

SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTHWEST

A monthly publication for the parents/guardians and local residents sharing good news and updates about our students, staff and the Southwest Local School District



July 2018

“State of the Schools” Slated for Aug. 7

Here’s your chance to catch up on all of the recent progress and upcoming changes, just in time for the start of the new academic year.

Come to the inaugural “State of the Schools” event - which is designed as a fun, festive and informative evening, slated for Tuesday, August 7, 7 p.m. at the Activity Center.

All are encouraged to attend the event, which features entertainment by the high school band plus updates on technology and curriculum, district finances, progress on the four new schools and high school renovation, and more!

“There have been so many advances made in numerous areas,” states Superintendent John C. Hamstra. “We wanted to ensure as many parents and local residents were aware of this progress and to share what we plan to accomplish in the coming year. This is our way of celebrating the achievements made thus far and to kick off what we know will be an excellent year for our students and our district.”



Southwest Students, Community Comes Together to Support the Sowders Family

A huge thank you to the Harrison Community for supporting the Sowders Family car wash fundraiser held June 25! Thanks to the community’s support, \$3,342.29 was raised, all of which will be given to the family who recently lost their home in a fire.

Special thank you to the American Legion (pictured here with several Southwest staff and parents) for their \$250 donation and to all of the teachers, students, athletes, coaches, admin, parents, & community members who worked washing cars!



In addition to the car wash, many local groups and businesses have generously supported the Sowders. Thanks to Gold Star for holding a fundraiser, the Cincinnati Reds, local ball teams, This City, His City, local churches and the many others who have made donations.

There are several ways you can support Shawn and Misty Sowders and their family:

- A Go Fund Me account has been created – You can make a donation on the site and leave words of encouragement for Shawn and Misty. <https://www.gofundme.com/misty-and-shawn>
- An account has been established at 5/3 Bank - You can give your donation to any 5/3 Bank, just note that the money is for the benefit of Shawn and Misty Sowders



Cheerleaders, cross country runners, baseball players, Southwest Local Schools staff, parents and folks from the community—lots of different groups and individuals washed cars June 25 as a way to raise funds to support the Sowder family.

District Welcomes New Principal and Dean of Students

Two new administrators will help lead the district this coming school year: Mia Neckel takes the helm as principal at Whitewater Valley Elementary School and Brandon McBee fills the newly created role of Dean of Students at the Junior School.

“Everywhere Mia serves within our district, she makes a difference,” states Superintendent John C. Hamstra. “In her work as a teacher, through her time as Title I Coordinator and as an instructional coach, everywhere she works, there has been improvement and student growth. Her passion and dedication to our students is evident as is her devotion to providing quality education through professional development of our teachers and the use of technology to enhance curriculum.”

Of McBee, Hamstra states, “There is so much flux at the Junior School level, both socially and emotionally for this age of students. Having a person focus on student behavior will enhance our efforts to make the junior school a safe learning environment for all students. I believe that, as Dean of Students, Brandon’s ability to work with and encourage the success of students will result in more positive student behavior and more academic and social growth.”

Neckel began her tenure with Southwest as a first-grade teacher at Hooven Elementary School. From 1999-2016, she taught at Crosby Elementary, both first and second grades, then moved to Harrison Elementary as the Title I Coordinator. Last school year, she served as the instructional coach at Whitewater Valley Elementary.

Similar to Joanne Aghotte’s role at the high school, McBee will coordinate the Junior School’s Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports. He will create consistent expectations for behavior, working with students, teachers and the junior school principal to improve student learning and decrease behavior issues. In addition, he will oversee the school’s Response to Intervention (RTI), which is a small group instruction model. He will continue teaching 7th grade science, along with being responsible for student safety and behavior.



Mia Neckel (above), Principal at Whitewater Valley Elementary, and Brandon McBee, Dean of Students at the Junior School.



Superintendent’s Message: Parent Survey Yields Insight Into Climate, Communication

There are literally pages of comments, feedback provided by parents and guardians of our students who took the time to share their thoughts in our annual survey.

The questions were divided into three focus areas, allowing for input into school climate; curriculum and instruction; and communication. In addition to the questions, parents also had the opportunity to share comments.

We received more than 582 responses -- which reflects a 15% response rate. Since a typical response rate runs between 8-10%, we’re very pleased that so many of our parents and guardians shared their thoughts and concerns. I’m also proud to share that, overall the responses were favorable. While responses varied from school and grade level, there were several themes that became evident.

In the school climate section, the average score was 3.87 on a scale of 5; major themes were safety, bullying, and the desire for high school busing. In the curriculum and instruction section, the average score was 3.99; top themes shared were to remove common core and to reduce state testing, the inconsistency of homework among classes and grade levels and the use of technology. In the communication section, the average score was 4.01; major themes evident responses were inconsistency of Progress Book updates and the need for more timely information from the schools and teachers.

Based on the feedback and comments shared, we are incorporating ways to address the gaps. For example, many parents are concerned about bullying. Thus we are creating an informal workshop to help parents better understand what both the schools and the family can do to help prevent bullying. Student safety was another top concern shared in the survey and we will continue to communicate what the district and schools are doing to enhance security and safety.

Again, thank you to all of the parents/guardians who completed the survey. The feedback is much appreciated and will be used as we continue our drive to provide academic and social growth for all students, every day.

— John C. Hamstra, Superintendent, Southwest Local

Important dates coming up:

- Thursday, July 19 – Board of Education meeting, 6 p.m., Harrison Junior School
- Tuesday, August 7 – “State of the Schools” 7 p.m., Activity Center
- Thursday, August 16 – Board of Education meeting, 6 p.m., High School
- Saturday, Aug. 18 – Harrison Hall of Fame and Athletic Boosters’ golf outing; noon, Circling Hills Golf Course
- Tuesday, August 21 – First day of school for students in grades 1-12