

RED

AROUND RUSH

WINTER 2017-18

RUSH COUNTY SCHOOLS



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SUPER NOTE

Winter break is a great time to recharge and reflect on the first half of the school year. There is much to celebrate this year, which you will learn more about in this edition of *Red Around Rush*.

This year was the first that each of our students - from kindergarten through high school - had a device to help them research, collaborate and communicate. I am pleased with how the 1:1 technology initiative has rolled out in our schools, and we have great students and staff to thank for that.

We welcomed a new, furry addition to our staff named Teagan. We recognized Benjamin Rush Middle School's Mark Scheidler, who was named one of the top assistant principals in the state of Indiana. We also welcomed more preschoolers into our buildings.

As we prepare to ring in the new year, I'm also reminded of the exciting new programs still to come to Rush County Schools, like the new Jobs for America's Graduates program. I am confident 2018 will be a year of tremendous progress and success for our students.

I am proud of what we do each day in Rush County Schools, and I am thankful to the staff, students and community who work together to make it happen. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to email me at vancem@rushville.k12.in.us or call me at (765) 932-4186 at any time.

I truly hope you enjoy a restful winter break spent with loved ones. Our students and staff have worked so hard through 2017 and deserve these weeks to relax. I wish each of you happy holidays and a peaceful new year.

Warm regards,
Matt Vance, Superintendent



RUSH COUNTY ADDS THERAPY DOG TO STAFF ROSTER

A new employee in Rush County Schools has students and teachers alike turning their heads as she prances down the hallway on all fours.

Teagan, a hypoallergenic black poodle, started as Rush County's official therapy dog at the beginning of the school year. She spends her days visiting schools across the district and helping calm students who are upset, frustrated or sad. She's paid in treats and pats.

"I was skeptical at first, but you just feel the tension drop," said Scott Stevens, Rush County's assistant director of differentiated learning. "I didn't believe it at first, but I now know that she can truly recognize when someone needs comfort. And it's not just students, it works for teachers too."

The district started tossing around the possibility of bringing in a therapy dog more than a year ago after finding research about the benefits. Studies have shown that therapy dogs in schools reduce anxiety, help students work through anger management and address personal and social issues. The therapy dog's presence can increase empathy and compassion in students, build self-esteem and help students connect to the school setting.

Although Teagan was experienced as a therapy dog to the elderly in nursing homes, the district still ensured that she



Teagan, the district's newest employee, gets paid in treats and pats!

was properly certified through Therapy Dog International. Teagan was required to pass a series of tests simulating a working environment. If she would have shown any signs of aggression or disinterest, barked or pulled at her leash, she would have failed the test. But Teagan passed with flying colors.

Not only is Teagan good at her job, but she also seems to love it.

"We will ask her, 'Want to go to work?' That was very intentional so she knows that it is a job," said Kim Nicholson, Rush County's director of differentiated learning. "She always beats us to the door and you look at her face, and you would almost think she is smiling."

Teagan's handlers always make sure she is given plenty of work breaks and is rewarded for her good behavior.

"She is rewarded with her purpose," Nicholson said. "She is a service dog by nature. You can tell by her walk, the way she prances."

Students and staff have embraced Teagan as a part of their community. When she walks through the halls, students circle around her to say hello, and Teagan does not get at all intimidated by the crowds.

Rush County administrators have already reached out to neighboring school districts to let them know Teagan would be happy to visit in case of a tragedy or traumatic situation. And if other districts are interested in hiring their own therapy dog, Rush County is happy to provide advice on making it happen.

"You have to do your homework," Stephens said. "What are you looking for in a dog? What purpose are you looking to fill?"

The district made sure to be transparent through the process with

school staff and with parents. All students were required to fill out a permission slip in order to interact with Teagan.

"She has been a blessing," Nicholson said. "We have learned as much about her as she has learned about us."

NEW PROGRAM HELPS AT-RISK STUDENTS

At more than 95 percent, Rush Consolidated High School's graduation rate is well above the state average. But until the graduation rate hits 100 percent, Rush County educators won't be satisfied. That is why the district is launching a new program called Jobs for America's Graduates in January when students return after Christmas break.

Jobs for America's Graduates, or JAG, is a school-to-work transition program that helps at-risk students graduate and continue to postsecondary education, an entry-level job or a career in the military. The program is funded by WorkOne, and it aims to help students with academic or economic hardships succeed.

"Unfortunately, many of our students do have barriers," said Rob Hadley, principal of Rush Consolidated High School. "It's becoming tougher for young children with the breakup of the American family and whatnot."

JAG is a way to reach students who might otherwise be at risk of dropping out. Rush County Schools Superintendent Matt Vance was interested in learning more about the program and asked Hadley to investigate.

Hadley called around to neighboring districts and received rave reviews. In one nearby school, the program saved seven kids from dropping out in the past few years alone.

Mark Matthews, a retired Rushville police officer, will lead the program at Rushville and has already been hard at work preparing for the first semester and establishing connections in the community. He is looking forward to building relationships with the first class of students and connecting them to potential careers.

"When our kids have an adult that takes an interest in their lives, their careers and their future, that's powerful," Hadley said.

Students in the program will spend time learning about themselves and setting goals for their future. They will learn how to craft an effective resume and how to present themselves for an interview. Matthews will also facilitate tours of local companies, manufacturing facilities and colleges so students can get a better idea of what options are available to them after high school.

Rushville's JAG program is open to juniors and seniors, and the school hopes to accept 30-35 students in the first semester. Anyone interested in learning more about the program or enrolling can contact the Guidance Office at Rushville Consolidated High School.

