



# Crosby's principal will be named Waterbury's 'Mayor for the Day'

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WATERBURY – After Jade Gopie is named Waterbury's African-American Mayor for the Day today, she won't be hanging around for long.

The Waterbury native and Crosby High School principal plans to leave Crosby for City Hall right before the 10 a.m. ceremony, give a speech, and go straight back to work.

"She's not taking the day off for it," said Carolyn Highsmith, a member of the committee that nominates someone to represent the city's black residents as the honorary Mayor for the Day each year.

Highsmith put Gopie's name in the running for the nomination to represent Waterbury's black residents for the second time this year, and said she was pleased when the other members of the committee approved her nomination in a near-unanimous vote.

"We just try to choose somebody who is a role model in the community," she said. "She's a great role model for the kids."

That Gopie grew up in Waterbury and has returned to teach and lead here made her an obvious choice, said Karen E. Harvey, a Waterbury school board member and a former African-American Mayor for the Day who was also on the selection committee that nominated Gopie.

"That means a lot," she said. "To me, there was no other selection to be made."

Gopie, 44, graduated from Kennedy High School and has degrees from the University of Connecticut, Central Connecticut State University, the University of Bridgeport and Sacred Heart University.

As a biology teacher at Wilby High School, she helped minority students earn college credit-earning scores on the Advanced Placement biology exam. In 2011, she appeared in television ads for the Exxon Mobile National Math and Science Initiative, which promotes AP enrollment among minority students.

"She's an innovative thinker," Superintendent Verna Ruffin said Tuesday. "She certainly is an excellent advocate for students. She's an up-and-coming future leader."

Gopie took over at Crosby in 2014, soon after the school was enrolled in the state Commissioner's Network, an effort to fund 25 of the state's lowest-performing schools to pursue state-approved reform plans. The school has since improved enough to be removed from that list.

"She turned that school around," Highsmith said. "They have made so much progress over the last couple of years."

On Tuesday, Gopie sat front and center at the signing of an agreement creating a new city high school, hosted at Crosby, that will allow high school students in Waterbury to earn an associate degree at Post University.

She said that growing up in Waterbury, she became familiar with the Mayor for the Day ceremonies honoring local leaders of members of various ethnic groups.

"It's a way that your community shows their love, respect and appreciation for the hard work that you do," Gopie said. "Just a way that your community is saying 'thank you' to you."

Gopie said she has invited a small group of Crosby students to attend the ceremony Wednesday morning. With a speech on the importance of education, she plans to use it as an opportunity to show her students that a black woman – and one who grew up with financial obstacles in Waterbury – can be a leader.

"It's important that they can see people who look like them, to have a sense of attainability for them," she said. "(Like) someone who lives on the same streets they probably live on now and attended the same public schools that they attended here in Waterbury, that if you work hard and overcome obstacles and challenges and barriers in your life, that you can achieve."

She said her students often assume she grew up outside of the city.

"When they really get to know me and learn about me, they see 'wow, you went to Bunker Hill and Rotella, and this is all the things you did. You struggled with how you were going to pay for college,'" she said. "I lived that. I can relate to the students in so many different ways."