



Alumni Spotlight

Dr. Tamara Willis '99



Dr. Tamara Willis, from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, graduated from Millersville University in 1999. She chose to attend Millersville University because the teacher preparation program had an exemplary reputation and she “wanted to be a part of its rich tradition of preparing educators.” Willis had a dual major in elementary education and special education. She chose to study education because of her love of learning that formed in her childhood years. Her choice to study special education stemmed from her fascination with the learning process. After graduating from Millersville University, Willis continued her studies and earned a master’s degree in educational administration from Temple University in 2003, and a doctorate in educational psychology from Temple University in 2007.

Willis believes that everyone can learn, and she wants to support those who struggle with the learning process due to physical or intellectual challenges. The special education training she received has been the foundation of her teaching and leadership style. Willis currently works in the education field as the superintendent of schools for the Susquehanna Township School District in Dauphin County. She states, “I am a staunch advocate for the success of every learner, no matter their zip code or diagnosis.” These personal beliefs align closely with her school district’s mission statement: The Success of Every Learner. Willis reports that Millersville University prepared her to see every learner as unique, full of promise and worthy of the very best.

In her Millersville experience, Willis says that it laid the foundation for who she is as a professional educator and instructional leader. Her journey to unlocking the potential within learners started at Stayer Hall during a two-part course on diagnostic reading assessments. As part of a lab, Willis had the opportunity to work with struggling readers and eventually fell in love with data analysis and deciphering learning needs. These courses gave her reason to believe that *all* learners can be successful. One of Willis’ most unforgettable professors was Dr. Dennis Denenberg. “He brought history to life and challenged the traditional, didactic delivery of instruction that has caused many students to disengage,” Willis says. Her experience with Dr. Denenberg taught her that learning should be active, fun and engaging. Willis was also involved in many University organizations during her time on campus. She was a member of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Gospel Choir, and Helping Other People (HOP).

Willis is proud of the body of work she has accomplished in serving children over the past 23 years. She prides herself on being an advocate for all children. Recently, she became a co-author of the Amazon best-seller, “STEM Century: It Takes a Village to Raise a 21st Century Graduate.” Her chapter, “Expanding Opportunities Through Collective Impact,” reveals how schoolteachers can expand access to STEM opportunities for all learners using a collective impact approach.

Willis intends to continue to support the students and families of the Susquehanna Township School District. Long term, she would love to spend more time writing and might even return to teaching at the graduate level one day. Dr. Willis has certainly made her alma mater proud!