

Our Commitment to Communicating with you

By Matt Meister

Director of Communications

Welcome to the first edition of the District 49 Dispatch. This newspaper is an important part of our plan to increase communication efforts to the 60 percent of residents in District 49 that don't have a current, direct connection to our schools.

As a resident, you invest in our students, staff, programs and facilities. We have a job to report to you how we are doing, and how you can communicate with us. Each quarter we'll do just that on these pages of the District 49 Dispatch. We'll report on the impacts

our educational programs are making on the lives of young people as we prepare to launch them to success after high school. We'll report on how we are using your financial investment effectively and efficiently. We'll report on some of the tools we have available to make two-way communication with our community as easy as possible.

Communication takes resources. You'll notice that a number of local businesses have chosen to support our communication efforts by advertising on these pages. May I suggest, in turn, that you consider supporting them. The Colorado Springs Military Newspaper Group and

the Colorado Springs Business Journal believe that education is important. They have chosen to partner with us in bringing the Dispatch to you each quarter. I thank them for their efforts in helping to bring you a quality report on your local schools.

It takes all of us to effectively educate the next generation, and it takes all of us to have a healthy and productive dialogue about the successes our schools are having and the challenges we face.

I hope you enjoy learning a little bit more about the important work happening inside your local schools. Thanks for reading the District 49 Dispatch.

The Business of Education in Colorado

By Brett Ridgway

Chief Business Officer

In the United States, public education is carried out at the state and local levels. The federal government exerts considerable influence over the state systems through funding of certain and specific programs, but ultimately each state designs its own system.

Article IX of Colorado's state constitution is titled 'Education', covering both 'K-12' and the higher education of a college or university. Article IX establishes the State Board of Education to be the oversight authority, but it also specifically gives control of instruction to local school boards. Article IX also charges the state legislature to "... provide for the establishment and maintenance of a thorough and uniform system of free public schools throughout the state, wherein all residents of the state, between the ages of six and twenty-one years, may be educated gratuitously."

Key in that phrase is, "a system of free public schools". That system does not relate to buildings as much as it relates to a coordinated set of educational programs to be delivered to students; the physical structures are the responsibility of the local districts throughout the state. This is why local districts come to constituents to provide the funding to construct the physical facilities, state formula funding is to be used for the operation and delivery of the educational program.

That de-facto requirement is further established in the next layer of influence over education below the state constitution, the Colorado Revised Statutes. 'Education,' CRS Title 22, details how local districts and schools are established and funded. A primary ideal at the front of Title 22 [CRS 22-1-102(1)] establishes that, "Every public school shall be open for the admission of all children between the ages of five and twenty-one years, residing in that district without the payment of tuition."

This combination of our state constitution statutes require local school districts to be able to educate residents of their district. That requirement only concerns the program from a technical perspective. As a practical matter, it must also include the physical structures – having adequate physical buildings and space to educate the resident students of the district. Prior to 2008, school districts were required to allocate a portion of their per-pupil funding (i.e. PPR) for a capital reserve fund. However, when the great recession hit and education funding in Colorado was cut by about 16 percent, more than \$1 billion per year, the legislature removed this requirement so that schools could keep educational programs going during

See Business of education page 2

Students Kiss Summer Break Goodbye As School Begins at RVES



Liam Scharer, Ridgeview Elementary School kindergarten student kisses his mom, Andrea Scharer, before heading into school Aug. 2. "He was so excited he asked if he could ride his bike to school by himself today," Andrea said. The POWER Zone school in District 49 serves more than 700 preschool through fifth grade students. Each student is welcomed with a handshake every morning as part of the Capturing Kids' Hearts program used by school.

Business of education

From page 1

the funding cuts. Unfortunately, those funding cuts continue today through the ‘negative factor’ - the work-around developed by the state legislature to cut about \$1 billion each year from constitutionally required education spending.

District 49’s share of the ‘negative factor’ was \$20.4 million for the 2015-2016 school year. District 49’s share of the ‘negative factor’ since implementation by the state legislature totals more than \$100 million dollars of lost revenue for the education of our local students. As a result of ‘negative factor’ losses, many local schools district’s capital planning has shifted to merely minor maintenance

of their physical facilities.

This is the new reality. The more than 16 percent of funding that was removed with the ‘negative factor’ is not likely to return unless a statewide tax increase is passed. That strategy was tried with the proposal of Amendment 66 in 2013. The District 49 Board of Education wisely opposed the \$1 billion tax increase; the distribution mechanism behind Amendment 66, also known as SB 13-213, would have increased the funding disparity that already plagues District 49. Residents in District 49 would have ended up paying more in the new income tax than District 49 would have received in the distribution

formula.

