


SPRING 2017

CONNECTIONS

A photograph of two men in dark suits and ties standing in front of a red roller coaster. The man on the left has grey hair and glasses, and the man on the right has dark hair. They are both smiling. The roller coaster is a red wooden structure with multiple loops and drops, set against a clear sky.

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and Dr. Gotcher



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Our school district is committed to the idea that all of our students have great potential. The educational program is built around the goal of bringing out this potential by providing opportunities for learning that are grounded in basic instruction in mathematics and literacy, which is supplemented by necessary interventions and extra assistance to help those students that need it. The real value in our program, however, lies in the depth of knowledge that a student can access by taking advantage of all the many offerings available.

There are very few school districts out there, for instance, that can offer a four-year program of study in biomedical science to a student who is interested in medicine as a career. Yet, Russellville was the first district in the state and the sixth district in the nation to put this program in place. Very few districts offer a four-year program in pre-engineering, but Russellville does. The state of Arkansas mandated a class in computer science and or coding. Russellville did not just put in a class, we put in a four-year program in computer science.

Our goal is not only to meet basic standards, but to exceed them. We believe that all students, if given the opportunity, will pursue their interests during their school days in a way that better prepares them for their future. The area of interest is not as important as being involved in learning that relates to that interest, whether it's architecture or automotive work, medicine or maintenance technology, welding or computer science, building trades or biomedical science. It is all important because learning about what you are interested in gives relevance to the learning and makes for a more motivated learner. Motivated learners make adults who are better prepared for the world in which they will live.

We care about our students. We want them to be successful. We are willing to provide whatever it takes to make this happen. It is important that we do this. Important for our students, our community, and our nation.



We believe that all students, if given the opportunity, will pursue their interests during their school days in a way that better prepares them for their future.



You may not know it, but Russellville School District is a leader in education, not a follower. We believe that translates into graduates who are the same way.

I will be retiring this June after 39 years in education and 11 years as superintendent at Russellville. It has been my pleasure to do my best to help make good things happen for your children and grandchildren. What I described above was part of my mission. The mission continues with Dr. Mark Gotcher, who takes over as superintendent in July.

*I am excited about the future under his leadership.
Yours in education,*

Randall W. Williams
Superintendent
Russellville School District

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JROTC

New pathway at RHS

This fall, students at Russellville High School will be able to participate in a new career pathway. The Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) is a program offered to high school students that teaches character education, student achievement, wellness, leadership, and diversity.

"I am elated to finally have a JROTC program at Russellville High School," said RHS Principal Sheila Jacobs. "When I became principal of RHS, I submitted an application to Army headquarters requesting approval for a JROTC program. We had someone from headquarters do an assessment of our facilities and interview me regarding our application and desire for JROTC. That meeting went very well, and this past November we got our final approval letter.

"We then began the process of trying to find the instructors who met our needs and complemented our vision for the program. I would like to thank Congressman Steve Womack who helped us in the process of getting approval and provided support along the way."

Currently, there are approximately 60 students signed up to participate in the JROTC program for the 2017-18 school year. The program includes coursework on leadership, civics, geography and global awareness, health and wellness, language arts, life skills, and U.S. history.

“At RHS, we have a goal of building the leadership capacity of our teachers and staff and our students. The curriculum and training in JROTC has a focus on leadership, citizenship, team-building, and service.”

