

**May
2020**

The Bluebird Post *A USD 411 Newsletter*

A Quarterly Publication from the Superintendent's Office

Upcoming dates

- May 19: Last Day of Classes
- TBA Senior Graduation, late July or Aug.
- Aug. 3: Threshing Days Parade
- Aug. 5: Enrollment
- Aug. 5: 6-12 Athletic and Activity Meeting
- Aug. 6: Enrollment
- Aug. 10: Kindergarten Roundup
- Aug. 14: ACT Reg.
- Aug. 17-19: Teacher In-service Preparation
- Aug. 20: First day of Classes
- Aug. 28: Fall Sports Preview

BOE Welcomes Mrs. Amanda Lowrance as Superintendent and Elementary Principal



*Mr. Booton, BOE President,
welcomes Mrs. Lowrance as
the next Superintendent and
Elementary Principal*



At the March 9 Board of Education meeting, the BOE welcomed and signed Mrs. Amanda Lowrance as the new Superintendent/Elementary Principal. Mrs. Lowrance has been an Early Childhood Coordinator for USD 259, Wichita. