

Meridian CUSD Newsletter

Fall 2019



(L to R) Kelly Zitzke, Todd Hall, TJ Zambrovitz, Aimee Stewart, Ben Groselak, Kristine Lundine, Alison Salo, Becky Barton, Jen Hall, Kim Hofmeister, and Malinda Hurt.

OUR COMMUNITY, OUR SCHOOL, OUR STORY

A Word From Our Superintendent

By Dr. P.J. Caposey



Meridian Community and Families,

Welcome to the 2019-2020 school-year!! The year is off to a tremendous start thanks to the hard work of our support staff ensuring that our students and staff returned to buildings they could be proud of

and able to use the tools of the day to access learning with access to technology in every classroom in the district. This summer was an incredible, emotional ride for the district.

For a few years we had prepared for a summer full of building and grounds improvements. We were extremely confident that we could get done a tremendous amount of work under the leadership of newly hired Buildings and Grounds Director, Bryan Vandiver. We were right. The transformation that took place was praise-worthy. In four months on the job, he literally impacted each element of our Facilities operations. His impact was amazing. Unfortunately, it was much too short as Bryan passed suddenly in July.

The work of so many employees committed to carry forward his work is what allowed our buildings

to open in the condition they did. Particular thanks to the Buildings and Grounds staff led by John Finley in Bryan's absence and the paint crew led by Lisa Reber as they put in maximum effort to have the buildings looking amazing. Additional thanks to Harms Landscaping who did incredible work for the district and donated time and service to have our grounds looking the best they have in my time in the district.

So, as we close the chapter on this summer – it is again time to look forward. Each year in this letter I share what our district focus for the year will be. This year our focus is to understand the change process and where we all fit within it. We have had a tremendous amount of change in the last five years and this change is simply going to accelerate as we continue to move toward our vision of attaining world class results. The only way we can move from getting through change to each of us leading and embracing change is as a team. The focus of my conversation with staff this year is ensuring that we are adopting the qualities of high performing teams and avoiding the pitfalls that impact low-performing teams.

As always thank you for your continued sup-

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port. It is not lost on me how lucky we are as a faculty, staff, and administration to serve this community. But – we need more support and feedback. We have just begun our Strategic Planning process and need your help. Please follow this link

(<https://my.thoughtexchange.com/#590673659>) and let us know what we need to do next in our journey to become an even better school district. For context regarding where we have been and where we are now so you can better inform your opinion of where we need to go, click this link (warning – 20 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGwdvY5djv4&t=3s>
OR follow the QR codes provided.

Also, please continue to connect with us on our social media platforms. We work very hard to attempt to meet our parents and students where they already are – so we hope to see you on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Please label school related posts with #WeAreMCUSD so we can collaboratively celebrate the great things happening in our community.

Thank you and let's make it a great year!!

**Thank you,
Dr. PJ Caposey**



Strategic Planning



State of Schools



WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Highland School

I am excited to welcome our students, staff and families back to Highland Elementary for another great school year. So many projects and facelifts were completed at Highland over the summer. While you may have noticed many of these changes at the Open House, we are excited to see how our continued implementation of the Leader in Me curriculum changes the culture and character of our school.

With the new school year comes new faces, both in our students and in our staff. First, we want to welcome all of the new students and families who are coming to Highland Elementary School for the first time. We also want to welcome Mrs. Abbey Diedericks (Kindergarten) and Ms. Janelle Tanaglia (2nd Grade). We are excited for the great things that will happen within each of their classes throughout this school year.



Our staff and students will continue to utilize the 7 Habits of the Leader in Me framework to develop character, leadership skills, and social-emotional skills that will set them up for success. We will focus on creating leadership opportunities for our students. We believe that everyone can be a leader. Ask your kids how they are becoming a better leader at school. If you are looking to become a leader in your children's education, I would encourage you to explore serving on the Principal-Parent Advisory Council or supporting our PTO. We have an excellent partnership and a very active PTO that raises funds for Highland and Monroe Center. The PTO provides lots of

fun opportunities for students and families throughout the year. There are many opportunities to volunteer all throughout the school year. You will be receiving a PTO newsletter outlining their events, fundraising, and purchases early in the school year.

