

D161 elementary principals pair up for greater cohesion

BY CAROLE SHARWARKO
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Principals in Flossmoor District 161 offered updates and reflections on their respective building's improvement plans at the March 14 school board meeting.

Each principal explained the latest data and observations about student achievement and behavioral management. The plans are ongoing initiatives to improve student learning and school culture.

Heather Hill Elementary principal Ashley Holland lauded the school's culture and climate, emphasizing its mottos of "make good choices" and "choose kind." She also told the board about the staff's special effort to address lags in first-graders' learning after a year of pandemic school.

The principal said first graders were struggling at the start of the year. "Our teams came together and said we can't do what we normally do. We've got to switch something up," she said.

Working with reading specialists and instructional coaches, the staff helped increase many students' standings in the school's tiered progress system.

Serena Hills School Principal Elizabeth Reich echoed Holland's statement about first-graders struggling to catch up.

"Kindergarten online was not ideal. Our kindergartners are just about as strong as our first-graders are this year," Reich said.

She said the use of The Anna Plan, a literacy enhancement tool, is helping first-graders improve. Teachers facilitate 30-minute daily, small group lessons that supplement students' regular reading instruction.

Western Avenue Principal Jean Isabelli said it was great to be back in the building this year. Teachers appreciate the designated social/emotional learning time that is built into the daily schedule, while students like getting rewards from the Den Depot school store.

Teachers are connecting and collaborating in more meaningful ways at Western Avenue, Isabelli said, especially during Professional Learning Community meetings. Specialists and instructional coaches offer their help, while teachers put a greater emphasis on comparing data, along with professional observations.

"We're starting to have conversations like, 'I see that your data looks like this, and mine looks like this. What are you doing differently?'" Isabelli said.

Board member Misha Blackman said she was pleased to see how united in methodology the principals are, and how they referenced one another in their reports. She lauded the sense of connection between the schools, contrasting it to what she said was a more separated nature of the past.

"When I joined the board, all of our schools worked great independently, and I thought, 'Wouldn't it be wonderful if they worked like this, but together?'" Blackman said. "We're one district, you should get the same level of education (regardless of) what side you're on...You're going to get a good quality, caring principal."

"They're talking to each other. They're all doing the same good work. Principals, you're all doing a wonderful job," and she thanked Superintendent Dana Smith for the work that's been done under his leadership.

D161 grants teachers tenure

BY CHRONICLE STAFF

The Flossmoor District 161 school board, in a unanimous vote during its March meeting, awarded tenure to 18 teachers.

Tenure is granted after teachers are successfully evaluated for their work over a four-year period.

Newly tenured teachers are:

- Robert Calhoon, orchestra teacher at Parker Junior High.
- Arlene Dewey, AVID (advancement via individual determination), teacher at Parker Junior High.
- Philip Edwards, science at Parker Junior High.
- Tyler Gauna, science at Parker Junior High.
- Mikayla Gear, fifth grade at Western Avenue School
- Amy Gehrt, instructional coach at Parker Junior High.

- Kaitlyn Hall, health at Parker Junior High.
- Shavonna Harris, science at Parker Junior High.
- Huda Hussein, English/Language Arts at Parker Junior High.
- Michael Krol, special education at Parker Junior High.
- Joseph Mailhot, social studies at Parker Junior High.
- Katherine May, kindergarten at Heather Hill School.
- Danielle Montijo, first grade at Western Avenue School.
- Emily Nicotra, English/Language Arts at Parker Junior High.
- Cheryl Rowland, special education at Heather Hill School.
- Jennifer Smith, reading specialist at Parker Junior High.
- Jason Volkman, special education at Parker Junior High.
- Melisa Yi, fourth grade at Serena Hills.

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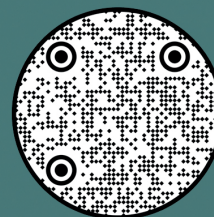
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