

## Local Schools



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# Free School Meals for Children Through Fall

OCTOBER 04TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

## Free School Meals for Children Through Fall

Poplar Bluff, MO - The Poplar Bluff R-I School District, in partnership with Chartwells, is excited to announce that school meals will be free to all students through the end of the semester on Friday, Dec. 18, or longer, as Congressionally appropriated funding is made available.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture publicized the waiver extension for operators of the summer food service program on Monday, Aug. 31, in response to the public health emergency.

“We appreciate the incredible efforts by our school food service professionals year in and year out, but this year we have an unprecedented situation,” stated U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue in a press release. “This extension of the summer program authority will employ summer program sponsors to ensure meals are reaching all children – whether they are learning in the classroom or virtually – so they are fed and ready to learn, even in new and ever-changing learning environments.”

Meals were previously available at no cost to students, grades pre-K through third, under the Community Eligibility Program. Now—funded through the federal nutrition assistance program—the Middle School, Junior High and High School students can also enjoy free school meals, including breakfast and lunch, and soon dinner to-go.

“These waivers will allow school nutrition professionals to focus on nourishing hungry children for success, rather than scrambling to process paperwork and verify eligibility in the midst of a pandemic,” added Reggie Ross, president of the School Nutrition

Association.

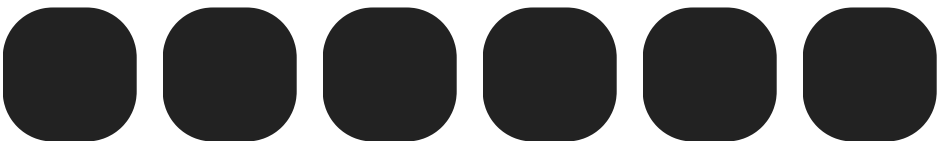
Reimbursements will be processed on student accounts for meals paid for out-of-pocket dating back to the beginning of the program this school year.

Article and photos by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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# Therapy Dogs Continue to be Utilized Throughout School System

SEPTEMBER 29TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Therapy Dogs Continue to be Utilized Throughout School System

Poplar Bluff, MO - A chocolate Lab, certified as a professional therapy dog, recently served to help get apprehensive new students through the classroom door during the first day of school at the Poplar Bluff Early Childhood Center.

Handled by Michelle Caswell, who teaches 3-year-olds in an integrated classroom, Hope is the latest in a tradition of service animals that have been utilized in various ways throughout the R-I district to provide a calming effect on students.

Donated by dog breeders Dave and Rhonda Bishop of Ellsinore in mid-2018, Hope completed her obedience classes through K9 Biz in Dexter and later passed her public access test through SEMO Dog Trainers in Poplar Bluff.

“In dog training, they train you and you train the dog,” Caswell explained. According to Caswell, Hope already helped forewarn of a seizure a student had suffered during a homebound visit before a hospice nurse was able to come to the boy’s aid. “That [act] alone was worth the two-year wait,” she noted.

Since the 2018/19 school year, Oak Grove Elementary has served as the second home of a Great Dane named Bailey, age 6, who resource teacher Holly Shupe has incorporated into her special education classroom. Beginning in 2012, Junior High counselor Luann Elledge also had a therapy dog named Creggan, an Irish setter now retired, and Lake Road counselor Valerie Duncan owned a Labrador retriever named Airial, who unfortunately died almost a year ago.

Jenn Nicolini, a Junior High teacher, is scheduled to travel with Elledge to Concordia, Kan., next week to pick up Creggan’s successor from Canine Assistance Rehabilitation Education & Services. Several civic organizations, banks, veterinarian offices and other businesses contributed so Nicolini can obtain the weeklong training through the prison reform program, and cover the ancillary costs.

“My goal would be to see every school have a therapy dog to help kids dealing with trauma,” Nicolini stated. She recently earned her psychological examiner certificate and specialist degree in counseling through Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau.

Earlier this month, Duncan was once again placed on the CARES waiting list, a process that can take one to two years. She has plans to fundraise to offset the training expense, as handlers are responsible for providing liability insurance, as well as food and veterinarian care for the pet. When Airial passed away, Duncan said students flooded her office with letters and mementos paying tribute to the beloved dog.

“I didn’t realize she meant so much until I saw all of that,” recalled Duncan, adding that she felt ‘overwhelmed’ by the outpouring. “A lot of times kids would come into my office, and they didn’t want to talk to me, they wanted to sit down and talk to her.”

Back in 2004, Junior High counselor Cindy Jackson, then employed at Lake Road, had perhaps the district’s first school dog—Eddie, a Bichon/poodle mix—before obtaining certification was required by the Board of Education, she said.

