



420 Church Avenue Verona, Wisconsin 53593

October 2019

Hello Sugar Creek Parents and Guardians,

One of my key responsibilities is to oversee all hiring and evaluations for our 74 staff members. Through my years at Sugar Creek I have read thousands of applications, participated in many hundred of interviews, hired many dozens of candidates for many school and district positions, and have performed hundreds of evaluations. Our students mean the world to us, and my ultimate goal is to hire the absolute best.

There is much in the news about a **national teacher shortage**. The traditional way to address teacher shortages is to focus on the recruiting of *new* staff. While this is important, I believe a key, overlooked, strategy is the retention of *present* staff. I'd like to share with you some of the strategies we practice at Sugar Creek that help to address retention:

- ***Mentoring:** all new teachers are given a mentor paid to assist them with the transition to our school.
- ***Academic trainings and support:** we give trainings on curriculum, instruction, and assessments, and our Teaching and Learning Coordinator and resource team partner with new teachers to model what are called "best practices" in education.
- ***Behavioral trainings and support:** we give trainings on behavioral strategies and provide on-going support from our Student Support Services team.
- ***Visit days:** we schedule new teachers and their mentors time off to visit successful classrooms elsewhere in our district, discuss what they saw, and consider ways to implement key features.
- ***Assessment days:** we give all teachers extra assistance so they can do student assessments.
- ***Culture of openness:** each year our teachers make the school's master schedule and our recess supervisors create the lunch and recess schedule.
- ***Principal presence:** I frequently visit classes and often relocate my office to the halls so that I can be readily present.
- ***Leadership opportunities:** we offer nearly 50 (!) various leadership opportunities for staff in virtually all aspects of education. This list is published here at the start of the year, along with the names of staff that are taking these opportunities to learn, grow, and support our school and its students.
- ***Professional development:** it is staggering the amount of paid professional development that our district offers.
- ***Listening Sessions:** I hold periodic open listening sessions for staff and communicate out the responses, to help staff feel heard.
- ***Behavioral management system:** national teacher attrition reports mention that a primary reason teachers leave schools is when they are unsafe places with poor behavioral management. To this end, Sugar Creek has won several state awards over the last five years for our incredible work with PBIS.

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***Salary:** no one becomes a teacher for the money. However, teaching should allow a person to support his or her family. Verona has done well in making our salary competitive.

***Classroom budgets:** all teachers and staff have access to school and PTO money to support their needs and hopes.

***Cultivate collaboration:** teaching is no longer a lonesome occupation and we at Sugar Creek have been leaders of developing professional learning communities (PLCs). All teachers meet on a team each Monday morning for an hour, reviewing lesson plans and discussing ways to use our data, as a team, to help *all* students learn and grow.

***Work/home life balance:** when family or personal needs arise, Sugar Creek makes it a focus to provide staff members the support they need.

***Focus on healthy living:** our district has a health and wellness program called V-Fitt which helps keep the focus on healthy living. Many Sugar Creek staff members are involved and even help lead this for the district.

***Social life:** We socialize together, formally (we have a Sunshine Committee and we have an incredibly thoughtful PTO) and informally as staff. We like each other!

***Politics in perspective:** It's easy for public employees to read the news and feel demoralized. We try our best to approach the news with an open mind, and also remind ourselves that we are doing important work for our community and for our nation's future.

***Nimble and responsive:** there is a reputation for schools to be stagnant entities. At Sugar Creek we have nimbly responded to changes and needs in such ways as remaking our hiring practices, instituting a Two Way Immersion program, and being the first school in VASD to implement: PBIS, all-school iPads, Recess Before Lunch, a Biking Unit, and Free Breakfast for All.

***Fair student assignments:** as hard as it may be to believe, national reports of teacher attrition show many new teachers are given the most challenging classes. At Sugar Creek we absolutely never do this.

***Opportunities for growth:** we routinely offer our staff the opportunity to try a new position within our school. Many have pursued this as a way to grow professionally!

***Advancement from within:** VASD's Grow Your Own program began a few years ago and helps to develop non-certified staff who are interested in becoming teachers in critical-need fields.

***Improved hiring practices:** our school board adopted new policies recently that allow principals to quickly identify strong candidates in hard to fill fields and hire them early, before they are swept up by other districts.

***School-university partnerships:** Sugar Creek has developed one with Edgewood to help ensure their education students are well prepared for the needs of K-12 public schools, and we learn from them!

***Meet teacher needs:** many of us remember the words of Ed, our former custodian: "We are here to serve the teachers so they can serve the kids."

***Acknowledgements:** this includes giving time at staff meetings to share appreciations for each other, providing incentives for staff who give of their time to attend school night events, and holding occasional gift certificate drawings to encourage staff involvement in PBIS.

***High expectations:** we hold others and ourselves to high expectations. Teaching is a serious, challenging, incredibly rewarding profession. We assume the best of intentions in each other and share, professionally, ways to help each other grow.

No school or district has "solved" the teacher shortage issue, but at Sugar Creek we don't sit back and expect others to fix it for us. Together, we here have helped to make our school a "destination school." Thank you,



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Mr. Todd Brunner, Principal