

Welcoming in the New School Year

Few things in life capture the hearts of a community like the first day of the new school year. Perhaps, that is because most, if not all, of us have a personal experience to connect with that day. Maybe you remember walking up hill 5 miles one way, climbing on board a bus with its own distinct smell, or riding your bike with a group of neighborhood kids. For me, the first days of school meant I could finally use the two wonderfully predictable gifts I typically received in early August for my birthday: back to school clothes and school supplies. It would seem I was destined to be a teacher.

This month while completing the usual back-to-school tasks, I realized many in the community do not have a chance to go behind the scenes to experience what the last weeks of summer entail in a district. Here is your chance to take a virtual, behind the scenes, tour as the district staff, teachers, students, and parents prepared to move into action on the first day of school.

As with any team, the staff roster was a top priority. This year, eight teachers proudly joined the ranks with the Ripon Area School District's talented staff. The new teachers participated in three days of orientation on August 20th-22nd. In addition to learning about policy, practice and passwords, highlights included touring the historic city of Ripon and attending lunch as guests of President Messitte at Ripon College. New support staff, coaches and substitute teachers joined the district team as well.

At the buildings, teachers returned to prepare their curriculum and rooms for a new year. The teachers attended inservices to learn about new technologies, instructional strategies and procedures. Their work was immense and their specialized training evident. On August 6th- 9th over 78 educators (13 from other districts) joined the Ripon Technology Academy to learn about using new teaching tools to enhance instruction. This was just one of many professional learning opportunities staff participated in over the summer.

While the teachers prepared their classrooms, many others worked in the wings. The custodial staff cleaned the buildings and polished the floors in anticipation of the return of hundreds of students. The technology staff refurbished and replaced equipment and infrastructures to ensure access for all. The curriculum staff revised instructional documents and updated student materials. Food service prepped the kitchens and set up new finger scanning technology. This technology improves efficiency and accuracy in the lunch line. District and building office staff rolled over reports, forms and data systems while the business office staff closed out one budget year and began the process of opening up the next.

Children visited the schools throughout the month of August with their families for back-to-school conferences and registration. While many parents attended registration to complete paperwork and forms before the first day of school, some chose to avoid lines and used an advanced registration option. This left just the prized school picture for the actual registration day. Taking pictures in August means one less interruption to student learning once the school year begins.

Many students, families, and supporters attended a ribbon cutting ceremony on August 20th for the District's newest school. The opening of Journey Charter Elementary School for K-2 students completed the K-12 project-based learning opportunity for the District. The four charter schools in the District were

made possible through charter planning and implementation grants awarded by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This summer, grants were awarded to Catalyst Charter Middle School (\$225,000) and Journey Charter Elementary School (\$200,000) bringing our district grant award total to \$2,850,000.

On August 27th and 28th, the schools were bustling once again as students returned to school for open houses. Lockers and desks were filled with new school supplies. In addition to open houses, 6th grade students were welcomed at the middle school by 8th grade WEB Leaders. The WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) program prepared incoming students by working on team building and focusing on what it takes to be successful in middle school. The high school was the first to implement a similar program called Link Crew for incoming freshman.

In the final days before the school year began, teachers attended three days of in-service and planning. The staff learned about the Superintendent's community survey data, completed required Department of Public Instruction (DPI) training, and began planning around the district goals for the year. During this time principals and teachers reflected on student data from the end of the previous year to set program, building, and team goals. The teachers also designed and wrote their Student Learning Objectives (SLO's) to meet the new DPI Teacher Effectiveness requirements.

At the all-staff back-to-school inservice on August 28th, the Ripon Board of Education presented Tonya Alling with the District's 2013 Friend of Public Schools Award. Ms. Alling was honored for her work with the Ripon-Green Lake Tractor Cruise Benefit, active membership in Ripon Noon Kiwanis Club, and primary leadership position in the state-wide autism project of the Wisconsin-Upper Michigan District of Kiwanis International. The award was presented to Ms. Alling in front of a standing ovation. Thirty-two staff members were also recognized for their years of service ranging from 10-35 years.

As bus routes and schedules took their final form, the staff reviewed safety plans and procedures including those for storm warnings, fire drills and lockdowns. While education is the outcome we desire, safety is our first priority. Having staff prepared for any number of emergencies from day one ensures students and staff stay safe throughout the year. Whew! It was a very full August. The buildings may have seemed quiet on the outside, but behind the scenes extensive work was being completed in preparation for the start of the 2013-2014 school year.

With the doors of the schools open, I would remind all community members to think about safety first. There will be many walkers, bikers and busses sharing the road with you now that school has begun. Crossing guards extend out into the neighborhoods to provide safe passage for students traveling to and from school. Yet, even with all the signs and extra precautions we can never be too safe. Please plan some extra time as you travel near the schools. Thank you to the community for your support as we prepare to turn these wonderfully predictable gifts of summer into the best gift of all – an education for our youth. *To see pictures of these events, visit the Ripon Area School District Facebook page. Remember to "like" the page as the Ripon Area School District is unable to "friend" you.*