

From the Desk of the Principal
December 2016
Eric Chisausky

I would like to thank PTO Presidents Jen Backus and Jacquie Korella for their leadership and championing a wonderful start to the school year for Walker. The Fall Family Fun Festival/Fun Run and Auction events provided our community time to connect with each other, celebrate Walker, and support our academic programming with exciting enrichments. As the first trimester has come to a close, I hope you all found the recent parent-teacher conferences valuable in the continuing partnership to help your child learn and grow at Walker School. I am proud of our students, staff, and parents for working hard together to make Walker a great school community!

What's New This Year

Teacher Teams

As many parents may know, several of our teachers joined new grade-level teams at the beginning of this school year in anticipation of some eventual retirements of our beloved teachers. I have been very impressed with the professionalism and dedication of the Walker staff during this transition. I am proud to report we are in a great rhythm this year, which should be reflected in the academic growth and success of our Walker students.

Foundations

In grades K-2 this year, we have implemented the Wilson Reading System® Program called *Foundations*. It provides research-based materials and strategies essential to a comprehensive reading, spelling, and handwriting program.

Wilson Foundations describes itself as “making learning to read fun while laying the groundwork for life-long literacy.” Our students in grades K-2 receive a systematic program in critical foundational skills, emphasizing:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics/ word study
- High frequency word study
- Reading fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension strategies
- Handwriting
- Spelling

Thus far, our Walker K-2 teachers have enjoyed the results from the student application of word recognition and writing, and we expect our students to better understand the nuances of word parts as they move into the intermediate (3-4-5) grades. Overall, we expect Walker students to be *better spellers*, which I know several parents have expressed as their desire for our students.

Wordly Wise

You may have noticed that students in grades 3-4-5 have been assigned a *Wordly Wise* workbook this year. *Wordly Wise* is a supplemental resource that all elementary schools have implemented this year to support instruction in vocabulary and usage. Typically, teachers introduce weekly vocabulary word sets and students work through various activities related to the development and application of these new words. As we continue to utilize this resource, we expect student writing to incorporate a more robust variety of *Wordly Wise* words. Feel free to talk with your child about the new words they are learning week to week.

Curriculum Committee Work

Assistant Superintendent of Learning, Kelley Gallt, has met with our principals and many teachers across the district to begin some very important committee work for each Subject area. Each committee is comprised of a grade-level teacher from each D181 School and other support staff. They meet at least monthly to align content standards, review best practices, and in some cases, recommend curriculum for adoption by the school board. For example, our Math Committee is working to create a district standard curriculum that aligns our Math in Focus resource (adopted 2015-2016) with Common Core and state requirements. The Science Committee has proposed an updated curriculum aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards, which we will continue developing over the next year. The English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies Committees have begun the same work. Art, music and PE teachers are also working in curriculum committees to rewrite and update their curriculums to meet the new standards in our subject areas. All of this is crucial in ensuring our students benefit from the most current and best instructional practices. Stay tuned for continued updates.

School Improvement

Greatest Area of Needs

Each year, Walker as well as the other schools within the district, set and work toward specific school improvement goals. As an improved process this year, each school has reviewed student growth data and current instructional practices to identify a *Greatest Area of Need* for each grade level. That means the Walker School Improvement Plan is comprised of grade-specific goals for English Language Arts and Math, in addition to a school wide SELAS goal (Social and Emotional Learning for Academic Success). In short, Walker has identified on-level reading and writing proficiency, and math fact fluency as needed focus areas for many of our grade levels. The resources we have implemented this year will support better instructional planning and delivery. Feel free to contact your child's teacher if you'd like to further discuss your child's progress relative to these school improvement efforts. I look forward to updating you on our progress in these improvement areas at our next PTO General Meeting.

Caught Being a Champ

As we returned from Thanksgiving break, Mrs. Voss, Mrs. Trice, and I visited each classroom to introduce our new *school wide positive behavior incentive*, “Caught Being a Champ.” We introduced a bingo board visual where students will be recognized for practicing expected CHAMPS behaviors throughout the school environment—specifically appropriate lunchroom volume and hallway etiquette. As a reminder, CHAMPS is school management system to develop an instructional structure in which students are responsible, motivated, and highly engaged in the specific task at hand. The acronym standardizes expectations for the following:

C - Conversation
H - Help
A - Attitude
M - Movement
P - Participation
S - Success

As a parent, you might see your child coming home from school with his/her hand stamped with an ink paw print. All adults, including teachers, lunch/recess supervisors, even Mr. Jose, are looking to “catch” our students practicing CHAMPS behaviors throughout the school day.

As students return to their classrooms and show their homeroom teacher their newly stamped hands, they will add their name to a square on the Walker classroom bingo boards. Each Friday during announcements, we will call a bingo-square and invite students to the office to receive colorful paw print wristbands. After the first week of stamping hands, we have seen a strong interest by students to be recognized, so we are off to a great start! *Be sure to look for a nice group photo in next week’s Walker Wednesday News.*

Mrs. Voss’s PTO Presentation

Walker Social Worker, Mrs. Allison Voss, presented at the November 16 evening PTO general meeting on the topic of “How to Make a Difference in Your Child’s Social and Emotional Health.” This was a well-attended event with a great opportunity for some light Q and A with Mrs. Voss. Even as an elementary school principal, I was reminded of the delicate balance between raising a child in today’s results-driven society and supporting one’s natural development of creativity and responsibility. Be sure to keep an eye out for the resources shared from this presentation, available at <http://www.walkerpto.com/selas-page.html>.

Looking Ahead...

Save the date on your calendars for the next PTO general meeting, February 15 at 7:00 PM. Assistant Superintendent of Learning Kelley Gallt will join us for an update on the District Strategic Plan. I will also share updates to my School Improvement Plan.

Please continue to donate new, unopened toys, winter clothing, books, and canned food for our Giving and Sharing collection, which will support HCS Family Services. Reminder: Our annual Giving and Sharing Assembly will be December 20 at 2:00 PM. See the table in the front hallways for the growing collection of donated items!

Thank You, Parents!

Lastly, thank you, *parents*, for your investment in your child's education and for being such an important part of Walker School. As this season of Giving and Sharing unfolds, I want to pass along my sincerest appreciation for your efforts in partnering with our staff to help every Walker student *develop the skills they need to change the world and the confidence they need to do it* (newly adopted d181 Vision statement).

As always, feel free to connect with me if I can assist you in any way to further support your child at Walker School.

Eric Chisausky, Walker Principal
echisausky@d181.org
630-861-4604