building a more informed, safer, and stronger community. He not only does he genuinely care about the success of the district and each and every student within the district, but he cares about the perception of the district and its impact in helping build a better and stronger district and community.

**Don R. Thompson, COLLEAGUE**

I first met Dr. Brian Harris in the summer of 1993 while screening candidates for Associate Principal at Barrington Middle School Station Campus. It took only a short time to determine that Brian was the top candidate for this position. Later, Dr. Jim Voris, who was to become the Principal at Station Campus, agreed and hired Brian.

Brian was young, bright, and quite personable. Those traits continue today. He spent six years with us at the middle school level. He contributed greatly to developing a warm and positive atmosphere for learning at Station Campus before moving to his next assignment. Dr. Harris talks to everybody and is very approachable. His communication skills and determination to stay on the cutting edge of developments in education has brought him back to Barrington after successful leadership experiences as a superintendent in other school districts. Brian has taken Barrington 220 to new and exciting heights in the world of public school education. He is highly sought after for his expertise both in the state and in national educational circles.

Now, here is the good part. Dr. Brian Harris remains the same good guy we met in 1993. Brian, Jim Voris, and I remain good friends to this day and enjoy a lot of laughs together.

**Publisher’s Note:** Quintessential People™ is a heartfelt collaboration between our publication and portrait artist Thomas Balsamo. Our goal is to share exceptional images and words that ring true about some of the finest, most inspiring people in our community. For more information, contact QB at publisher@qbarrington.com, or Thomas Balsamo (Portraits By Thomas) at 847-381-7710, or visit www.portraitsbythomas.com.