I am excited to see the amazing growth in our students, our staff, and our families throughout this school year. Please watch for information about events throughout the school year and partner with us in your student's educational experience. Don't forget to follow us on Facebook, on Twitter and to share out your student's accomplishments, achievements, and their passions using #WeAreMCUSD. I am looking forward to having a great year.

Joe Mullikin, Principal
Highland Elementary School



WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Monroe Center School

Beautiful, better, and best foot forward for Monroe Center's students and staff family this year. It's the best way to begin and view the 2019-2020 season together. This is an extremely exciting time of the year for many and it's no different here at MC. There are many things already in progress for students to come back to this fall. The progress that we've seen in and outside of our building is remarkable. Please take time to stop in and see the amazing transformation of our grounds and the beautiful changes in our building. All of that being said, we'd like to first thank our buildings and ground crews for all of their hard work over the summer and the time they spent helping us develop our building and help our ideas come to life. Their dedication and commitment to our mission has been very much appreciated in past months.

Our new innovation lab is almost finished, the painting is done, the furniture is looking great, and the technology is there. We've decided to house our Coding Ozobots (a gift from Rock Valley College) in the new Innovation Lab so all students have an opportunity to work with them. Rock Valley College shared with us that they are willing to come to Monroe Center again this year to help teach students about coding and more exciting technology components. We have a few finishing touches to take care of before the big reveal to the students starting with the 5th grade teams. Had it not been for the perseverance of both Mrs. McDevitt and Mrs. Metzger's past 5th grade classes, the innovation lab would still only be an idea.

We're so pleased to now have a marked walkway from the parking lot at the front entrance of the building for the safety of students and adults alike. It should impact not only the safety of our students in a great way but will also help the flow of parking as well because we will only have one area for students to cross rather than dropping off in various areas through the parking lot.

In terms of academics teachers and staff just completed their first day of training with our new Math Re-

source. i-Ready along with Ready Classroom. You will hear more about this from your students and their teachers as information is shared with you at home, but from what we experienced on the first day back the most exciting part about this will no doubt be that we are digging far deeper into the math than we ever have before and working on conceptualizing math rather than rote memory of skills as in some years past. It was really interesting to be a part of the training and to understand what our students will be experiencing.

There will be more to experience at Monroe Center for students, staff, and families as we move throughout the school year and we're excited to partner together with each and every one of you this year to best help your child grow and learn. I will soon be reaching out to parents to continue to build my principal/parent advisory committee, we will be talking about our first family literacy night soon, and our student leadership teams will be up and leading in no time.

**Welcome back,
Mrs. Deana Simpson
Principal, Monroe Center Grade School**



WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Meridian Junior High

I am excited to have welcomed the staff and students back to Meridian Junior High at our Back to School Bash. The staff and students loved all of the projects that were completed this summer. The front of the school was improved with some new beautiful flowerbeds. The west hallway was spruced up with paint and a new chalkboard wall! Upstairs you will find our vision for a learning studio in room 206. This room came about after we discussed what our MJHS Vision: S.O.A.R. or Success of a Redbird really meant to us. We are looking to create a space for students to use to think outside of the box and stretch themselves. We will update you on this room this winter!

With the new school year comes some new staff. Please welcome:

Band Director: Eric Johnson

Chorus Director: Jordan Pedigo

Art Teacher: TBA

Speech Pathologist: Emily Peterson

Secretary: Margarita Alvarez

The Junior High staff will have several opportunities for professional development this year. Our first opportunity is Leader in Me Training. The Leader in Me is an evidence based school improvement model that empowers students with leadership and life skills they need to thrive in the 21st century. We look forward to carrying forward the great work that has already taken place at Highland and Monroe Center with Leader in Me.

If you are interested in joining in some of the leadership opportunities at Meridian Junior High I encourage you to explore serving on the Principal Parent Advisory Committee (PPAC) or joining the MJHS PTO. The PPAC meets once a month before board meetings. This committee helps drive some of the important policy updates, looks at the data related to school improvement and discusses other topics that parents may have concerns about, for example social media or vaping. The PTO was formed 5 years

ago, and continues to provide our students with several fun activities throughout the school year. So far the PTO has raised over \$60,000 that has all come back to our students. All of this has been done without our students selling anything! You can find out more about the PPAC by calling the Junior High office. You can find out more information about the PTO by liking their Facebook page.

Find all you need to know about the upcoming week in your email inbox every Sunday in the In Case Your Student Didn't Tell You newsletter! And don't forget to like the District Facebook page: Meridian CUSD 223!

It is SHOWTIME!

Mrs. Davis
Principal



WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Stillman Valley High School

Dear SVHS Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to the 2019-2020 school year; we are excited to begin a new year with all of you. Stillman Valley High School's Vision is to create a learning environment that empowers our students to take on the most challenging courses offered in an effort to prepare them for success at the college, career, or military level. We truly want our students to be **Empowered to Excel**. However, this vision cannot be attained without valuing and promoting social and emotional wellness. We are dedicated to a learning environment that promotes a positive culture with strong student engagement.

Thank you for continuing to partner with us to positively impact the academic, social, and emotional growth of our students every day. Please know that your involvement and support of your children at the high school level is essential. Students still need to see that you play an active role in their high school endeavors. You can stay connected by making consistent use of our SVHS website at www.stillmanvalleyhigh.org. The **SVHS Daily Announcements**, **SVHS Parent-Student Handbook**, **SAT/ACT Test Prep**, **Family Access/Gradebook**, **SVHS Course Guide**, and much more are available under the **Quick Links** tab on the high school website.

Students at SVHS are encouraged to earn Community Service Hours throughout their high school careers. A mindset of service supports our District Mission to cultivate "...community contributors." Our seniors are recognized for their four years of service during their graduation ceremony. Service hours should be completed by students outside the school day through various local organizations. Our students can also earn service hours in conjunction with SVHS clubs, teams, or classes. Each time your child completes service hours, please encourage him or her to stop by our Counseling Department to complete a one-page **Service Hours Form**, or they can complete the form online by visiting the **Quick Links** tab on our SVHS website at www.stillmanvalleyhigh.org. Our SVHS Counseling Department provides students with community service options and contact information

through our daily announcements and community service bulletin board.

The Latin Honors Program at SVHS was established several years ago, and it serves to promote our District Mission and SVHS Vision. High school seniors receive Latin Honors recognition during their graduation ceremony if they have met the established criteria related to: ACT, SAT, and/or ASVAB Benchmark Scores, Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA), Good Citizenship, and multiple Capstone or College-Level Courses. With our state's ever-changing high-stakes testing, it is essential that we define what it means to be College/Career/Military ready at our local level. The specific requirements of Latin Honors can be found in our SVHS Student-Parent Handbook located in the front of your child's SVHS Agenda/Planner and under the **Quick Links** tab in the **2019-2020 Student-Parent Handbook** on our SVHS webpage.

Important Dates – 1st Quarter:

- August 30 – Early Release for Students at 11:10 AM
- August 30 – ASVAB Testing – All Seniors (Morning -SVHS)
- September 2 – Labor Day – No School
- September 19 – Homecoming Pep Rally at 7:00 PM (SVHS Football Field)
- September 21 – Homecoming Dance at 7:00 – 9:30 PM (SVHS M.P. Room)
- October 9 & 16 – SVHS Parent-Teacher Conferences 4:00 – 7:00 PM
- October 10 – End of 1st Quarter
- October 11 – Teachers' Institute – No School
- October 14 – Columbus Day – No School

Sincerely,

Mrs. Leslie Showers
SVHS Principal

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

News and Notes from Transportation

*As a reminder, our goal is to have safe and timely pick-ups and drop-offs of all students. We ask for a window of five-minutes early and five-minutes late bordering the shared pick-up and drop-off time. Please contact the Transportation Department if pick-ups or drop-offs do not occur within that window.

*We have 7 Early Release days. On these days your students will arrive home 3 hours and 20 minutes earlier than a regular release day. Aug 30, Nov 8, Dec 6, Dec 20, Feb 14, Mar 27 and May 8. Please be sure to note these dates so that someone is at the stop for your kindergarten students to be dropped off.

*Davis Junction students (particularly Ogle Crossings and Harvest Glenn students and parents) - Please keep in mind that it will be approximately 8 minutes for a bus to go around a different direction to get into your subdivisions to start the pick up or drop off process when stopped by a train. We thank you for your patience with this, as you know all too well how much of an inconvenience these trains can be.

*If your student will be going home with another student after school, please be sure to write a note to inform the bus driver. This will be permitted as long as the space on the bus allows.