Sheila Jacobs



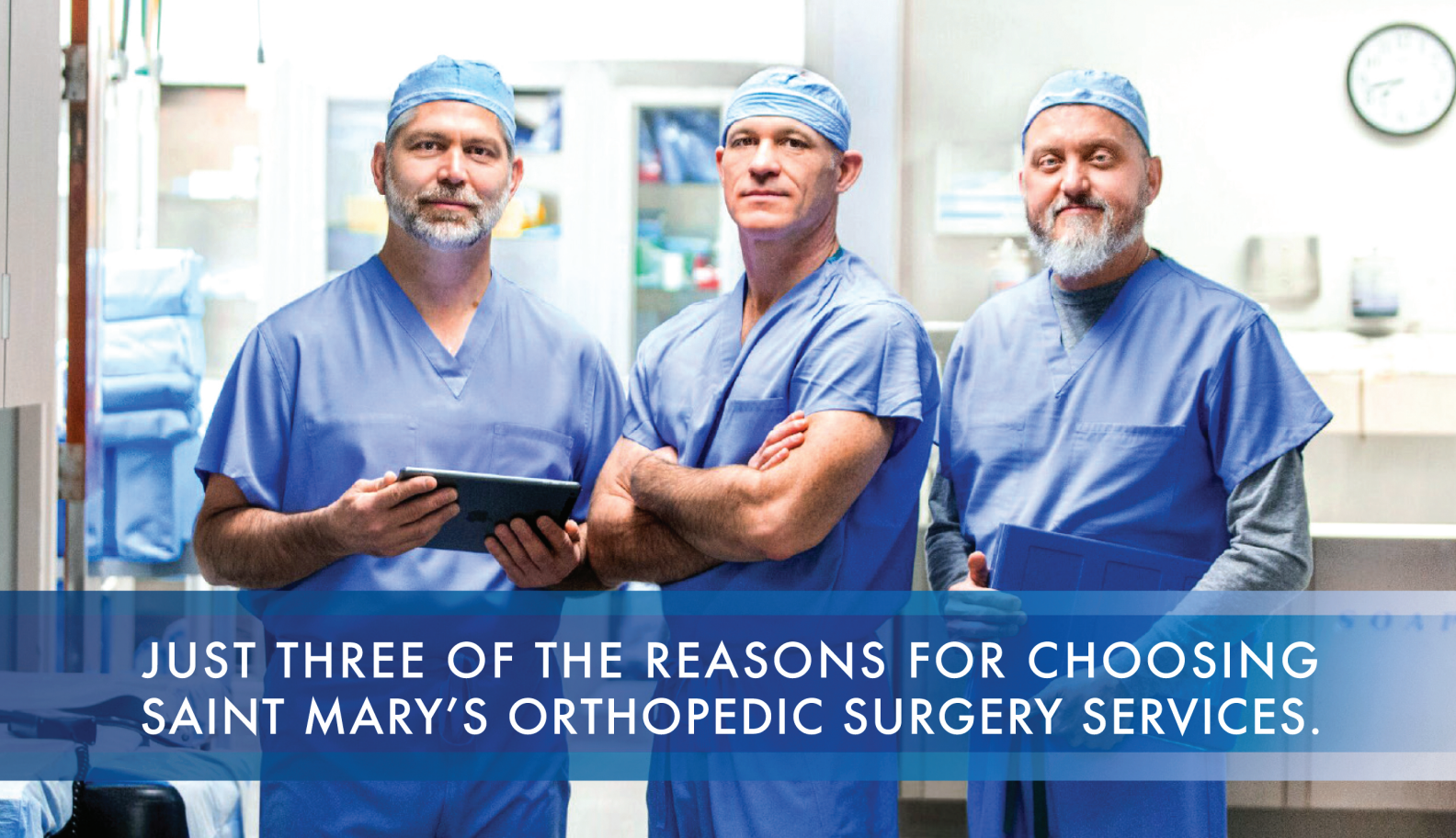
Master Sgt. Jeff Stinson and Major Todd Gray will lead the JROTC program at RHS.

The curriculum is based on the principles of performance-based, learner-centered education and promotes development of core abilities including, capacity for lifelong learning, communication, responsibility for actions and choices, good citizenship, respectful treatment of others, and critical thinking techniques. Collectively, these lessons motivate students to be better citizens.

In addition to promoting citizenship, JROTC prepares students for post-secondary options including college or the workforce. Students also have the opportunity to participate in after school activities such as RAIDER Platoon, Air Rifle Team, Color Guard, and Drill Team.

The curriculum is facilitated and taught by retired Army personnel, who are employed by the district. JROTC instructor qualifications are based on military experience, maturity, stability, and leadership acquired over 20 years of service to our nation. RHS recently hired instructors Major Todd Gray and Master Sgt. Jeff Stinson to lead the program.

"Our goal at RHS is to help students find their passion and develop their talents," said Jacobs. "At RHS, we have a goal of building the leadership capacity of our teachers and staff and our students. The curriculum and training in JROTC has a focus on leadership, citizenship, team-building, and service. In addition, JROTC complements our district-wide focus on college and career readiness and has the potential to provide scholarships for our students."



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Creating problem solvers: PLTW Launch

The new curriculum has allowed me to be a facilitator of my student's learning instead of just the teacher."

Maegan Pollack

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields continue to dominate the nation's competitive positions. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), employment in occupations related to STEM is projected to grow to more than 9 million between 2012 and 2022.

That is why Russellville School District is committed to providing curriculum that will encourage these skills early on. This past fall, all K-4 schools in RSD began a new science curriculum called Project Lead the Way (PLTW) Launch. The program encourages students to adopt a design-thinking mindset through activities, projects, and problems that build upon each other and relate to the world around them.

Activities are hands-on, technology based, real-world challenges that provide exploration to satisfy the students' natural curiosity. It involves using problem-solving strategies, with criteria and constraints to develop solutions to solve human needs or wants. Students collaborate with a team to design, create, and test their prototypes. They then present their discoveries to their class.

No one has seen a bigger transition in the classroom and with students than the elementary teachers at RSD. One of the major changes has been to classroom instruction.



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The PLTW Launch curriculum encourages the teachers to shift their teaching style from teacher led instruction to student led problem solving.

“The new curriculum has allowed me to be a facilitator of my student’s learning instead of just the teacher,” said Maegan Pollack, a kindergarten teacher at Center Valley Elementary. “I enjoy giving them background knowledge and then allowing them to run with what they know to expand their knowledge.”

Another transition has been student development in the classroom. The PLTW Launch curriculum empowers students to develop essential skills such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and perseverance.

For Ashten Wynn, first-grade teacher at Crawford Elementary, the difference she has noticed in her classroom has been the students’ sense of accomplishment.

