

**For Immediate Release**

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**Barlow Staff Consider Applying for a Charter Grant**

**Ripon, WI** – On February 13, 2018, the Curriculum and Instruction Program Committee for the Board of Education received information about work the Barlow Park Elementary School staff have been doing to consider incorporating social emotional learning targets and play-based instruction into the district’s four year old preschool and lower elementary grades. The staff is looking at restructuring the elementary program to better fit the social emotional needs of Ripon’s youngest learners and prepare them for academic rigor. Principal Sanderfoot shared the work could develop into a new 4K-2 charter similar to schools in Ontario, Finland and New Zealand as early as second semester of the 2019-2020 school year.

Since No Child Left Behind legislation, more and more academic demands are being pushed down to the preschool and kindergarten levels. “Pushing literacy and numeracy on children before age seven has come at a cost to our youngest learners.” noted Principal Sanderfoot. She shared research showing that “when students are asked to do tasks their brains aren’t ready for, students can believe themselves to be incapable and lose their natural desire to learn.”

If the Board supported the concept, the curriculum, benchmarks, and assessments for the school would potentially be organized into multiage levels that students would move through over the course of a semester. At the end of a semester, the students would move on to another level or remain at the same level as sometimes occurs with swimming lessons. All

students would work through the essential social emotional learning and academic curriculum by the end of second grade so they would be ready to move on to the more traditional grade level configurations at Murray Park and Quest Elementary Schools. Much planning and conversations between teachers, parents and community members would need to take place over the next two years to make this happen, but staff wanted the Board to know they have interest in the concept.

Principal Sanderfoot noted, “We have more students being referred to special education for other health impairments (ADHD primarily), emotional behavioral disabilities, and severe developmental delays. Most of the referrals are for children between the ages of 3 and 6. This indicates a need for a system change. These referrals have goals for social skills, emotional regulation, and sensory needs. Many of those skills are taught in the Wisconsin’s Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Social Emotional Learning Framework. Making social and emotional skills part of the learning equation would help children succeed in school and life.”

For more information, please contact Superintendent, Dr. Mary Whitrock, at whitrockm@ripon.k12.wi.us or 748-4600 with any questions.

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