District 49 leaders continue to believe that taxes each of us pay to support the public good should have appropriate benefit to the school district you live in. The current funding formula, much less than the proposed formula of SB 13-213, have factors designed to penalize District 49 because we do not have the high-visibility demographic factors that the formula’s authors are intending to benefit. The formula also ignores equally deserving demographic factors that District 49 does experience.

District 49 Demographics

Our community has grown quickly since the turn of the century, and today some 17,500 students live in District 49. While some school building space has been added since 2000, the district unfortunately does not have sufficient space to accommodate all of these students.

As previously established, the district itself cannot cure that deficiency - only the community members of the district can remedy that by authorizing the assessment and collection of tax streams by the school district, for the purpose of constructing and physically maintaining school facilities adequate enough to actually educate all resident students.

Another important concept impacting District 49 is what Colorado calls ‘choice enrollment’. Choice enrollment exists due to a provision in state statute [CRS 22-36-101] that indicates, “. . . Every school district . . . shall allow: (b) Commencing with the 1994-95 school year and thereafter, nonresident pupils from other school districts . . . without requiring the non-resident pupils to pay tuition.” Choice enrollment brings approximately 1,400 students into District 49 because of the excellent educational programs we offer. Students attending a District 49 school through choice enrollment do increase the district’s funded student count and annual funding allocation from the state provided for operations.

In total, District 49 needs to accommodate nearly 19,000 students in our schools – this does NOT include the more than 4,000 students enrolled in the various online programs District 49 operates. The current portfolio of buildings that District 49 operates will effectively educate 11,500 students in permanent structures – that is a shortfall of space for 7,500 students! The district does have four, soon to be five, authorized charter schools operating within district boundaries that provide approximately 3,000 seats, bringing the total permanent facility capacity to 14,500 students – still leaving a 4,500 shortfall

in capacity.

To make accommodations to educate all of our students, District 49 uses a fleet of 57 temporary, modular structures to provide over 105,000 square feet of additional space. While that is the best short-term option, it is not a good, or feasible, long term option.

Some schools are in more mature (i.e. older) neighborhoods and therefore do not experience significant overcrowding. However, other schools are operating well above capacity in efforts to educate as many students as possible. One elementary school is operating at 116% of capacity while another is operating at 108% of capacity. These capacity stresses do not take into account resident students who end up attending a different school district through choice enrollment. Over 2,300 resident students were compelled to make that ‘choice out’ decision in the 2015-2016 school year.

Since Colorado places the authority and responsibility for building local schools on the residents of each school district, as resident voters we need to consider whether we are adequately fulfilling our Colorado constitution and statutory requirements to provide education for our resident students. Even if District 49 did not accept any out-of-district choice enrollments, we would still not have enough facilities to educate the resident students – AND, new houses are being built every day.

Residential Development, Developers, and FCBC

In some states, developers involved in residential construction are required to build schools in the neighborhoods they create. Others, like Colorado, require only that the developer dedicate land to the school district. While the former strategy has the benefit of assigning costs to the residents of the newly formed neighborhoods, it has the constraint of keeping the school district out of the construction of the school they will eventually be running. This can lead to a portfolio of disparate buildings that are often inefficient and not able to function in a coordinated manner, and may or may not be filled with students.

Colorado’s technique of requiring developers to dedicate land mitigates the negatives associated with developer-built schools, by involving both the school district and the residents of the district in all aspects of the decisions regarding school construction. Under our state’s system, it is the responsibility of the district to monitor facility issues from a capacity and quality perspective, inform its public

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EIES Students Gear Up For First Day



By **Dustin Senger**
Digital Communications Specialist

Roughly 700 students began the school year Aug. 2 at Evans International Elementary School in District 49.

As families approached the school during a warm summer morning, teachers and administrators offered greetings and explained classroom assignments. Several students swapped summer break stories outside, while others rushed into the building.

As students from preschool to fifth grade filed into classrooms for orientation activities, school administrators and support staff prepared a kick-off assembly in the gymnasium.

Kindergarten teacher Rita Morris read “First Day Jitters” by Julie Danneberg, a story about starting classes at a new school, and making new friends. The story’s surprise ending shows how anyone might catch the jitters about entering a new situation, even teachers.

Morris, who has led kindergarten through third grade classrooms, taught second-graders last year. Now with a classroom of kindergarteners again, she says her focus is on ensuring familiarity with the school grounds and procedures, and then phonetics and word structure.

“My goal is to get them all reading, so they’re ready for first grade,” said Morris.

After coloring and cutting out “first day of school” crowns and before touring the building, Morris opened a green two-liter bottle labeled “jitter juice,” a mixture of Hawaiian Punch, 7UP and pineapple juice. She poured a cup for every student.

As students finished the juice, one boy rose his hand and said, “Mrs. Morris, it helped take all the butterflies away.”

Rita Morris, kindergarten teacher, starts a new school year with a story Aug. 2 at Evans International Elementary School in District 49. She read “First Day Jitters” by Julie Danneberg, a story about starting classes at a new school, and making new friends. Morris then opened a two-liter bottle labeled “jitter juice,” a mixture of Hawaiian Punch, 7UP and pineapple juice, and poured a cup for every student. As students finished the juice, one boy rose his hand and said, “Mrs. Morris, it helped take all the butterflies away.” Morris, who has taught kindergarten through third grade, says her focus is on ensuring familiarity with the school grounds and procedures, and then phonetics and word structure. “My goal is to get them all reading, so they’re ready for first grade.”

Continued from page 2

of those issues, and present decision points (i.e. election questions) to the constituents for consideration. The community, in turn, has the responsibility to stay abreast of issues in the school district in order to make appropriate, informed decisions on the election questions presented to them. If the school district’s election plan is prudent, appropriate, and necessary, then it is incumbent upon the community to support the needed funding that will enable programs or facilities to occur for the benefit of students.

Many residents are unaware that many companies developing residential neighborhoods in District 49 go above and beyond what is required to support education in our district. A public benefit, non-profit entity called Falcon Community Builders for Classrooms, has contributed over \$5 million to District 49 for assistance in various capital needs. The developers make voluntary contributions to what is essentially a trust fund, managed by the FCBC Board of Directors. The board, with equal representation between District 49 and residential developers, with a final member drawn from among one of the publicly elected individuals from county or city offices in the school district, vote on distributions made to the district.

The voluntary contributions made by developers are typically \$1,500 per single family home and \$1,000 for a multi-family housing unit. Operating in this way since its inception in 2005, FCBC and its contributors have shown they truly care about District 49 students, residents, and taxpayers. The continue to demonstrate that with their continued efforts today.

Local Support From Property Taxes

How do school district tax assessments of District 49 compare to neighboring school districts? While there can be a basic comparison of total levy rates, the underlying questions (e.g., Is the tax rate appropriate?

Do the students have what they need? Are our students equitably funded with neighboring districts?) are much more complicated and not as easy as they may occasionally be portrayed. To truly understand the issue, one must consider:

1. A district’s mill levy structure (general fund, abatements, bond levies, override levies)
2. A district’s funded student count,
3. A district’s distribution of property types existing within their boundaries, and
4. The tax assessment rates for the various types of property.

A majority of the total tax levy assigned by the school district is written in state statute. For example, in District 49, for the 2015 assessment year, the general fund portion of the total levy was 24.459 mills and the abatement portion was 0.217 mills. The general fund amount has been frozen since the School Finance Act of 1994. The abatement levy is formulaic, simply representing the total taxes abated (refunded or reduced) in the prior tax year, applied to all assessed property in the new tax year. Combined, these two components that can’t be changed represent ‘unactionable’ mills.

District 49’s general+abatement levy is 24.676 mills, D20’s is 27.308 mills and D11’s is 23.694: one higher and one lower than District 49’s. The next question is more appropriate – How much local support is generated for each student. Applying the mill rates to the total assessed value and student count of each district shows District 49 students receive \$850, D20 students receive \$1,651 and D11 students receive \$1,941 – very large discrepancies!

‘Actionable’ mills, bond levies and override levies approved by school district residents, show a similar pattern. District 49 has 19.959 voter-approved mills, D20 has 32.908 and D11 has 17.109. Again, one is higher and one is lower than District 49. When applied to each districts’ total assessed value and student count, we see

that District 49 students receive \$687 of actionable local support per student, D20 students receive \$1,989 and D11 students receive \$1,402.

While District 49 leaders appreciate being held to a higher standard of efficiency and effectiveness than our competitors, it is fair to recognize that even significant performance will not likely make up for 189 percent (D20) and 104 percent (D11) advantages in actionable local support from residents.

Conflicting Tax Policies

There is a lot of complexity and policy conflict present in three of Colorado’s major tax-related dogmas known as:

- The Gallagher Amendment
- Taxpayer Bill of Rights [TABOR]
- Amendment 23.

These policies are well intentioned, but the conflation of the three (as they are currently written) is a virtual terminal diagnosis for the future financial health of the state of Colorado. Why?

Gallagher restricts residential property tax rates – not a bad thing for individual property owners, but a bad thing for education when you consider that the School Finance Act was written with an assumed ratio of 60% state support and 40% local support – and that ratio is now sitting at 70/30 – a 10% swing on a \$7 billion dollar state budget for K-12 education.

TABOR is multi-faceted, but one component is troubling regarding state revenue limitations. When state revenues go down, as they did during the great recession, it resets a new maximum revenue total going forward. Unlike we do in our own homes, the state can’t ‘live lean’ during hard times and go back to normal after the crisis has passed. Instead, the ‘living lean’ becomes the new normal. Conceptually that could seem OK, but in reality, that limitation isn’t able to be maintained long term. While this was the full intention of those who wrote TABOR, voters may not have fully understood the repercussions of this portion of the policy.

