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Barlow Park Charter Teachers will Travel to Mentor School in Australia over the Summer

RIPON, Wis. — After waiting 3 years due to COVID travel restrictions, teachers from Barlow Park Charter School will finally travel to their mentor school this summer. The 3 day professional development trip to Sydney Australia was planned as an essential part of the Federal Charter Grant Budget when the school's unique instructional model was approved. Barlow Park Charter School is competency-based which means literacy and math lessons have learners working in flexible groups based on each individual student's needs. It is also a play-based learning environment, which means there is a portion of the day called Play Workshop that is dedicated to the development of social and emotional skills.

"It really is a unique model that we have not found replicated in the United States," says Tanya Sanderfoot, principal of Barlow Park Charter and Journey Project School. "We initially budgeted for site visits to model schools to help us in our planning year. Not only was that not possible because travel was limited due to the threat of COVID, but also because we haven't been able to find a model school that offers both our vision of competency-based instruction and the play-based model of learning. "We tried to find local sites to visit," adds Dr. Sanderfoot, "but local schools are either doing competency-based instruction heavily rooted in technology or they offer a play-based learning environment but only for 4K and 5K students. The charter team just kept coming back to Lindfield"

During the initial research and planning of the school, the team relied heavily on the website and guidance from a school in Australia called Lindfield Learning Village. Lindfield is a "stage not age" school that changed the educational landscape by making school better for every student every day. It has been praised by renowned education researcher John Hattie as an impressive school that is already at or above nearly all learning measures. "It has been challenging to build the school from scratch without actually seeing a model school in-person." Principal Sanderfoot said,

"We are proud of how our school has evolved and all the work our staff has done to create a new and innovative model of learning. We have such a great start and we are excited to keep the momentum going but what our team needs most is the opportunity to see this model in action in real time. We will then be able to share this model with schools across our state and even country."

This June, the Barlow Park Charter team will finally meet members of their mentor team. Because grant funds are allowed to be carried over throughout the life of the grants, the dollars originally planned for the trip will be used this summer. The staff is excited to proceed with the original plan and to have the chance to see Lindfield in person. The team will participate in multiple intensive days of collaborating at Lindfield. The learners and staff at Barlow Park Charter are so grateful for the opportunities that this grant has given them to help the team move closer to realizing their mission and vision.

Barlow Park Charter School, the Ripon Area School District's newest charter school, opened in September of 2020. Despite initial challenges of opening amidst the COVID pandemic, Barlow Park Charter School grew from 5 classrooms in its first year to 9 classrooms in 2022-2023. The mission of Barlow Park Charter School is to provide a responsive learning environment that encourages all learners to reach their fullest personal potential and become well-balanced, compassionate, curious citizens.

Any comments or questions, please contact Principal Dr. Tanya Sanderfoot at (920) 748-1550 or sanderfoott@ripon.k12.wi.us.