Continued on page 29

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Art, science and power tools

Students at Sequoyah Elementary got the opportunity to participate in a new after school club this year that combined art, science, engineering, and power tools. The Woodworking Club was formed with the help of Assistant Principal Brad Beatty, Art Teacher Ashley Bryan, Science Teacher Denise Wiedower, and Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education at Arkansas Tech University, Dr. Justin Killingsworth.

"We have a great room called our Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) room, and we wanted to look for ways to utilize it and also look at some after school opportunities for our kids," said Beatty. "We began brainstorming some ideas, and thought that a woodworking class would be a great way to work in engineering, math, and art skills in a fun, real-world way."



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From left to right "Amanda Crow, Scott Babb, Jennifer Spradlin, Scott Hill, and Kathryn Kastner"



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“ We have a great room called our Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) room, and we wanted to look for ways to utilize it and also look at some after school opportunities for our kids.”

Brad Beatty



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Crust Options: Thin Crust: Add **\$1.00** Stuffed Crust: Add **\$3.00**

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“After seeing our STEAM room during a parent night, Dr. Killingsworth shared his interest in assisting with plans for utilizing the room. We later visited about the possibility of a woodworking class. We then brought in Ms. Bryan and Ms. Wiedower to plan out the process.”

The club was open to all fourth-grade students at Sequoyah and was held after school on Mondays for five weeks during the fall and spring semesters. Students interested in participating filled out a form and approximately 16 students were randomly selected for each semester. The goal of the program was to incorporate the STEAM skills they were learning in the classroom into a real-world situation.

Fourth-grader Claire Lacefield wanted to participate in the woodworking club because woodworking seemed a lot like art and she wanted to solve a problem.

“Each year, I get a new American Doll and I don’t have enough beds for each of them. So I decided to make a bed myself instead of buying one,” said Lacefield.



“The goal of the program was to incorporate the STEAM skills they were learning in the classroom into a real-world situation.”

The students started their projects with research. They were required to research the different types of tools they would be using and then present to the group what the tool’s purpose was, and how to safely use it. They then researched what they wanted to make and were given some size requirements. After their research, they were given graph paper and learned how to scale their design. The students then came up with a cut list and built their designs.

“Most of their designs were personal to them,” said Bryan. “It was neat to see how they connected their project to their interests or something in their lives. As teachers, we are always trying to get students to take an idea and find a way for them to relate to it personally, and this project really did that.”

During the fall semester, the students worked in groups of four with Beatty, Bryan, Wiedower and Dr. Killingsworth. For the spring semester, Dr. Killingsworth brought in his agricultural education majors to work one-on-one with the students in the club.

“I felt that my Applied Agricultural Systems students could benefit from having the opportunity to work with Sequoyah students this spring,” said Dr. Killingsworth. “It gave them the opportunity to think not only of the supervision of the student directed projects, but they also had the opportunity to refine some skills, work on



the management of those projects, and score the projects. It was a great project for the students at Sequoyah and a great opportunity for our students to put practice into action.”

As part of the STEAM initiative, Sequoyah hopes to draw more businesses and people from the community to help with additional projects.

“We welcome area businesses into our classroom,” said Wiedower.

“We want our students to be able to make those real-world connections and the projects that they are doing to be purposeful to our community.”

For Ashley, the Woodworking Club is just one more way that students at Sequoyah are conquering their world.

“With our STEAM initiative I have seen a different thought process in our kids. It is something that we are ingraining in them, and it is becoming so easy for them to do. I think it is so great that we are opening their eyes and changing the way that they see the world,” she said.



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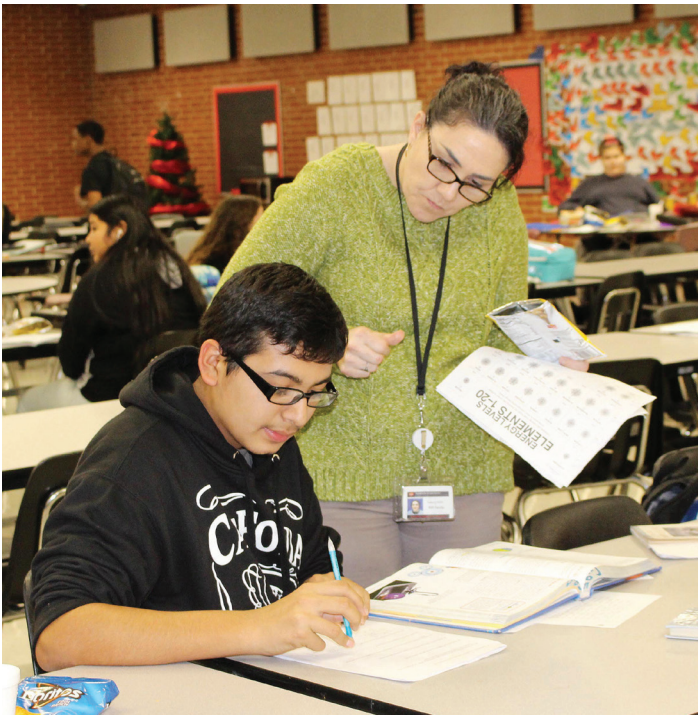
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Motivation for every student



Every student learns differently, and the Russellville School District recognizes that. This year at Russellville Junior High School, the administration team started a No D's or F's Campaign to help motivate students at the end of semesters. The program aims to make students more aware of their grades and give them initiative to finish the semester strong.

