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Belonging Starts Here: A New School Year Together

Submitted by Park City School District Superintendent Dr. Jill Gildea

As we welcome the start of a new school year, students, parents, educators, and staff across our community are gearing up for another year of learning, growth, and connection. The beginning of school is a special time—a moment when we come together to reaffirm our commitment to our children’s education and the values that unite us as a community. Belonging is at the heart of everything we do.

Our schools are not just places of academic learning—they are communities where every student, teacher, and family member should feel valued, respected, and supported. As we open our doors to the 2024/2025 school year, it is important to remember that a true sense of belonging is essential for students to thrive in school and life.

This year, we have much to celebrate. Thanks to the bond passed in 2021, our district has been able to expand and enhance our facilities, including our new preschool and community centers. These investments are already making a significant impact, with increased enrollment of our youngest learners and new opportunities for engagement and support. Nearing completion, Phase I of the high school’s construction will significantly expand opportunities for our students, particularly in the rapidly growing Career and Technical Education fields. These achievements are a testament to our commitment to providing the best for our students and the community.

Our commitment to high-quality education is reflected in the caliber of educators joining our district. Drawn by our strong reputation for excellence and competitive compensation, these dedicated professionals are eager to fulfill our mission of *inspiring and supporting all students equitably to achieve their academic and social potential*.

Furthermore, we have taken necessary steps to make our schools welcoming and inclusive environments for all so that we can ensure that every student is *safe, supported, engaged, challenged, and healthy*. We have implemented clear policies that protect our students’ Civil Rights, define acceptable behavior, and established simple, accessible systems for reporting concerns. Our staff is receiving ongoing training to better handle incidents with care and professionalism, ensuring that every student and family member can feel confident in the support they receive.

Last spring, I was reminded why we always benefit when we listen to our students. While observing PCHS’s Social Issues class, I heard remarkable students share their insights on fostering respectful and inclusive environments in our schools. I was deeply impressed by

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their thoughtful perspectives, particularly their top priority: shifting the culture. Their words resonated with me because they come from students living this reality daily. They wisely noted that it's easier to "create a new culture than to change an old one." Clearly, these students are passionate and ready to be our partners in leading transformative change in our schools.

As we move into this new school year, it's important that we all play a part in fostering a community where everyone feels they belong. Whether you are a student stepping into a classroom, a teacher preparing lessons, a parent guiding your child's learning, or a community member supporting our schools, your role is vital. Together, we can create a school community that is united, supportive, and inclusive.

Let's choose to model respect, kindness, and understanding in our words and actions so that we can create a school environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed, each individual is celebrated, and everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Let's make this school year one of growth, achievement, and, most importantly, a year in which everyone in our community knows they belong and are an integral part of our shared mission.

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE