

For Immediate Release

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Ripon Area School District Seeks Parent Input for Charter Proposal

Ripon, WI -- The Ripon Area School District held a Community Information Session on Tuesday, February 5, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Ripon High School Community Room. The information session provided information about a charter school proposal for Barlow Park Elementary being considered by the district.

The charter concept, first proposed to the Board last year, has been the topic of ongoing conversation and research by the staff who are seeking to address changing student needs. Through book studies and Professional Learning Community (PLC) discussions, staff explored multiple education models such as: Montessori, Competency-Based, Waldorf, and Purposeful over the past year. "As the year went on, the charter proposal, which pulls what we feel are the best pieces of each of the models explored, began to take shape," said Barlow Park principal, Tanya Sanderfoot. The next phase of the proposal will be collaboration with parents as the district decides the best approach for the children in Ripon.

The proposed charter focuses on personalized, playful learning through developmentally appropriate instruction. The restructured elementary program could better meet the social-emotional needs of Ripon's youngest learners and prepare them for academic rigor. Principal Sanderfoot shared, "The model is inspired by the school systems in Ontario, Finland, New Zealand, and most recently Australia. Through play, children create, adapt, explore, experiment, learn, communicate, socialize, and problem solve (Vygotsky, 1978). Play allows children to build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with their environment, with others, and on their own (Glover, 1999). We believe school should not be a one-size fits all system. Not every child develops in the same cookie cutter way. We do know that specific pathways exist that children typically follow step-by-step. For example, children crawl before they walk and walk before they run. Competency-based instruction can pull together essential skills and developmental milestones."

Sanderfoot noted the model has elements similar to swimming lessons where children are assessed in the first session and then placed in groups based on skills. At the end of each session, student are reassessed on

essential skills and if they demonstrate proficiency, they move on to the next level. Students needing extra support, may repeat the level and may become a leader in that section.

“The School Board put our existing charters in place as centers of innovations. By seeking charter school status, Barlow Park would receive flexibility from state and local regulations to allow for mid-year promotion to the next level and adjustments in required minutes of instruction among other things,” comment Superintendent Dr. Mary Whitrock. “There is no magic with our current grade level structure. It was put in place decades ago to manage the large number of students whose families were moving from farms to the cities because of the industrial revolution. As time moved on though, we have changed our expectations of schools without changing the structure of our school system. I believe what is being proposed may become more common in other district, much as the work of our first charters helped to transform the face of all of our classrooms.”

The next information session is schedule for Tuesday, February 12, 2019 from 5:30-6:30 at Barlow Park in the media center. This will be an opportunity for parents and community members to learn about the multiple education models such as: Montessori, Competency-Based, Waldorf, and Purposeful Play the Barlow staff has explored over the past year.

For more information, please contact Principal, Tanya Sanderfoot, at sanderfoott@ripon.k12.wi.us or (920) 748-1550 with any questions.

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