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Sunday METROWEST DAILY NEWS

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PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

New FSU president to earn \$263K

Niemi will be among highest paid in state university system

Zane Razaq
The MetroWest Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK

FRAMINGHAM — Once she takes the reins this summer, Framingham State University's incoming president will be one of the highest paid executives in the state university system.

Nancy Niemi, who officially starts her new position on July 1, will take home an annual salary of \$263,000, according to her contract, a copy of which was provided to the Daily News in response to a records request.

Niemi signed the five-page deal on Dec. 22. She is currently provost and

vice president for academic affairs at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, a historically Black university in Princess Anne, Maryland.

Framingham State spokesperson Daniel Magazu said the Department of Higher Education provided the university with an approved salary range,



Niemi

which the Board of Trustees used as a basis of negotiations and as the primary factor in determining the offer.

"We also take into account the candidate's prior experience and the competitiveness of the marketplace,"

See NIEMI, Page 4A

Eager readers



At the Literations Program at the McCarthy Elementary School in Framingham, third grader Xavier Duvilaire reads with Dave Wilkie, of Milford, March 7. PHOTOS BY ART ILLMAN/DAILY NEWS AND WICKED LOCAL

New program pairs retirees with Framingham students who need help

Zane Razaq The MetroWest Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK

FRAMINGHAM — Twice a week, third grader Xavier Duvilaire goes to a quiet classroom in McCarthy Elementary School and dives into a book for 30 minutes.

Beside him each time is tutor Dave Wilkie, of Milford, listening and smiling and guiding him through the pronunciation of tricky words. The same scene plays out at two other tables.

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The helping hands of Jim Brenneman, of Natick, and third grader Yosvelyn Betancourth reading together March 7.

USA TODAY

WOMEN OF THE YEAR

Sallo advocates for access, children and civil rights

Alexandra Weliever
The Patriot Ledger | USA TODAY NETWORK

Marlene Sallo is one of USA TODAY's Women of the Year, a recognition of women across the country who have made a significant impact. The annual program is a continuation of Women of the Century, a 2020 project that commemorated the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote. Meet this year's honorees at womenoftheyear.usatoday.com.

Though her titles and roles have changed over the years, Marlene Sallo's job has always remained the same: advocating for people's rights, everywhere.

See SALLO, Page 2A

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Readers

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The McCarthy and Stapleton elementary schools are in the early stages of a new pilot program with Literations, a Boston nonprofit that engages older adults to tutor children who lag behind in reading. Volunteers first came to the schools several weeks ago as strangers but have been forging bonds with students since.

"A couple of my students are so comfortable with me — if I screw up a word or something, they'll say, 'Jim, you skipped this word,'" said Jim Brenneman, of Natick. "They're enjoying it and they're keeping me on my toes, too."

How does the program work?

Since 2017, Natick's MathWorks has partnered on various projects with the Foundation for MetroWest, including a program that provided grants to local nonprofits struggling due to the pandemic. Craig Santos, senior director of MathWorks' training services, said the software company wanted to fund an effort to correct inequities in the region.

That sparked the Foundation's Impact MetroWest project, an interactive data website that identifies more than 50 indicators that measure quality of life in the region including racial disparities. From there, the Foundation and MathWorks joined forces with Literations and Jewish Family Services of MetroWest to put together a pilot program aimed at closing the learning divide.

Right now, about 30 students from first to fourth grade are involved in sessions that are embedded into the school day. The aim is to boost reading skills by an average of 1.5 grade levels.

Very familiar relationship

The program is known for using older volunteers. When he retired in July, Steve Payne tried to find ways to use his new free time. He turned to part-time consulting briefly, but called it unrewarding.

"You get paid a lot less money and you still have all the same issues that you retired from," said Payne, who lives in Ashland.

He stumbled upon the Literations opportunity and said it seemed like a



Natick retiree Jim Brenneman reads with third grader Yosvelyn Betancourth, March 7. PHOTOS BY/ART ILLMAN/DAILY NEWS AND WICKED LOCAL



Rosalia Morel, program coordinator for the Literations Program at the McCarthy Elementary School, said the program frees time for teachers, who often don't have time to engage struggling students with targeted one-on-one time.