Amendment 23 requires that K-12 education funding in Colorado keeps pace with inflation – a sensible

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What is a mill?

A mill is one-thousandth of a currency unit. In the United States, one mill is equivalent to one-tenth of a cent, or \$0.001. The mill rate is the amount of tax payable per dollar of the assessed value of a property.

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enough idea. However, when Gallagher restricts property tax receipts and TABOR restricts revenue, Amendment 23 has no chance to be implemented. That is why the legislature now engages in the dance of giving the increase required by Amendment 23, only to take it back with the aforementioned ‘negative factor’. Our state legislature has no other choice while this policy conflict persists.

As a generality, District 49 is a suburban component of the Colorado Springs metropolitan area. Being outside the industrial and commercial core of the city makes our district a wonderful place to call home. However, that quality-of-life benefit comes at a cost to our school district. The Gallagher Amendment, passed in 1982, had the intention of keeping the ratio of residential property values vs. commercial property values consistent. This has provided great benefit and relief to residential property owners over the years, to the point that residential property is now assessed at less than 1/3 the rate of commercial property. For the 2015 tax year, residential property was assessed at 8% of retail value, while all other taxable property types were assessed at 29% of retail value.

Those assessment rates, when applied to total taxable property values of a school district, result in a ‘assessed value’ for the district. Taking that total against the number of students in the school district provides a very telling measure of ‘Assessed Value per Pupil,’ or AVPP. What AVPP indicates, when compared across school districts, is the relative burden each district’s property owners bear to provide equal opportunities for

students. It’s the ‘effective cost’ of having a better quality-of-life community in suburbia than is generally experienced in more urban or city-center communities. Those communities have the benefit of commercial property to distribute tax burdens, but the cost, generally, is sacrificing some benefits from a quality-of-life or quality-of-community experience.

Everything we’ve discussed boils down to this: Providing District 49 students equal opportunities experienced in neighboring school districts will require:

- Increased investment by District 49 taxpayers
- High-level financial efficiency and financial performance by District 49 leaders
- Excellent learning effectiveness by District 49 educators

The challenge of the latter two necessities is something that District 49 recognizes, embraces, and enthusiastically pursues every single day - and the evidence of having successes in efficiency and effectiveness exist and are becoming more and more visible. For example:

- District 49 was recognized as one of the top three districts in Colorado for financial efficiency by the Center for American Progress
- District 49 was recognized by Education Week as one of 25 districts worth visiting in America
- District 49 was recognized by Getting Smart as one of 30 districts in the country worth visiting
- District 49 was the recipient of the Foothills Award from Rocky Mountain Performance Excellence, the regional affiliate of the Malcom Baldrige National Quality Award program
- The literacy experts at the Colorado Department of Education, during their

Local Funding Contribution to Area School Districts			
Unactionable Mills			
	District 49	District 20	District 11
Assessed Mills	24.676	27.308	23.694
\$ Generated Per Student	\$850	\$1,651	\$1,941
Actionable Mills			
Assessed Mills	19.959	32.908	17.109
\$ Generated Per Student	\$687	\$1,989	\$1,402
Total Local Funding Per Student	\$1,537	\$3,640	\$3,340

end-of-year review of our DIBELS results, said that District 49 was leading Colorado in the rate of improvement for our young learners. They said our improvement efforts were unprecedented and a role model.

- The Colorado State Board of Education recognized District 49 as leading culture change in the state through our implementation of individual career and academic plans for secondary students, a key component of Colorado’s new graduation guidelines.

These specific recognitions, along with numerous requests to present components of our success at state, national, and international conferences on education, all speak to the accomplishments of District 49’s efficiency and effectiveness. We also regularly host visitors from far and wide that want to see our success in innovating and creatively changing public education to better serve our students, families, and

residents, in person.

In our American culture, we have the famous idiom of ‘squeezing blood from a turnip’. In the business sector, we know that optimizing efficiency and effectiveness creates growth. Once that optimum level is achieved, only additional investment will drive growth. District 49’s elected and administrative leaders desire to continue to grow and improve. We have spent the last eight years turning the efficiency and effectiveness dials to reach the optimal balance we have today. The next step is investment. In order to improve the educational experience for our students, to improve and increase the school district’s impact on the local economy and property values, to give the students in District 49 every opportunity that neighboring districts give their students – please support the good plans we have for the future.



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- Jack Bay, District 49,
Chief Operations Officer



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Student Urges ‘Teaching With SOUL’



District 49 Dustin Senger

Evan Mahon, 17, scheduled to start 12th-grade at Vista Ridge High School, speaks July 27 to hundreds of school administrators and teachers during a District 49 back-to-school event at the Pikes Peak Center in Colorado Springs. “You are the most influential group of workers in this nation, building the future leaders and citizens of the world,” Evan said. “How powerful would our world be if we had kids who weren’t afraid to take risks, meet new people, think like innovators, know they can change the world, who weren’t afraid to think and who all had a champion in their lives?”