“Since the early 2000s, Poplar Bluff has been a school district that believes in creating a safe, welcoming place for children” through the use of office pets, Jackson commented. “Dogs lighten children’s spirits, and provide that unconditional acceptance.”

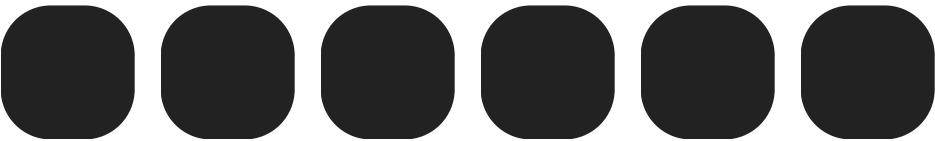
Pictured: Hope, a 2-year-old professional therapy dog, stands in the hallway greeting families on Wednesday, Aug. 26, at the Early Childhood Center.

Article and photos submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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# PBMS Giving Closet Opens for Students in Need

SEPTEMBER 29TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

## PBMS Giving Closet Opens for Students in Need

Poplar Bluff, MO - A sixth grade teacher working toward a counseling degree has realized her vision at the Poplar Bluff Middle School this school year, having opened a Giving Closet free for students in need.

With help from family and co-workers, Taytem Eudaley built shelving and racks, and organized inventory that includes clothing, personal hygiene items and school supplies in what once served as the boys' locker room next to E.T. Peters Gym.

Students are referred by teachers or counselors, then they present a voucher to Eudaley, who discreetly takes them 'shopping' at the start of the school day, she said.

"My first year teaching I saw a lot of kids didn't have the bare necessities, and just know you're starting your day at a disadvantage if you're struggling [outside]," Eudaley explained. "This allows us to give anonymously so kids can focus on school stuff instead of home stuff, and they don't have to bring with them that emotional backpack."

At the end of 2019, Eudaley was provided a small budget from administration to purchase bulk supplies such as body wash, and she began soliciting donations through her parish, West Side Church of God, as well as reaching out to other school patrons.

The custodial staff originally built a coat rack, and then over the summer Eudaley completed the layout with assistance from loved ones. There is a separate space that she uses to sort items as they come in. Previously the school had stored some supplies in the nurse's office, according to Eudaley, but the collection was not on display for students to browse

"It was a bit of a mess before with donations lying around, and she basically washed all the clothes and built the shelves over the summer as a project for her master's program," said Dr. Josh Teeter, Middle School principal. "The main purpose is to provide clothing for kids who don't have the means available."

Some items on the current needs list include toothbrushes and toothpaste, clothing hangers, gently-used backpacks and young adult books, according to Eudaley. She is eventually looking to secure a washer and dryer once a hookup is installed.

The Middle School Giving Closet is modeled in part after a similar operation that runs out of the High School library. Both accept items through the main office of the respective school buildings.

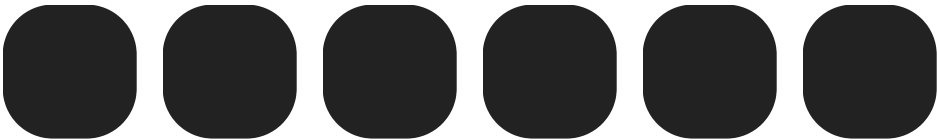
Pictured: Teacher Taytem Eudaley stands next to a Mules display section in the PBMS Giving Closet.

Article and photo submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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## \$5K Awarded Toward Remodel of 80+ Year-Old Gym

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## \$5K Awarded Toward Remodel of 80+ Year-Old Gym

Poplar Bluff, MO - The final touches of a facelift have been placed on the Poplar Bluff Junior High gymnasium, the very oldest building in the district, with its construction dating back to 1937.

Custom window coverings reading P-B-J-H-S M-U-L-E-S across the top of the facility were installed on Wednesday, Sept. 2, by Southeast Signs & Graphics.

Work over the course of several months through a \$5,000 Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant and matching district funds has included a fresh coat of paint, new basketball hoops, wall-mounted padding, scoreboards and an entire bathroom renovation in the gym lobby featuring updated flooring, countertops, commodes and sinks.

"With your support, this project will foster growth, pride and quality improvement at our school for years to come," wrote instructional coach Keri Jameson in the grant application approved last year by the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation. "We have an extraordinary vision for what we can do with our building; we only need the funds to make it happen!"

The gym is the entry point of the school for students each day. The building is also utilized for basketball and volleyball games, by travel sports, youth leagues as well as the Poplar Bluff Parks Department. The restroom facilities are additionally opened up to the public during football games at the adjacent Morrow Stadium.

"Candace [Warren, principal], has been very proactive in making improvements in her building and I value that, and knew there was a need," explained Dr. Amy Jackson, R-I assistant superintendent of business. "In conjunction with maintenance and our custodial staff, we were able to make these renovations within the current approved budget, without having to pass an amendment."

Once other high priority projects such as roof replacements are completed across campus as the district cautiously navigates the current economic crisis, noted Jackson, she looks forward to revisiting the long-range plan with committee members and perhaps directing more renovation work at the historic building.

"Out of anything, I am most proud of what we were able to accomplish here with help from Dr. Jackson and the Maintenance Department," Warren stated. "She promised and she delivered, giving the space a contemporary look and new energy. It had good bones, and now basically looks like a brand-new facility."

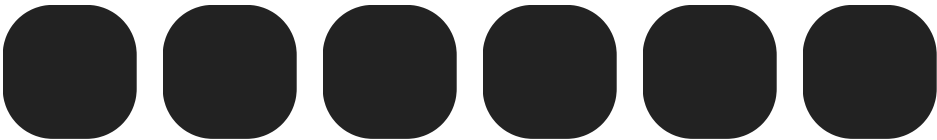
Pictured: The PBJHS gymnasium is pictured last week with new banners, paint and basketball hoops as part of an overall remodel.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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# Teacher of the Year Promoted Internally to Lead Lake Road

AUGUST 25TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Teacher of the Year Promoted Internally to Lead Lake Road

Poplar Bluff, MO - Distinguished elementary educator Rondi Vaughn has been hired to succeed Erica Weadon as principal of Lake Road Elementary



Having split her career between Eugene Field and Oak Grove over the course of two decades with the Poplar Bluff School District, Vaughn now intends on bringing with her best practices from each elementary building.

“It’s the same curriculum and same achieving excellence (mission statement), it’s just seeing education through a different lens,” Vaughn said. “I plan to take the greatness from each of the buildings I’ve been in, and hope that I can continue to build on the work that makes Lake Road amazing.

Input on leadership qualities was solicited from Lake Road faculty before the Board of Education approved Vaughn's internal advancement in March, after Weadon announced that her family would be relocating. A Campbell native, Vaughn can recall substitute teaching a teenage Weadon back at Holcomb High School, where Vaughn was encouraged by an administrator to pursue a career in education.

She earned her master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from William Woods University in Fulton, and more recently another master’s in elementary administration from Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau. Vaughn began her tenure teaching elementary school in Kennett in 1998.

“I didn’t instantly know I wanted to be a principal, it just evolved as I had instructional leadership opportunities within our PLC (professional learning community),” Vaughn explained. “You have to develop your teachers; they’re the most important resource for delivering instruction and student success. I have been in their shoes; I’m gonna be facing the challenges with them.”

Lake Road was the first school in R-I history to earn the coveted National Blue Ribbon award. Earlier this year, the elementary school received gold level recognition under School-wide Positive Behavior Support and was named a national showcase school through the Capturing Kids’ Hearts initiative once again.

This year Lake Road will complete its phase-in plan of expanding the configuration to include grades 1-6 to combat the results of a population shift within the district. The school board approved the purchase of a modular classroom in February to house elective classes, subsequently opening up two classrooms per grade level in the main building.

Vaughn was named the 2020 Teacher of the Year at Eugene Field, a Lighthouse School under the Leader in Me program, based on Dr. Stephen Covey’s best-selling book, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.” Vaughn happens to be the eighth teacher at Eugene Field to go on to become a school administrator either within the district or the region since implementing the leadership program. She says the habits have made an impact on

both her professional and personal life.

“You have to hold onto your ‘why,’ and that’s your hope,” Vaughn stated. Vaughn was previously named the 2012 Teacher of the Year at Oak Grove, the second school within the district to receive the Blue Ribbon award. She was a part of the groundwork there under the SW-PBS system

“Mrs. Vaughn obviously has a tremendous teaching pedigree and is immediately equipped to continue the advancement of the good work Lake Road is engaged in,” said Dr. Scott Dill, R-I superintendent. “In terms of her mindset, she has a servant’s heart when it comes to leadership, and in my mind that’s the only way to approach such a position. She understands that the opportunity to lead is really the opportunity to be of service.”

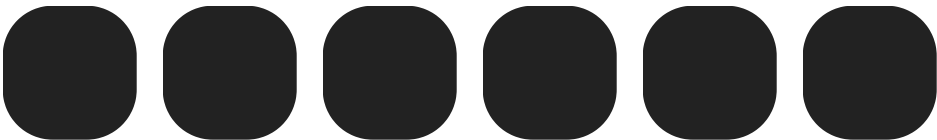
Pictured Rondi Vaughn enters her 23rd year as an educator leading Lake Road Elementary, one of two Blue Ribbon Schools within the district.

Photo and article provided by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

LAST UPDATED ON AUGUST 25TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

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