Assistant Principal Shavon Jackson has done programs like this at previous schools and wanted to bring it to RJHS students to show encouragement for their hard work.

The program began this past fall and the goal is to continue the program every semester.

For three weeks, RJHS was full of extra incentives and motivation. Every day at lunch, motivational videos played to encourage students to focus on their schoolwork. Students also received a personal video from Kentrell Brothers, an NFL Minnesota Vikings outside linebacker, to remind them how important studies are to succeed in the rest of their lives.

Teachers at RJHS gave their full support for the program. In addition to the videos, teachers donated gift cards to be given out to students.

Teachers would nominate students to be entered into a daily drawing for a card to different restaurants around town. There were so many donations from teachers that they were able to draw names more than once a day. “Everybody was so supportive of it,” said Jackson.

The main event of the No D’s or F’s Campaign was a “Zeroes Aren’t Permitted” (Z.A.P.) night at the school where students could work on whatever they needed to or study for a test in a distraction-free environment.

On that evening last fall, students attended a pep rally for a basketball game, then went over to Z.A.P. night. After about 20 minutes of unwinding and eating snacks that were donated for the night, it was time to get to work. Students studied for two hours and were given a ticket to go to the game later that night.

“It was a huge success and we can’t wait to do it again this spring,” Jackson said.

Teachers volunteered to assist those students struggling to complete the work on their own time. Supplies, such as graphing calculators, were also provided so students who did not have those at home were able to use them for their work.

“

The No D’s or F’s Campaign is a creative way to engage all students and provide them with an opportunity that is not available to everyone. By starting with a good foundation, students can use this motivation for success in all areas of their lives.

Angelina Wehrman, an eighth-grader at RJHS, was very appreciative of the campaign and enjoyed Z.A.P. night.

“Sometimes you get overwhelmed with all your work, and getting to work on it with the teachers that gave it to you is really helpful,” she said, “I wish we could have this night all the time.”

RSD wants to reach out to every student and help them succeed in life. The No D’s or F’s Campaign is a creative way to engage all students and provide them with an opportunity that is not available to everyone. By starting with a good foundation, students can use this motivation for success in all areas of their lives.

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Continuing the LEGACY

*R*ussellville School District has been fortunate to have had only 10 superintendents since 1922. This kind of stability is something most school districts in our state can not boast of, and it has helped to grow our district into the exceptional one that it is. At the end of the 2016-17 school year, Superintendent Randall Williams will be concluding his 11th year at RSD, and Dr. Mark Gotcher will become the 11th superintendent of the district.

Mr. Williams will be turning the helm of the ship over to someone he has known for 27 years and has worked with in various roles for the past 11 years. Their relationship began in 1991 when Mr. Williams took his first superintendent job at Hector School District where Dr. Gotcher was the K-12 music teacher.

"I first met Mark at Hector several years ago," said Williams. "He had a reputation as a very sincere and hardworking individual, and I really admired him and his work."

Their working relationship would be cut short at Hector though, as Dr. Gotcher took a position at Dardanelle High School the

following school year.

"I first met Mr. Williams very early in my career as I was leaving Hector to be employed at the Dardanelle School District as their new choir director," said Dr. Gotcher. "He was the new superintendent of Hector and he and I had a great visit getting to know each other and he encouraged me to remain in Hector. I had already committed to Dardanelle and could not back out of my word to them. Yet, I was impressed with him and his character and we remained professional acquaintances through the years."

Their paths would not cross again until 2006 when Mr. Williams was hired as the new superintendent at RSD where Dr. Gotcher was the assistant principal at Russellville Junior High School. Their relationship would continue to evolve over the next few years as Dr. Gotcher moved into the role of superintendent at Atkins School District, and then as the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Education.

"When I came to Russellville, Dr. Gotcher was an administrator," said Williams.



“During that time I grew to respect his work, the way he thought about things, and the way he approached school administration. He and I shared many conversations about becoming a superintendent back when he was looking at getting into this line of work. When he got the job at Atkins, we had good phone conversations and conversations at meetings where we discussed how things were going and exchanged ideas.”

For Dr. Gotcher, Mr. Williams has been and will continue to be a friend and mentor. “I got to know Mr. Williams more after he became the superintendent at RSD, and I continued to learn from him and grow as a leader. I recall many meaningful conversations at Crawford while serving as principal, and at Atkins while serving as their superintendent. Mr. Williams was always eager to share his wisdom and his experience to help me understand school finance, board relationships, and school facilities.”

Both men have had and will continue to have a role in the shaping of RSD.

“

I’ve worked with some outstanding faculty members and administrators over the years. I also worked with some outstanding school boards. Good things happen quickly when this situation exists. I also have had great community support at each of the districts I’ve worked. None of the things that I’ve been a part of in education would have been possible without good, strong community support.

— Randall Williams

”

When Williams took the superintendent job, the district had been suffering from declining enrollment and a need to re-establish itself as a leader in education around the county and state. To do this, Williams knew that Russellville would need to undergo significant facility improvements, establish its own identity as a district that had the most opportunities for people's children, and be able to provide the resources needed by teachers and students.