By Dustin Senger
Digital Communications Specialist

Approximately 1,600 employees from across District 49 attended a back-to-school event July 27 at Pikes Peak Center in Colorado Springs. Some of the most highly praised remarks were delivered by a high school student.

Evan Mahon is preparing to start 12th-grade at Vista Ridge High School. When he took the stage in the auditorium, it was packed with school administrators and teachers, a crowd that extended from the first row facing the stage to the balcony overlooking it.

Under a base camp theme, the event underlined a need to strengthen teams with clear goals and responsive support systems. In between presentations and activities, video clips highlighted the roughly 49 staff members who climbed Pikes Peak on July 18. The climbers described the effort as “summitting for students.”

During his remarks, Mahon received an enthusiastic ovation from staff members, who arrived from more than 20 schools and district offices. He clarified the critical and impassioned role they fill in preparing students for their next phase in life.

“I am honored to have been asked and I am blessed to be able to speak in front of such esteemed and honorable teachers and staff in District 49,” said Mahon, holding a microphone and several note cards.

“Hopefully, I can deliver a crescendo for the morning and give you all some inspiration for the upcoming school year,” he said.

“District 49 has given me so much and helped me grow as a student,” said Mahon, explaining that he’ll soon start his 12th year. “I hope this is how I can return that kindness.”

Mahon outlined a mission for himself as a student body president. He encouraged school faculty to apply the concepts he called “teaching with SOUL,” an acronym for sincere, or being authentic and genuine; overcome, confronting adversity; unique, being original and standing out; and lead, creating a positive environment.

‘Teaching with SOUL’

“We must focus on relationships this year that are authentic and genuine with students, parents and other educators. James Comer once said, ‘No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship.’”

“Everybody in this room has been touched and mentored by an adult – someone you looked up to, who helped you become an educator, be confident in yourself.”

“It was someone you truly wanted to be as a child. Whether a coach or educator, someone inspired you to be where you are right now: Sitting in the Pikes Peak Center listening to a 17 year old impart knowledge on you.”

Cutting through the laughter, he said, “I’ve had so many different teachers that have touched my life and helped me grow and develop and become the leader and student I am today.”

“Whatever position you have in the district, the nature of our school district this year must be collaborative and cooperative, rather than competitive. We must focus this year on making sure we are authentic and genuine with everything we do.”

Reflecting on the recent journey up Pikes Peak, he said the climb “shows our strength, dedication, and how we are excited and innovative.”

“You are committed to something bigger than oneself. Your purpose in this field has a greater mission than what you may think. Educators mold and shape the youth of tomorrow.”

“With everything going on in today’s world, we must teach students to be respectful, open-minded and empathetic to others.”

With regard to confronting adversity, Mahon said, “Teachers deserve Emmy Awards for how much you act,” referring to the award for excellence in the television actor industry.

“You have to come into work everyday and smile and be positive or else you will negatively impact the education of all your students.”

“Students already dread coming into school. Will you

foster that attitude with how you deal with obstacles? Or will you help them be proud of you, their class, their school, and their district?”

“What makes you unique as a district employee? As a teacher? As a principal? As a counselor? We preach to kids all the time about finding their niche and being their own person and not being followers. Are you listening to your own advice? What makes you stand out?”

“Let students leave your class not only with an education but also with life skills they will remember. Put the effort into your class that you want from your students. Go out of your way to talk to that educator that you don’t always socialize with.”

“Make you and your class be the class everyone looks forward to.”

“Let me tell you one thing: Kids don’t learn from teachers they don’t like. Go out of your way to help students understand material and make the personal connection. ... You must go out of your way to help students be lifted to the point where they feel confident in themselves to be who they want to be.”

“When students come to you with ideas and plans for innovating the school or the classroom, don’t turn them away. These students have a special sense of school. They are the kind that care about their student peers and want to see the best. Lead these students to success, don’t turn them away and limit thinking. We want them to be articulate and improve our district. They are the future of District 49.”

“You are the most influential group of workers in this nation, building the future leaders and citizens of the world. How powerful would our world be if we had kids who weren’t afraid to take risks, meet new people, think like innovators, know they can change the world, who weren’t afraid to think and who all had a champion in their lives?”

“As a student, it is so humbling to see the amount of commitment and energy given by teachers throughout the year. We are truly blessed to be around educators who care about our growth and development as young adults.”

District 49 Leads Regional Learning Efforts During Summer Break



A black light illuminates a clue during a game of 'Breakout' during the Colorado Springs GAFE Summit July 20. Educators from across District 49, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming attended the Ed Tech Team Google Apps for Education event at Vista Ridge High School. District 49 beat out neighboring Academy School District 20 to host one of three GAFE summits in Colorado each year. More than 55,000 educators attended Ed Tech Team summits in 2015.

By Matt Meister

Director of Communications

"We're learning new ways that we can engage students in the classroom with updated activities that use technology to get students excited about learning," said Patty Gioscia, Skyview Middle School assistant principal, at the Colorado Springs GAFE Summit July 20.

Gioscia and educators from across District 49, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming attended the Ed Tech Team event at Vista Ridge High School. District 49 beat out neighboring Academy School District 20 to host one of three GAFE summits in Colorado each year. More than 55,000 educators attended Ed Tech Team summits in 2015.

Teachers and administrators discover practical strategies for enhancing learning in the classroom through effective technology integration, specifically through the use of Google Apps for Education at the summit.

"Administrators need to model for our teachers what we want them to do with technology in the classroom with our kids," said Gioscia, who along with a cohort of other educators, attempted to solve a series of clues using a suite of Google apps in a game of breakout.

"I was very impressed with the District 49 website. I applied from out-of-state, and so found the website helpful in preparing myself with the background knowledge about the school community, current projects, and the students. I found the website helpful to find information about Horizon Middle School, where I was eventually hired to work as a seventh grade math teacher."

– Alex Hurdell, new teacher from South Dakota.

Learn more about the district's award-winning digital communications initiatives at D49.org/communications.

The scavenger hunt required a team of two-dozen educators to use Google skills to successfully solve a series of clues, while beating the one-hour clock timer.

Under a superhero theme, the game required a series of locks to be opened. Clues were presented and solved using multiple Google applications, including drive, calendar, Google Plus and VR.

"There are a number of skills we learned in this game

to share with your teachers," said Crystal Miller, principal of Summit Cove Elementary School in Summit County. "When I do this game with my new teachers, they learn the skills and expectations I have as they come into my building. It's more effective than watching a YouTube video about making a contact list."

"You guys did it in less than 45 minutes!" said Sarah Stuhr, fifth-grade teacher at Summit Cove Elementary School.

"It took a lot of us," said Debbie Cassidy from neighboring Widefield School District 3, "not everybody knows everything, but by working together, we got the clues. We've got to share our technology knowledge that way in the classroom."

"District 49 is leading by being chosen to host the GAFE summits," said John Litchenberg, District 49 instructional technology specialist. "It says a lot about who we are and where we are going to have been selected to host this important learning opportunity each year."

On their website, Ed Tech says GAFE summits address important issues teachers face today, including problem-based learning, student motivation and engagement, design thinking and skills students need in today's workforce. Speakers from as far away as southeast Asia spoke at the summit.

"It isn't just about the technology," said Josh Sieczkowski, Falcon High School assistant principal, "it's also about real world skills. As problems were solved, everyone got more invested in the game."

Sieczkowski and a handful of educators, including Laurie Lane, a fifth grade teacher from Cheyenne, Wyoming in solving the last clue to finally unlock the breakout chest.

"At first we were individuals working on clues and at the end we were working as a team together, said Sieczkowski. "It was amazing how that translation happened through the course of the game without us even realizing it."



Patty Gioscia (middle), Skyview Middle School assistant principal, and Josh Sieczkowski (right, pointing), Falcon High School assistant principal, work together during a game of 'Breakout' at the Colorado Springs GAFE Summit July 20. Educators from across District 49, Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming attended the Ed Tech Team Google Apps for Education event at Vista Ridge High School. District 49 beat out neighboring Academy School District 20 to host one of three GAFE summits in Colorado each year. More than 55,000 educators attended Ed Tech Team summits in 2015.

Falcon Zone Students Offer Friendships During Transitions

By Dustin Senger
Digital Communications Specialist

With more than 600 Falcon Zone students transitioning to secondary schools Aug. 2 in District 49, peer support groups gathered the day before to help ease the experiences.

New students gathered for orientation activities Aug. 1 in middle and high school gymnasiums. At Falcon High School, two upperclassmen were assigned to one of 30 groups of ninth-graders. The peer leaders took groups of less than a dozen students into the school's hallways.

The upperclassmen had volunteered for Link Crew, a high school transition program developed by The Boomerang Project. The program, relying on school-level coordinators, equips students to help their transitioning peers feel comfortable, so they may feel a need to help others, too.

Link Crew leaders work to discover what might help each transitioning student succeed.

After building tours, various commissioners, 12th-graders who had also participated in Link Crew as 11th-graders, led team-building activities. After that, the new students would begin an abridged school day, spending 5 minutes in classrooms and testing 2-minute passing periods.

"I felt like the Link Crew leader I had was helpful for me, so I wanted to give back," said 12th-grader David Palmer, 17, tossing a miniature football in a classroom. As incoming ninth-graders caught it, he asked them to share something interesting about themselves.

