

March 3, 2017

A message from the superintendent

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Greetings from Dean Gorrell, Superintendent of the Verona Area School District. This is the fifth message to Verona Area School District (VASD) parents and staff this school year, providing you brief updates regarding what's happening in our district as well as news from the state and national level. I encourage you to contact me with questions you have about any of the information shared in this update:

Email: gorrelld@verona.k12.wi.us

Phone: 608-845-4310

In each of these updates I will reiterate our district mission: ***Every Student Must Succeed***. This is the core of our work because ***no*** child is expendable. We believe at this time in their lives, our children depend on us for their future. Soon though, our collective future, from our national security to economic viability and everything else, will depend on them and ***their*** success.

Local Updates:

Referendum update: The April 4, 2017 election ballot will include three VASD referendum questions, two that are facilities-related and one for operational expenses. The first mailing in a series of three arrived in your mailbox a couple weeks ago and we refer to this piece as the Fact Sheet. It is a summary of information related to the referendum from the scope to the estimated costs and tax impacts. There are several ways you can obtain more information about the referendum:

- Visit our website at verona.k12.wi.us/referendum
- Call me at 608-845-4310 or email me at gorrelld@verona.k12.wi.us
- Allow me to visit your home / business for a personal question & answer session. If interested, please contact 608- 845-4337 or kloppik@verona.k12.wi.us to set up a time.
- Attend one of four upcoming community information presentations:
 - **Informal "Coffee Chat" with a Board Member**
 - March 7, 7:30am at Tuvalu Coffeehouse in Verona (back meeting room)
 - March 9, 7:30am at Pancake Cafe on Nesbitt Rd in Fitchburg (back bakery room)
 - **Referendum Information Presentations** (*includes representatives from the construction & architectural teams as well as a financial & urban planning consultant.*)
 - March 13 at 6pm at Fitchburg Library
 - March 14 at 6pm at Badger Ridge Middle School

Fortalezas Familiares (Family Strengths): (contributed by Dr. Carmen Valdez, UW Madison Department of Counseling Psychology) Being a parent can be tough. Although parents want nothing less than for their children to do well, managing work responsibilities, life stressors, and family demands can limit the resources they have to support their children. Most parents manage these struggles successfully. But for some, feeling isolated, uncertain about the future, and disconnected from resources, can make their struggles feel insurmountable, and lead to chronic stress and even depression.

Depression can affect how a person feels about themselves, how they think, and how much energy, motivation, and concentration they have for daily activities. Depression can lead to a loss of interest in life, little involvement in activities, including parenting and family time, and fading hope for the future. Besides affecting the parent, it can also significantly strain other family members and resources. Unfortunately, when a parent has depression, everyone in the family shares in the confusion and shame associated with depression and other changes in family life.

Depression is substantially high among Latinos given stressors related to immigration, legal status, and adaptation to U.S. culture. In addition, separation of extended family ties, loss of parental authority, and cultural disconnects between parents and children contribute to depression among Latino parents.

A promising program for our Latino students and their families is Fortalezas Familiares, which translates to Family Strengths. Fortalezas Familiares is a 14-week program for the whole family, the parent with depression, their partner or another caregiver, and their children. The program has been shown to reduce mothers' depression, support family resources, and reduce emotional and behavioral problems in children among Spanish-speaking families. Fortalezas Familiares is designed to (a) address the confusion and blame that occurs in families when a parent has depression, and (b) build parenting competence, effective communication, and family cohesion, and (c) enhance family assets and positive coping strategies. In addition, Fortalezas Familiares incorporates cultural influences on (a) Latinos' experience of depression, (b) stress on families (e.g., immigration, cultural adaptation), (c) family values and traditions, (d) parenting resources, and (e) treatment preferences.

The program will be offered at Glacier Edge Elementary School in the Fall of 2017. Families interested in participating should contact Jenny Schultz, school counselor, at 608-497-2130. Participating families will attend weekly meetings, which include a shared meal, and program meetings for parents, and separate but concurrent meetings for youth 4-8, 9-11, and 12-18. Program facilitators will include Latino, bilingual, and bicultural individuals. The program will take place at school to also build relationships between Latino families and schools.

Personalized learning: For the last four years, the Verona Area School District has put tremendous energy and resources into an instructional movement known as personalized learning. In all of the remaining newsletters this year, I will include information about personalized learning which will include links to resources and information from local, state, national and international sources about this approach to teaching.

In my last newsletter, I wrote about student engagement and the promise of personalized learning to increase engagement. To review, the U.S. average for student engagement is in the 80% range for elementary, 60% for middle school and 40% for high school. ¹ As for the work place, a recent Gallup study found that only 32% of U.S. workers were engaged in their work. That same study found that 50.8% of the workers were not engaged and 17.2% were actively disengaged.² Gallup categorizes workers as "engaged" based on their ratings of key workplace elements that predict important organizational performance outcomes, such as having an opportunity to do what they do best each day, having someone at work who encourages their development and believing their opinions count at work. Engaged employees are involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work.

The same is true about engaged students. It's pretty easy to spot a child who is actively disengaged in their learning, but how do you know if your child is truly engaged in their learning? The table below offers some differences between students who are compliant and appear to be engaged, but really aren't as they're more focused on pleasing and being rewarded. ³

Compliant / Dutiful Learner	Engaged Learner
Responds to straightforward questions but needs scaffolding to pursue more complex questions.	May be bored or unmotivated to respond to straightforward question but is fascinated by questions that require teasing out ambiguity and complexity.
Seeks approval, credit or high marks because of effort, quantity, or adherence to directions.	Seeks recognition for the thoughtfulness of the work, or originality of the work, even if it isn't complete or doesn't adhere to directions.
Plays it safe by electing to follow known procedures, explore familiar topics, and use tools that have been mastered; dismisses or avoids alternative points of view or approaches.	Chooses to take risks by exploring something new, attempts to solve a problem in a novel way and considers alternative points of view.
Completes work with no expectation for finding personal relevance, connection or interest.	Seeks work that is interesting or seeks to make work interesting.
Takes information at face value and does not question the credibility or validity of "experts" (e.g. a teacher, online source, textbook).	Questions both text and people to better understand an issue, topic or problem.
Follows oral and written directions with minimal prompting.	Follows oral and written directions with minimal prompting but may pursue an alternative approach to personalize the experience.
Intently focuses on task completion to finish the assignment.	Focuses on the learning and wants to talk about it regardless of the prompting and without consideration of others.
Completes explicit procedures and requirements in a timely manner.	Pursues own train of thought regardless of the task at hand or feedback from staff, which may make it difficult to finish in a timely manner.

In a personalized learning environment, students are given more choices in how they pursue and pace their learning and how they show proficiency and mastery of specified academic content standards. In other words, as with engaged employees, engaged students are afforded the opportunity to do what they do best and apply that in novel situations to create further and new learning. They are relentlessly encouraged to hypothesize, test, report and repeat the process by their teachers and given a real say in their learning.

Lastly, there is a link between a personalized learning environment that promotes deep, engaged learning and employability skills. If you do a Google search for employability skills, you'll get hundreds of thousands of hits. Many of those can be synthesized to include a number, if not all, of the following:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Initiative and enterprise
- Planning and organizing
- Self-management
- Learning
- Technology

Personalized learning provides our learners with a more authentic learning experience that promotes growth in the critical skills needed in today's workplace.

Transgender Policy: Last May, the departments of Education and Justice issued guidance directing schools to let transgender students use facilities that correspond with their gender identity. This guidance was addressed to school districts and colleges that receive federal funding and was based on the Obama administration's interpretation of Title IX, the federal law that bans sex discrimination in schools, to include gender identity. In late February, the Trump administration withdrew those directions for transgender students.

In October of 2016, the Verona Area Board of Education approved a policy related to students who are transgender and non-conforming to gender role stereotypes (Link below). That policy will remain in effect until we either receive legal direction from the state or federal level that our policy is illegal or otherwise not permissible, or if the Board of Education changes this policy.