"There were some good things going on, but you could see the district needed to get busy and make some significant changes, both in curriculum and in the physical plant," said Williams. "With the help of the board and community members, we put together a very successful millage campaign in 2007 that basically changed the face of the district and changed the resources the district had and will continue to have for the next 20 years."

With the passing of the millage, the district was able to complete renovations at all of the elementary schools in the district, create a state-of-the-art Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) center at Russellville High School, and construct The Center for the Arts. The district also built safe rooms at all 10 campuses, and renovated the high school business, family and consumer science, and special education departments. The millage also enabled the district to give teachers the technology and learning materials they needed. The district recently completed Cyclone Arena, and construction of a new multi-purpose facility is set to begin soon.

While Mr. Williams feels he has accomplished many important goals, he always has a head full of ideas and next steps for the district.

"One of the things that I found out about myself is that it is hard to focus on what is there, because I've spent so much of my time focusing on what is not there," said Williams. "Occasionally, I will sit down and look at what we have done and feel good about it, but most of the time I look at what could still be done."

Mr. Williams contributes his successful career to the faculty, school board members, and community members he has worked with over the years, and the mentors who have influenced him throughout his career.

"I've worked with some outstanding faculty members and administrators over the years," said Williams. "Sometimes I was able to hire them, and sometimes they were just there. I was fortunate in that way. I also worked with some outstanding school boards. I've worked with boards that were progressive in their thinking in all three of the districts in which I have worked. There is a great synergy that occurs when you've got a board that understands its role and understands how to support and trust the people in the district. Good things happen quickly when this situation exists. I also have had great community support at each of

“

The one thing I hope to build is a people over programs approach to leadership. I believe that no organization, no program, no idea, is more important than the people you serve.

— Dr. Mark Gotcher

”

the districts I've worked. None of the things that I've been a part of in education would have been possible without good, strong community support."

Mr. Williams feels lucky in knowing a few great mentors who he also considers friends.

"I also have had some great mentors throughout the years," said Williams. "Danny Taylor, who was the superintendent at Dover, hired me and gave me my first job. Getting to know him over the years has had a great impact on me and my work. He was my mentor, colleague, professional role model, and friend over the years, and I owe so much to him."

"I also worked with Joe D. Bull at Hector who was the superintendent when I got my first principal job," said Williams. "I always thought he was a man of great wisdom, and I learned a lot about how to work with people from him. Tommy Tyler was also superintendent at Hector when I was a principal, and he taught me about work ethic. He was one of the hardest workers around. Dain Duvall at Pottsville was a good friend to me when I was a young superintendent. He was always encouraging to me and I thought a lot of him over the years."

"Another person in my career was Charlie Dyer who was the superintendent at Alma," said Williams. "He gave me advice that I have tried to follow throughout my career. He told me people pay taxes so that good things can happen for their children and grandchildren, and our job is to continuously work to make sure the money they pay in taxes is going toward good educational opportunities for their children. It sounds simple, but it requires diligence and a focus on keeping the district moving forward when it would be easy to rest."

Dr. Gotcher has held many roles throughout his 28 years in education that have helped to prepare him for his new role as superintendent of RSD. One factor that hasn't changed is his location. He has remained in Russellville even though his job has taken him to other locations.

"I never left this wonderful community," said Gotcher.

"While I may be currently employed as Deputy Commissioner of Education for our state, my home, my family, and my church, have remained in Russellville. I was employed by RSD for 19 years and I am so thankful for the colleagues and administrators who gave me a chance to teach and lead in this amazing district."

For Dr. Gotcher, the opportunity to return to RSD in the role as superintendent is a dream come true. He will transition into his position with a "Listen and Engage" entry plan that will give him an opportunity to listen to teachers, staff, students, and community. It will also allow these stakeholders the opportunity to share their desires and expectations for a better learning environment for the students at RSD. "I believe it is most important to listen, learn, and engage when there is a change in leadership in any organization," said Gotcher.

Building leadership in others, being a servant leader, and being a visible leader are three areas that Dr. Gotcher plans to demonstrate as superintendent of RSD.

"I would like the community to know three things about me," said Gotcher. "1) I believe in building leadership in others. I do not want to be defined as a great leader but

instead by what leadership I can produce in others. 2) I believe in servant leadership. A leader should always be about the people you serve not just how effective a leader you may strive to become. 3) I believe in being a visible instructional leader. The most effective schools and districts have leaders that are highly visible in their schools and their community. While I cannot be everywhere and be everything to everybody, I will always strive to be visible and available to the community I serve. The one thing I hope to build is a people over programs approach to leadership. I believe that no organization, no program, no idea, is more important than the people you serve."

The future for RSD looks bright, and Mr. Williams is leaving the district with anticipation of great things occurring in the future.

"I'm excited about the future of the district," said Williams. "I think Dr. Gotcher is a good fit for the district. I know his heart is in the right place and he has a good knowledge base to do this job. I have full confidence in him and I'm excited for the children that are going to be attending school here because I think he is going to take the district to the next level."