"When they first come into the school, they're shy – by the end of the day, they feel welcomed," said David, wearing a Falcon High School football jersey. Several Link leaders wore shirts with a parody of the "Jurassic Park" movie logo applying the school's green and gold colors. They acted as guides to "Falcon Park."

"It's helpful to have an older student show us around, and tell us not to be scared about anything," said ninth-grader Natalie Stoufflet, 14, explaining how her anxiety was lifted. "For me, I don't like to be alone – I like to be in a group with other people."

Twelfth-grader Jessie Yost, 17, led Natalie and several other ninth-graders for a building tour. They navigated the athletics and arts hallways, and explored the band room and counselor center, and then the wings for science, history, math, English and world languages.

"I had an awesome freshman experience, so I just want to start these guys out right," said Jessie.

Jessie took Natalie and ninth-grader Cassidy Steele, 14, into a room lined with computers and reference manuals. Teacher Thomas Russell welcomed the young technology enthusiasts, and encouraged them to join his cybersecurity club's first huddle of the school year.

Russell, a retired Army sergeant first class, enrolled in a Department of Defense Troops-to-Teachers program to study network security and information systems management, and then complete a master's degree in education for applied technology.

He started a cybersecurity club so Falcon High School students could compete in the Air Force Association's CyberPatriot program, the largest cybersecurity competition in the United States. The fledgling club quickly became one of the top CyberPatriot teams in Colorado.

"There are a lot of people here who are friendly to new people," said Cassidy, after leaving Russell's classroom. She was looking forward to learning about computer applications and networking, as well as technology literacy.

"This is my favorite class – this is where I feel most at home," said Jessie, opening a door to a classroom bordered by hospital beds, and A-O-H-S stenciled on the window. Connie Michaels-Lipp, instructor and program coordinator, explained how to join or support the school's Academy of Health Sciences.

Michaels-Lipp has a clinical background in behavioral health, chemical dependency treatment and school nursing, along with acute care quality assurance and utilization review. She explained how AOHS students often take the national registry application for an emergency medical technician certification. Many graduate from Falcon High School as certified nursing assistants.

Michaels-Lipp is also a Pikes Peak Community College nursing adjunct instructor and a CNA coordinator for the college's Falcon Nurse Aide Program.

"Taking her class is what made me want to pursue a medical career," said Jessie, routinely praising the career



Twelfth-grader Jessie Yost, 17, leads a building tour for a group of ninth-graders during orientation activities Aug. 1 at Falcon High School in District 49. Two upperclassmen were assigned to small groups of incoming ninth-graders. They had volunteered for Link Crew, a high school transition program developed by The Boomerang Project. The program, relying on school-level coordinators, equips students to help their transitioning peers feel comfortable, so they may feel a need to help others, too. "I had an awesome freshman experience, so I just want to start these guys out right," said Jessie.



Eighth-grader Ashleigh Putney, 13, explains activities to a group of sixth-graders during orientation activities Aug. 1 at Falcon Middle School in District 49. She's was part of the school's WEB team, a sixth-grade transition program known by an acronym that stands for "Where Everybody Belongs." Ashleigh wanted to be a WEB leader who'd focus on developing meaningful relationships, those that'd last long after the orientation activities ended.

opportunities and passions the academy promotes.

"This has helped me feel more comfortable with the school," said Cassidy, after a Link Crew commissioner explained culminating activities.

"It feels a lot less intimidating now, less than it did over the summer," said Cassidy.

'Where Everybody Belongs'

For eighth-grader Ashleigh Putney, 13, leading a small group tour of Falcon Middle School was an attempt to help others where she had needed it. She's part of the school's WEB team, a sixth-grade transition program known by an acronym that stands for "Where Everybody Belongs."

WEB leaders at Falcon Middle School were also leading 30 groups of less than 12 new students.

Ashleigh wanted to be a WEB leader who'd focus on developing meaningful relationships, those that'd last long after the orientation activities ended.

"How many of you are excited?" she said, ahead of small group team-building activities in a classroom. With hands retreating back into laps, she asked, "How many are scared?"

As hands again reached toward the ceiling, she said, "I'm going to help you with that."

Along with eighth-grader Elias Rogers, she escorted the group on a tour through various academic wings. They strolled with backpacks, water bottles and name tags, along with brightly colored and over-sized sunglasses – each group had a unique item.

They entered a classroom, took a seat and discussed passing periods, lockers and attendance policies.

"They'll cut you some slack because it's all new to you," said Elias, 13. "But after a week or two, you need to be able to find your classrooms."

"A big word for middle school is 'responsibility,'" said Ashleigh. "In elementary school, you had a teacher lining you up everywhere. Here, you need to take responsibility. If you show responsibility and respect, then even the older kids will look up to you."

"Be the example that others want to follow," she said.

