

**For Immediate Release**

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**Ripon's 4K-Grade 2 Schools Discuss Uniting**

RIPON, Wis.— Barlow Park Journey Principal Shawn Gartzke invited parents to attend an engagement session in January 2024 to discuss the future of the Ripon Area School District's (RASD) 4K-Grade 2 schools. With Barlow Park Charter (Barlow) Elementary School's contract and federal grant both coming to an end on June 30, 2024, the Governance Council began discussing whether renewing the charter was essential. To continue as a charter school, the Council must request a renewal with the Ripon School Board in February prior to the state-wide open enrollment application period for the 2024-25 school year which runs from February 5 - April 30.

The Barlow Governance Council's question regarding renewal sparked further conversations across the Barlow staff, the Journey Project School (Journey) Governance Council, and Journey staff. Over the last few months, the Governance Council and the staff in both schools engaged in conversations regarding the opportunity of unifying the schools and were given separate opportunities to vote. All groups voted unanimously in favor of creating one elementary school.

Now, the Council and staff of both schools are interested in having an open dialogue and conversation with parents. So, in early January, the process will expand to include all 4K-Grade 2 parents. Then in February, the Council and staff of both schools would need to inform the RASD School Board that Barlow is not seeking a charter contract renewal; and Journey seeks to end its five year agreement at the close of the 2023-24 school year, two years early.

Journey opened in 2013 as a K-2 Project-Based Learning (PBL) charter school using inquiry-based approaches. Learners are taught basic knowledge to tackle realistic problems typically

in the areas of science and social studies, often integrating literacy and math. In the 2021-22 school year Journey changed from a charter school to having a local agreement with the Ripon School Board. In 2020, Barlow opened as a K-2 competency-based charter school. Literacy and math learners work in flexible groups based on each individual's needs. Barlow offers purposeful play-based learning opportunities. Throughout the day, learners practice social-emotional learning skills through a play workshop.

Since Journey began, parents needed to choose between Barlow and Journey. Parents choose Barlow Charter for personalized instruction in literacy and math with opportunities to learn through purposefully planned play-based activities. Parents often choose Journey Project School for a hands-on approach of learning to foster communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills. While both schools provide learners with the building blocks for lifelong learning and focus on educating the whole child, some parents have expressed concern their child may miss out on elements offered in the other school as well as students not always being able to interact with all of the children in their grade level.

Mr. Gartzke shared, *“Over the last few months the staff and governance councils of both Barlow Park Charter and Journey Project Schools have been engaged in conversations about collaborating in and implementing best practices across both schools to potentially create one cohesive model of education for the early childhood through second grade students in the Ripon Area School District. We are excited about this opportunity to collaborate and come together with you to hear your thoughts about the potential benefits this union could offer. The Ripon Area School District is fortunate to have quality and innovative models of education at all levels.”*

Any comments or questions, please contact Mr. Gartzke at (920) 748-1550.

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