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Celebrating excellence: RHS Renaissance Program



The program works to improve academic performance, behavior, student engagement, and overall school spirit through student scholarships, resources for school programs, and the Jostens Renaissance National Conference.



Performance, promotion, and partnership are the three principles that the Russellville High School Renaissance program is based upon. Each year, the members of the Student Board and Foundation Board work together to provide incentive and achievement programs and activities to encourage student academic excellence, increase teacher appreciation, and enhance community support and participation at RHS.

The Renaissance program at RHS was among the first student incentive and rewards programs in Arkansas introduced by Jostens, who founded the Jostens Renaissance Education program. The Jostens Renaissance Education program has partnered with thousands of schools across North America for the past 25 years. The program works to improve academic performance, behavior, student engagement, and overall school spirit through student scholarships, resources for school programs, and the Jostens Renaissance National Conference.

The RHS Renaissance program is overseen by RHS teacher Angela Sergent who works with the student board. The Renaissance Student Leadership Board consists of 31 students this year, who desire to strengthen their leadership skills and community involvement. They assist with award programs, choose a staff and student of the month, and serve as leaders of the school.

Another huge aspect of the RHS Renaissance Program is community involvement. The student board meets monthly with community members to learn about area businesses. The students hear presentations about the importance of leadership, and how to become contributing members of the community.

“Our Renaissance program plays a significant role in the promotion of a positive learning and leadership culture at RHS,” said Sheila Jacobs, principal at RHS. “When students become a part of Renaissance, they learn the value of service to others as well as the importance of being connected to our community. The many programs sponsored by Renaissance have become an excellent part of our students’ education.”

The Renaissance Foundation Board consists of members of the community, parents, RHS administration, and a RSD School Board representative. The foundation board is mainly responsible for obtaining funding of the RHS Renaissance Program.

Continued on page 27



RHS students receive Cyclone Achiever Awards.



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The Center for the Arts: Celebrating 5 years

“

The goal of The Center is to present RSD students and the community with music, theatre, dance, and fine art.

The Center for the Arts opened its doors for the first time to guests and the community on April 8, 2012, at a Grand Opening celebration. Fast forward five years and it's hard to believe each year since approximately 60,000 people have been welcomed through those doors and over 80 events held.

It started out as a dream for the Russellville School District to have a performing arts venue that would serve the students and residents of the River Valley. Thanks to the support of the Russellville community, a millage was passed in 2007 and the anticipated performance center broke ground in 2008. The 130,000 square foot facility now stands prominently at the front of Russellville High School. The goal of The Center is to present RSD students and the community with music, theatre, dance, and fine art.

One of the greatest aspects of The Center is the opportunities available for high school students to learn the technical side of productions and events.



The Center has a technical classroom, a scene shop, a costume shop, as well as state-of-the-art lighting and sound equipment. Students who want to work in the production field are better equipped and more qualified for going to work after school because of the specialized training they receive at The Center during high school.

During the past five years, students have also been exposed to industry professionals who have led workshops during major productions. During the production of *Shrek*, students were able to work with a Broadway costume designer and a Broadway makeup artist. This year, they have worked with another Broadway costume designer for *Willy Wonka* and the *Chocolate Factory*. The RHS Theatre Department has presented wonderful musicals including *Beauty and the Beast*, *Shrek*, *Wizard of Oz*, *Little Women*, and more.

The stage has also welcomed several arts-in-education programs including the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, *The Nutcracker*, *Doktor Kaboom*, several Arkansas Arts Center touring productions, and internationally famous illusionist, Kevin Spencer.

Continued on page 28



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Little things that make a school year

It has been a big year for the students at Russellville High School. With the football team making school history with their first state championship win, and the band continuing the tradition of performing in the presidential inauguration parade, there were many opportunities for the student body to celebrate this year and the RHS Student Council helped to make the year memorable from the very start.

Student Council President Annabelle McNeill and Senior Class President Matthew Campbell started working on their



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goal to increase student morale and involvement as soon as they got elected to the student council by discussing with the administration a way to get some of the pep rallies back into the old gym, and offering to take over the planning and running of the pep rallies.

“We wanted to have more students participate in the pep rallies so we worked with the administration to get two in the new gym and two in the old gym,” said Campbell. “We wanted to be able to play games and have students come down on the floor and participate in them. To do that, we needed to be in the old gym so that we didn’t mess up the floor in the new gym.”

Another part of their plan was to make sure that everyone was informed on the activities taking place. The student council started making signs that were hung in the hallways and did Friday announcements with information such as the student section theme, encouragement to ride the pep bus, and ways to sign up for activities and to get involved.

“We wanted everyone to know about the activities going on, not just a select group, said McNeill. “Inviting everyone to everything made people feel like it was open to them too, and that they could be a part of the activities. It is crazy how something so little can make such a big impact.”

One of their favorite moments of this year was a surprise pep rally that was held the week of the state tournament. The council and administration planned this pep rally to take place after a scheduled fire drill in the cafeteria, which allowed the whole student body to be present. The council had the drum line, and cheer and dance teams waiting for the student body as they filtered into the cafeteria for the pep rally.

“That was one of the coolest moments I would say of this year,” said McNeill. “I never thought that we felt like one school more than in that moment. We were all watching this video and had half the students sitting down with the rest circled around them so everyone could see. Everyone was so excited because everyone played a role in getting to state. Everyone had been there the whole season and it wasn’t just one group of kids doing it, it was everybody.”

What started out as a way to increase participation at the pep rallies soon turned into lots of little activities and events throughout the year. The council sponsored a homecoming dance and built the senior class float for the homecoming parade, created the new cyclone mascot, worked a blood drive, organized a Crush can fundraiser for Valentine’s Day, participated in the Veteran’s Day Breakfast and Assembly, and are sponsoring a kickball tournament this spring. They also gave back to some of the Russellville elementary students during National School Lunch Week. McNeill and Campbell went to some of the elementary schools during lunch where McNeill gave a short presentation to the students on the importance of school lunch, and Campbell agreed to dress up as the Aramark elementary school mascot Ace the Fox.

“

“Inviting everyone to everything made people feel like it was open to them too, and that they could be a part of the activities. It is crazy how something so little can make such a big impact.”

Annabelle McNeill



“It was a lot of fun,” said Campbell. “I ran around with some of the kids at recess and gave out a lot of hugs. It was fun to be able to connect with the younger kids.”

The student council also wanted to give the student body a voice. Members of the student council and student body participated in meetings with the RHS administration concerning the 1:1 Initiative, Aramark representatives concerning school lunch choices, and even the city planner concerning things that the students would like to see in Russellville. It was also important to McNeill for members of the council to meet one-on-one with other student groups to talk about things that they wanted to do at activities to give more students a voice in the school.

“If everyone gets an opportunity to have their voices heard. They feel more important and it makes them feel like they matter, which in turn makes them want to come to school and everyone has more fun.”

As for next year, the two hope that the student council can build off what they accomplished this year, learn from the things that worked and those that didn't work, and to set a good example for the younger students.

"It's the same as being in sports," said Campbell. "It's your work ethic, your drive, and what you do. The students will remember what you put in and that is what they will think of when it is their turn to be in charge of student council."

For McNeill, she believes that they accomplished their goals of increasing student moral and participation.

"I think that we succeeded in our goal of making students like coming to school more. We tried to give everyone a voice, and I believe the little things added up to make a big difference," said McNeill. "It was the little things that made school more enjoyable, made people want to be here, and helped them to have more fun. Not only did it make the students proud of their school and want to do more things, but made the learning environment better literally by just making students like coming to school. So I think we really accomplished what we tried to do, which was make everyone proud to be a Cyclone."



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RHS Renaissance Program

Continued from page 20

“The entire Renaissance program strives to help increase student performance and academic excellence at RHS,” said Cindra Roberson, president of the Renaissance Foundation Board. “The Renaissance Foundation Board is tasked with securing funding that helps pay for the academic awards programs at Russellville High School. Each year, the Foundation Board seeks out donations from community businesses to support the Renaissance academic programs at RHS. The Foundation Board also conducts a fundraising letter campaign that requests donations from community members to help raise funds for the Renaissance programs at RHS. The Foundation Board also hosts fundraisers where they and the student board work together to help raise funds for the Renaissance academic awards programs at RHS.”

The Foundation Board along with Ms. Sergent also organize the Renaissance academic award programs at Russellville High School, including:

ACE AWARDS: The Attitude Creates Excellence (ACE) award is presented twice per year by a faculty member who recognizes a student for having an improved or exemplary attitude. Students receive a t-shirt, certificate, and coupon to Taco Bell.

CELEBRATION OF EXCELLENCE: This awards ceremony recognizes outstanding students who receive scholarships and other awards. Students who maintain a 3.5 GPA for 3, 5, and 7 semesters receive a 3.5 Academic Award, and students who receive a community donated scholarship of \$1,000 or more are also recognized at this event.

CYCLONE ACHIEVER AWARDS: Each RHS faculty member nominates one student to receive this award. The student is recognized for exemplary effort, cooperation, dependability, and application of interpersonal skills. Each student receives a medallion and a certificate recognizing their accomplishment.



DISTINCTION BANQUET: This banquet recognizes students who receive a 30 or higher on the ACT or 1340 on the SAT, have a 4.0 GPA with an Honors Curriculum, are a National Merit finalist or semi-finalist, or are a Highest Honors Graduate. The students receive a certificate and a silver coin and their accomplishments while at RHS are announced to those in attendance.

RAK AWARDS: The Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) is presented once a month by teachers or staff who see a student displaying a random act of kindness. Students receive a gift card.

For RSD School Board member Wesley White, the support of the community is a reason for the success of the Renaissance Program.

“Through the efforts of many hard working parent volunteers that have served on the Renaissance Foundation Board, outstanding staff sponsors, and a generous community, the program has grown to become one of the best student incentive programs in the state,” White said. “There is no doubt that student performance has been positively impacted by the program and it has “made a difference” at Russellville High School.”



The Center for the Arts

Continued from page 23

Several school events are also held each year at The Center such as RHS Junior Follies, RussVegas Coaches' Karaoke, and RSD band and choir concerts (including regional and state competitions).

Through ongoing efforts to inspire students into the art field, The Center for the Arts created an art program entitled "Celebrate Art!" to showcase RSD students' art work in the lobby art gallery. The gallery is utilized to display student artwork as well as community artists' work, and will soon showcase traveling artwork.

The Center has been fortunate to host several large conferences and pageants including CHRIS Teens, ATU Southern Regional Band Music for All Festival, and the Miss Arkansas Outstanding Teen Pageant. Schools in the district also have enjoyed hosting student talent shows, spelling bees, graduation ceremonies, and more at The Center.

During the past five years, The Center has also welcomed and embraced many community members and groups who are passionate about bringing great entertainment and arts to the area and work with The Center to highlight the River Valley. Through partnerships with the Russellville Symphony Guild, the Arkansas Symphony has performed for the past three years for over 6,000 local and area third-fifth graders to inspire our next generation of musicians. The River Valley Arts Center brings local students and adults together to produce exciting summer shows. Summer musicals including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Oliver*, *Peter Pan*, and more have been presented at The Center.

"The Center for the Arts has been instrumental in shaping the arts in Pope County and the River Valley for the past five years," said Stephanie Beerman, executive vice president of the Russellville Area Chamber of Commerce. "The high



standard of entertainment and arts opportunities for families and students adds to the quality of life that the people who live in, work in, and vacation in Russellville deserve. In addition to outside events, The Center provides hands-on, real-life experiences for students looking to go into the performing arts and the many technical fields behind the scenes."

Other events that The Center has held include top entertainers and touring groups such as Third Day, Casting Crowns, The Swon Brothers, Mickey Gilley, Tanya Tucker, and most recently, Tim Hawkins. There have also been several military bands, including the U.S. Army Field Band and the U.S. Air Force Band, that have performed at The Center.

The success of The Center would not be as strong as it is without support from the Center pARTners, a wonderful group of over 35 dedicated volunteers who serve The Center and assist during events by welcoming guests and performers, taking tickets, helping patrons and so much more.

"We would like to thank our community and our patrons for their support," said Wendy Sparks, Operations Manager of The Center for the Arts. "It is support from the River Valley that we have received since our opening that is critical to our current and future success. The more support we have from our community members, the more we can offer. We are excited about what the future holds for The Center and for Russellville as we continue to grow and offer new opportunities for our citizens and our students."

The Center is a place where students and the community can come together to grow and express their love for the arts. Great things have happened there in the past five years and there is more to come. For more information on upcoming events or how you can be involved at The Center visit www.russellvillecenter.net or call 479-498-6600.



PLTW Launch

Continued from page 9

"I felt more of my students had a sense of accomplishment," Wynn said. "I think PTLW helps students think outside the box and learn there are many different ways to do something. From building their design and discussing how they could improve it, they really took ownership of their work."

A skill that each teacher has seen is perseverance. Students have been becoming problem solvers by finding the answers themselves instead of asking for them. "They seem to love building and designing solutions to problems," said Melissa Dilbeck, a fourth-grade teacher at Dwight Elementary. "They are always asking 'what is the next problem we are going to solve,' and I hardly ever hear the words 'this is too hard' anymore. This program helps them take ownership of their learning."

Students who typically do not excel in a traditional classroom setting are also getting the opportunity to succeed with this curriculum. The projects allow students who struggle to succeed and stand out, while also increasing their self-confidence.

For Matha Rogers, a third-grade teacher at London Elementary, this has been her favorite part of the curriculum.

"My favorite part of the curriculum has been watching students who do not always excel in other subjects come alive and shine while designing and creating prototypes. All students have the opportunity to think like an engineer," Rogers said.

With the PLTW Launch curriculum, RSD is providing the tools and skills students need to be successful in science by building the foundation for middle school, junior high, high school, and beyond. This curriculum not only helps students in all subject areas, but prepares them for jobs in the future that may not even exist yet.



"PLTW has changed the way my students look at science," said Gina Eason, a fourth-grade teacher at Sequoyah Elementary.

"They really see the connection between math, science, technology and engineering and each student now sees themselves as a problem solver."

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- 1** — June 12 Early enrollment for students in grades K-4 new to the Russellville School District
- 2** — RHS band appreciation concert at The Center for the Arts @ 7 pm
- 4** — RMS band appreciation concert at The Center for the Arts @ 7 pm
- 9** — All choirs appreciation concert at The Center for the Arts @ 7 pm
- 11** — RJHS band appreciation concert at The Center for the Arts @ 7 pm
- 18** — Two-hour early dismissal
- 20** — Russellville High School graduation at Tucker Coliseum @ 7:30 pm
- 29** — No school Memorial Day
- 30** — Last day of the 2016-17 school year

AUGUST

- 14** — First day of the 2017-18 school year

SEPTEMBER

- 4** — No school Labor Day

OCTOBER

- 23-24** No school Teacher Professional Development and Parent/Teacher Conferences

- 23** — Parent/Teacher Conferences K-5

- 24** — Parent/Teacher Conferences 6-12

NOVEMBER

- 20-24** No school Thanksgiving break

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