"You guys sounds like you're getting this down good," said Ashleigh. "I think you're going to do great at your new school."

Defining Our Journey In District 49



District 49/Melissa Andrews

Roughly 49 staff members across District 49, from school custodial staff and principals to the chief education officer and a Board of Education Director climbed Pikes Peak on July 18. The climbers described the effort as “summitting for students.” The climb was used as a metaphor for the district’s journey of continuous improvement during an all-staff event prior to the start of the 2015-2016 school year.

By Peter Hilts
Chief Education Officer

Faint greys and pale yellows colored the eastern sky as 49 climbers from across the district gathered on July 18. Before dawn exploded color on the horizon, teams boarded buses, arrived at the trailhead and set off on a 13-mile hike up Pikes Peak. By the time the sun was fully up, the leading teams were pushing in to Barr Camp and preparing for the march to tree line. Some teams arrived by noon, while others adjusted their pace and kept climbing until late afternoon. Each team kept a different schedule and every climber had a personal strategy, but 49 climbers stepped onto the trail in the morning and 49 climbers stepped onto the summit by the end of the day.

The teachers, administrators, support staff, maintenance leads and operations experts who tackled Pikes Peak were there to represent the commitment and effort we are making in District 49. After several years of excellent board leadership and improving results across the board, our district is positioned to make a climb to excellence. Our innovation efforts are maturing; our schools and zones are expanding programs, and our staff members are increasingly delivering the effective and efficient services our community expects. Our vision is for District 49 to be the best choice, and our mission is to learn, work, and lead relentlessly until our vision becomes reality. We firmly believe that delivering excellent results

in our community will result in fulfilling our vision and mission.

So, instead of feeling satisfied that our performance has improved, we’re committing to use our effective and efficient performance as a springboard to reach for excellence. Over the last two years, District 49 has been studying excellent organizations in health care, financial industries, nonprofit services and especially K-12 education. We have started using state and national leaders as benchmarks to evaluate our own performance. We have joined with some of those organizations to conduct thorough reviews of our performance to identify organizational strengths along with opportunities for improvement.

Our commitment to continuous improvement targets one major outcome—performance excellence. Our district has many instances of excellence as evidenced by widespread recognition for our teachers and specialists—many receiving recognition as Colorado’s exemplars. The Colorado School Psychologist of the Year (Kim Boyd), Assistant Principal of the Year (Angela Prochnow), Reading Educator of the Year (Linda Bason), Biology Teacher of the Year (Robin Walters), Online/Blended Counselor of the Year (Dale Bonavita), and Health Sciences Advisor of the Year (Connie Michaels-Lipp) are all members of the District 49 family. So when we commit to performance excellence, we already have a team of role models to inspire us all.

But inspiration will not be enough. We are redoubling our efforts to live by our cultural compass, treating each other with respect, care, accountability and transparency while we treat our work with creativity, innovation, learning and strategic purpose. These eight characteristics are the culture that defines us and has consistently attracted high-performing veterans and high-promise newcomers to our district. Having just completed one of the most successful hiring seasons in our history, we have fresh energy and new teammates to serve our growing community.

The work we will do together is as difficult as climbing Pikes Peak, but a lot more rewarding. By focusing on our five strategic priorities, we will make sure our efforts to improve are aligned to each other and serve our community. 1) By demonstrating transparency and honesty, we aim to maintain the trust we’re earning from our community. 2) By inviting leaders and citizens into our schools and onto our advisory teams, we fulfill our strategic commitment to deeper community engagement. 3) By opening new schools including a vocational early college, and online early college, and expanding the programs we offer at all our schools, we continue to grow the robust portfolio of schools that now attracts more students of choice than any district in our region. 4) By continuing our efforts to improve primary literacy, we are building the firm foundations that our students need and

their parents expect. Although we have room to keep improving, our elementary educators received the highest praise from our state department of education when they observed that D49’s system is delivering improvements well above the average. They even told our board that the pace of improvement in District 49 is an example for the rest of Colorado. And finally, 5) by expanding our system of individual success plans for all secondary students, we fulfill our commitment to launch every student to success. Whether they keep learning in college, begin serving in our military, answer a call to ministry, start and lead a family, or begin contributing in the workforce, we want the graduates of District 49 to have the same level of success our climbers had on Pikes Peak.

It is incredibly gratifying to be part of a district where excellence is more than a buzzword. It’s a commitment. We know our students and staff have the capacity to climb together and become a role model district. Our commitment is to equip and encourage the entire family of District 49 so that we can all step onto the summit of top tier performance. Just as 49 climbers did in the middle of July, we will keep the peak in view, focus on our goal and get to the summit for our students. It’s a big mountain we want to climb, but we have a great vision and growing capacity to reach the peak. We invite you to step on the trail and start ascending as we take our students to the peak of performance.