"I'm really excited about this opportunity, and I think our students will be too," Hadley said.

MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL RECEIVES HIGH HONORS

Mark Sheidler, principal at Benjamin Rush Middle School, has always considered himself a "fixer." He thinks it goes back to the time he spent as a mechanic, where a car could always be repaired.

"If I can't fix things, it attacks me as a loss," he said. "If I end up letting a student slip, I take it as much upon myself as the student. Not being able to fix the problems in a student's life drives me crazy."

He called it the hardest part of his job, but it is also likely one of the characteristics that makes him so good at being a principal. He is bound and determined to help students overcome any situation they are facing, even when it can't be "fixed."

"The most challenging part of this work is that there are a wide variety of situations that you have no control over," he said. "And many times, the student also has no control over it."

But for 25 years, Scheidler has been helping students regain control of their lives and their futures. For that, he was named as the Assistant Principal of the Year for District 10 of the Indiana Association of School Principals.

Sheidler was inspired to enter education because of all the high school teachers and coaches who had an impact on him through his school years. He graduated from

Greensburg, but remembers playing sports against and befriending Rush County students.

He worked his way up from being a teacher to school leadership, and he spent several years at the high school level. He recalled the difficult situations his students faced, from becoming pregnant to being kicked out of their homes by their parents.

"In the beginning, I felt like I was running into walls and wasn't able to do that anymore," he said. "But then I would see two or three students walking across the stage that I knew wouldn't have been there if it weren't for our hard work, plans and accommodations, and that was so rewarding." Sheidler has since moved to working with middle schoolers, and loves the culture at Benjamin Rush.

"The best part is probably the family atmosphere that we've continually pushed and strived for," he said. "I work with a lot of great teachers, and the students and teachers all care about each other."

One day in November, Sheidler thought he was going to the library for professional development with his staff, but it turned out to be a surprise party recognizing him for his Principal of the Year win. Sheidler said he is thankful for the people he works with and the chance to make an impact in students' lives, just like teachers did for him when he was young.

"Nothing can ever outdo hard work," he said. "I think in today's world, so many things are based on test scores. We forget there are many people who are extremely successful even if they don't do well on tests. Our students need to know that if they find what they're passionate about and work hard at that, they will be successful on their own terms."



Contact Us

Rush County Schools
330 W 8th St.
Rushville, IN 46173
Ph: 765-932-4186
Fax: 765-938-1608
Twitter: @RushSchools

Arlington Elementary School
2533 N 700 W
Arlington, IN 46104
Ph: 765-663-2416
Fax: 765-663-2723
Twitter: @AESWildcats

Milroy Elementary School
300 N. Walnut St.
Milroy, IN 46156
Ph: 765-629-2323
Fax: 765-629-2250
Twitter: @MilroyCardinals

Rushville Elementary East
390 W 16th St.
Rushville, IN 46173
Ph: 765-938-1616
Fax: 765-938-2417
Twitter: @RES_East

Rushville Elementary West
410 W 16th St.
Rushville, IN 46173
Ph: 765-938-1509
Fax: 765-938-1703
Twitter: @RES_West

Benjamin Rush Middle School
1601 N. Sexton St.
Rushville, IN 46173
Ph: 765-932-2968
Fax: 765-938-2011
Twitter: @BenjaminRushMid

Rushville Consolidated High School
1201 Lions Path
Rushville, IN 46173
Ph: 765-932-3901
Fax: 765-932-4051
Twitter: @RushvilleHigh

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RUSH COUNTY SCHOOLS EXPAND PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Indiana is one of only a handful of states that does not fully fund preschool programming, but Rush County Schools leaders believe every student deserves an early and strong educational foundation.

This year, Rush County Schools expanded its preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds. The program, based at Rushville Elementary School West, currently serves 35 students, and leaders hope that number will continue to grow.

"We are committed to providing high quality educational opportunities to help students be successful," said Melissa Leap, Rush County's director of curriculum and instruction.

Studies have shown that students who attended a high-quality preschool program are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to be arrested for violent or drug crimes. Leap is confident Rush County's program will help Rushville students be successful in the future.

"We believe that preschool is an important part of a student's educational career," she said. "The goal of our program is to provide the foundational skills for reading and math readiness, as well as fine and gross motor skills, teamwork and confidence in a school setting."

For more information on enrolling a child in the preschool program, visit rcs.rushville.k12.in.us or contact Leap at leapm@rushville.k12.in.us or (765) 932-4186.

DELAY AND CANCELLATION ALERTS

Weather related closings or delays will be communicated through the automated School Messenger calling system. If you are not currently signed up, contact your student's school to be added. In addition, information will be placed on our school website, local television stations WRTV, WISH, WTHR, WXIN, WTTV, and local radio stations 91.9 and 94.3. Our goal is to make the decision about canceling or delaying school by 5:45 a.m., but weather is unpredictable and the safety of our students, faculty and staff is extremely important to us, so cancellations may occur after this time if conditions make it necessary.

ALL-SCHOOL CALENDAR, 2017-18

Dec. 25-Jan. 4 Christmas Break
Jan. 5 Teacher Work Day
Jan. 8 Students Return/Second Semester Begins
Feb. 16 Teacher In-Service Day (no school)
Feb. 19 No School/Makeup Day
March 26-30 Spring Break
April 13 No School/Makeup Day
May 24 Last Student Day
May 25 Teacher Records Day
June 3 Graduation