"worthwhile adventure."

Jay Kim, executive director of Foundation for MetroWest, said using older volunteers is the program's "secret sauce."

"There is a special bond that can be created between a grandparent and a child," he said. "In some ways it does

mimic that kind of relationship. I think it's a very familiar relationship for many young people."

For tutoring to be effective, the student needs to feel at ease to be uncertain or ask questions, said Wes Enicks, executive director of Literations.

That relationship-building goes hand-in-hand with the program's literacy component, said he said.

"What happens with a lot of children at this age is they lack that confidence to learn. They don't want to make mistakes in front of peers," said Enicks.

A look at the data

Impact MetroWest's 2019 data shows only 38% of Framingham third graders were proficient readers compared to the statewide 52%. Further, just 30% of African American/Black students and only 23% of Hispanic/Latino students in Framingham met or exceeded third grade reading proficiency.

Enick called a student's third grade reading skills a "a key indicator of future success."

"Up to third grade, students are really gaining those skills to read," he said. "From fourth grade on, they're using those skills to learn other content. So, if they're behind at that point, not only is that impacting their ability to read but it's impacting their ability to learn."

If they continue to fall behind, it can have a longer ripple effect, said Enicks.

MathWorks will keep a close eye on third grade English language MCAS exam scores for students of color in the pilot schools, said Mathworks' Santos. They'll compare the results from this target group against the larger group at the individual schools as well as against the larger Framingham group, he said.

Ideally, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino and African American/Black third graders in Framingham who are reading proficiently will increase significantly, he said.

Miles on the tongue

On Monday, a new volunteer was

Continued on next page

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Retiree Steve Payne, shown working with third grader Natan Teixeira, said he joined the Literations Program because it "seemed like a worthwhile adventure."
ART ILLMAN/DAILY NEWS AND WICKED LOCAL

Continued from previous page

learning the ropes at McCarthy's strand of the program, which will help the school launch morning sessions and reach more students. As the pilot expands, the aim is to have more than 50 students participating by the end of this school year and 150 in the next.

Volunteers do not introduce new material to students, but instead reinforce what they're already learning in class. So, if a student is working on word identification or needs more help with fluency, volunteers will get books to match that level.

It frees time for teachers, who often don't have time to engage struggling students with targeted one-on-one time while juggling a classroom full of other kids, said Rosalia Morel, a Literations program coordinator.

"We're helping the teachers kind of get the students' miles on the tongue," she said.

Extra services provided

If a student mentions a problem at home during the course of a tutoring session, the volunteer can turn to Jewish Family Services, which will step in to help.

It can range from assistance with immigration to food or housing insecurity. Yemi Ajao, interim director of the district's Community Resource Development, said those services are tailored to meet specific student needs and ensure

each child has a good home learning environment.

"Some of the students, the barriers they face, they exist outside of the walls of the school," said Ajao.

Lino Covarrubias, executive director of Jewish Family Services, said it also keeps the pressure off the tutor. Putting too much on the plate of a volunteer can dilute the mission, he said.

"A good volunteer always worries... we don't want that. We want the focus of the volunteer to be about literacy. Anything else about the family, JFS will be involved," said Covarrubias.

How to get involved

If interested in volunteering for Literations in Framingham, visit the non-profit's website at Literations.org/volunteer for more information. The commitment is a minimum of four hours per week for the full school year.

Payne said he's been heartened watching his students progress bit by bit. One student he works with has just advanced to a higher reading level and he thinks "she's encouraged by that."

Volunteer Wilkie said he's exhilarated to see his students gain ground.

"They're definitely improving every week," he said. "And the fact that they're enjoying it is kind of special."

Zane Razaq writes about education. Reach her at 508-626-3919 or zrazaq@wickedlocal.com. Follow her on Twitter @zanerazz.



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