<http://verona.k12.wi.us/cms/One.aspx?portalId=139771&pageId=413270#>

Book Study: If you are interested in participating in a book study on the following book: *The End of Average, How We Succeed in a World That Values Sameness*; author Todd Rose, please contact my assistant, Tamera Stanley at 608-845-4309 or stanleyt@verona.k12.wi.us. We will purchase the book for you and in receiving the book, you will commit to attending in person (or by streaming through Facebook) the following dates:

Monday, April 10th from 7:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the District Office, 700 N Main St. / OR live stream Facebook
Monday, April 24th from 7:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the District Office, 700 N Main St./ OR live stream Facebook

State Updates:

Update on public school funding in upcoming biennium budget: The Governor has published his 2017 – 2019 biennium budget, which includes public school funding. A summary of the major components of the Governor's budget for public education includes:

- An increase in funding of \$200 per student in year one and \$204 in year two. This funding is referred to as categorical aid, meaning it comes from the state and NOT local property taxes. Some of this funding is contingent on projected savings moving state workers to self-insured health care.
- Fully funding the expected changes on charter, choice and special needs program participation, and providing families with a voucher that is increased by a "per pupil" amount of \$217 in each year of the biennium.
- Creating the Early College Credit program, which will combine the current Youth Option and Course Options programs and serve as a single structure under which students can earn college credit while in high school. The Governor proposes allocating state funding to help defray the costs to the public school districts.
- A repeal of the minimum hours of instruction (currently public schools are required to schedule at least 437 hours of instruction in kindergarten, at least 1050 hours in grades 1 – 6 and at least 1137 in grades 7-12).
- Permitting post secondary faculty to teach in high schools without having a teaching license if in good standing and have a bachelor's degree.

There are many more items in the Governor's budget proposal than those listed above. The following link will take you to the Governor's complete budget proposal. (Education portion is on pages 433 – 454)

<http://doa.wi.gov/Documents/DEBF/Budget/Biennial%20Budget/2017-19%20Executive%20Budget/Budget%20Book%20Combined%20v3%20Provisional.pdf>

The link to a budget brief is below (pages 6 – 10 are related to education)

<http://doa.wi.gov/Documents/DEBF/Budget/Biennial%20Budget/2017-19%20Executive%20Budget/17-19%20BIB%20FINAL%20revised%2002082017.pdf>

National Updates:

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) In December of 2015, Congress replaced what was known as the *No Child Left Behind Act* with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). ESSA is designed to reduce the specificity of federal requirements providing states and local school districts more flexibility regarding how they are held accountable for student achievement. The following are a few of the major points of this legislation:

- Program requirements are expected to go into effect in the 2017 – 2018 school year
- Legislation includes requirements related to:
 - Accountability
 - Improved academic achievement on state assessments (95% testing requirement *)
 - Graduation rates
 - Progress towards English language proficiency for English learners
 - States determine a fourth factor
- Academic Standards – States get to choose their own academic standards
- Report Cards – Current report card structure is largely maintained and allows for expanded reporting for foster youth and homeless students
- School Improvement
 - States must identify:
 - The 5% lowest performing schools (per state assessment)
 - High Schools graduating less than 2/3 of their students
 - Schools with a subgroup (such as English Learners) consistently underperforming

* 95% testing requirement: Currently, all public schools districts and public schools must have at least 95% of the students eligible for state testing participate in the state assessment. In Wisconsin, parents can choose to opt their students out of the state assessments. This past year, we saw an increase in the number of parents opting their children out of the state assessments. Three of our schools, Badger Ridge Middle School, Savanna Oaks Middle School and the High School were penalized for not reaching this minimum test participation. Under ESSA, states are to decide how to factor in the 95% testing requirement and the consequences for not meeting this threshold. States may create their own opt-out laws.

These are just a few of the many provisions under this new law. It is unknown if the new Department of Education Secretary and administration will seek changes to this legislation or in the related administrative rules.

Thank you for taking the time to read this update. Please feel free to contact me with questions / comments you may have about any of the information provided here.

Kind regards,

Dean Gorrell – Superintendent
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gorrelld@verona.k12.wi.us

1. Rickabaugh, J., 2016, Tapping the Power of Personalized Learning, A Roadmap for School Leaders
2. Gallup, January 13, 2016 link: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/188144/employee-engagement-stagnant-2015.aspx>
3. Zmuda and Jackson, 2015, Real Engagement, How Do I help my students become motivated, confident and self-directed learners
4. <http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/jobs-careers/planning-your-career/employability-skills>