*Although we are still enjoying the beautiful weather, winter will be here before we know it. Please keep in mind with the winter driving season that our driver's first priority is your student's safety in getting to and from school and school activities. When the roads appear to be a little tricky to navigate know that your driver is doing their best to be on time, but taking all the necessary precautions to arrive safely.

*All of our route buses are equipped with the HCTB app (Here Comes The Bus) This allows for parents to be able to see right when their students bus will be arriving. For information about downloading the app go to the www.Meridian223.org home page to find the information on the front page. Our school code for the app is 86342.

*MCUSD is in GREAT need of substitute bus drivers

and welcome applicants who would like to join our team. The district provides all necessary training. If you are thinking this may be something that you would like to check out, we are always open to answering any questions you may have about the aspects of the job. Please consider joining us in this very rewarding part-time job that can work nicely around and with your student's schedule.

20 percent of Meridian Faculty earn Google Certification

Over the past three years Meridian CUSD has used an incentive program to support teachers who chose to drive their own professional development by becoming a Google Certified Educator. The time intensive process requires teachers to complete modules and then take a timed assessment to demonstrate their proficiency within the Google suite.

Google has designed professional development for teachers so that they may best utilize the resources available to them to continue their personal growth and to best support their students. The Google Educator website states, "Learning never stops. Dedicated educators are lifelong learners. With that in mind, we've (Google) designed free, online training for the classroom that helps educators do what they do best, even better."

Over the course of three years over 20 MCUSD educators have taken their personal time to dive in and earn this certification. Many completed the work on their time and others received on-site assistance by their peer and Google facilitator Malinda Hurt.

Current staff that have earned certification include: Malinda Hurt, Riley Appino, Todd Hall, TJ Zambrovitz, Danielle Kunce, Megan Zamora, Kelli Zitzke, Alison Salo, Kristie Lundine, Jessica McLaughlin, Christina Shula, Kim Hofmeister, Jill Gramer, Becky Barton, Tara Jepsen, Jacqui Goodman, Aimee Stewart, Jen Hall, Amy Metzger, Beth Kleinschmidt, Lisa Hillard, Ben Groselak, and Jamie Melin.

Superintendent Dr. PJ Caposey noted that he was incredibly proud of the work of his teachers. "I think it is incredible that teachers have chosen to challenge themselves and commit to staying unfinished in order to best serve our students. I am incredibly proud of the fact our teachers have demonstrated the desire to best use the technology we have available in order to continually engage our students."

(SEE PICTURE ON FRONT COVER)

Local Postal Customer



MERIDIAN CUSD 223



@MCUSD223

5 Honored as MCUSD 223 Those Who Excel Winners

Michele McDevitt, Jacqueline Arjes, Dave Babcock, Chad Hoefle, and the Family Literacy Night Team will all be honored as Those Who Excel Honorees at a banquet hosted by the Illinois State Board of Education in Bloomington-Normal on October 19th. Meridian CUSD honored each of their nominees for this state-wide honor last school-year and received notice of their recognition this week. Meridian is exceptionally proud of the honorees and the work they do on behalf of our students and community.

The Illinois State Board of Education annually sponsors Those Who Excel to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to our state's public and nonpublic elementary and secondary schools. Excellence, Meritorious Service and Special Recognition awards are presented in seven categories: classroom teacher, school administrator/principal, student support personnel (licensed), educational service personnel (unlicensed), school board member/community volunteer; team, and early career educator. Nomination materials are evaluated by a selection committee comprised of individuals who represent a variety of educational organizations. Awards of Excellence winners in the classroom teacher category are finalists for the Illinois Teacher of the

Year. Local school district leaders and members of school communities nominate candidates.

Meridian winners were in the following categories:

Michele McDevitt won an award of Recognition for work as a classroom teacher.

Jacqueline Arjes won an award of Merit for work as an early career educator.

Dave Babcock won an award of Merit for his work as a member of our support staff.

Chad Hoefle won an award of Recognition for his work as a community volunteer.

The Family Literacy Night Team won an award of Recognition for their work as a team.

Meridian CUSD 223 Superintendent PJ Caposey stated, "The Those Who Excel program is about honoring those who are truly exceptional within your district and then entering them into a competition to recognize their incredible efforts at the state level. I am incredibly proud of the work of those we nominated for these distinguished awards and am happy they will be publicly recognized for their outstanding contributions to our district and to the work of educating the students of our state."