



Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: February 11, 2022

This week I had the honor of being involved behind-the-scenes in something a little out of the ordinary. Still, the story is a true testament to the myriad of ways in which our BDS employees continue to go above and beyond for our students and so I'd like to share it.

As you know already, many of our families are still living in hurricane-damaged homes and more than 1200 of our students currently meet the federal definition of homelessness because they have no fixed addresses of their own. Those situations have been made exponentially more difficult by recent job losses, business closures and other economic impacts of the pandemic.

We do all we can to help families. This week, we had an opportunity, thanks to the generosity of ChartwellsK12 and some local sponsors, to host a special event for a family group of six young children living in challenging circumstances. Without power to their trailer, which still has a blue tarp roof from the hurricane, these children don't have ready access to hot meals at home and so we put together a special family dinner for them just to let them know that we're trying to help.

The dinner was terrific and I cannot say enough about the amazing BDS and Chartwells' staff members who went out of their way to make sure the children felt special and enjoyed the event. It was indeed a pleasure for all involved and I think the entire group made some memories that will be treasured for a long time to come. The young students were delighted to receive the toys and gift cards and we're also trying to connect the family with an agency that can help with both the power and the roof situation.

While an event like this is a "first" for us, it's a perfect example of the myriad of ways in which our employees go above and beyond regularly.

Did you know, for example, that most of our schools have washing machines and dryers so they can help ensure students have clean clothes for school? Additionally, many of our schools provide personal hygiene items to students in need and ALL of our schools have clothes closets stuffed with new and gently-used clothing that students can access. Thanks to the generosity and kindness of our community, we even have donors who step up to help families who are dealing with infestations of bed bugs but cannot afford professional extermination services. We live in a fantastic community!

Since the hurricane, most of our schools have set aside small spaces for "pop up pantries" and food donations are made to families in need as supplies are available. This is in addition to the more than 1,200 local students who take home bags of food, called Blessings in a Backpack, each weekend thanks to the generosity of many area churches and non-profit organizations.

And then there are the little things that are not so little to the recipients. We should celebrate the teachers who keep drawers full of snacks for late-arriving students who are hungry and the staff members who pay

for field trips out of their own pockets so students in need don't go without. We need to highlight the sacrifices of the staff members who pitch in financially to make sure students have the right clothes for graduation and other special occasions and those who quietly make donations in the office to ensure students' needs are met.

But just in case you think it's all about material things, I'd also like to take a minute to brag about the employees who take their treasured time off to spend at baseball games, football games and band concerts to ensure that each student sees a trusted adult in the audience. Let's also thank the employees who buy the wrapping paper they don't need, the cookies they won't bake or the popcorn they don't want ... all of these fundraisers help students and every contribution is invaluable. We should also give a massive shout-out to the employees writing letters of recommendation, proofing essays and spending precious after-school time helping our seniors make their college and university dreams come true. Because some students don't have a solid support system at home, our employees also step in to help students open bank accounts, secure driver's licenses and apply for college and scholarships. These "gifts" are just as unique and valuable as any other.

In so many ways, every single day, the employees of Bay District Schools do everything possible to ensure that none of our students go without regardless of their socio-economic status or family challenges. Public education is the great equalizer and it's the employees of the public education system who ensure our students have as much equity as possible when it comes to opportunities to achieve their dreams.

On this day, and on all days, I sincerely appreciate the men and women of Bay District Schools who genuinely believe in public education and the chance it affords our students. Our public school employees are community heroes and we need to remember that. Thank you, all of you, for all of the BIG things and all of the little things you do for our students every day ... your kindness and compassion are noticed, valued and appreciated.

Stay safe and God Bless!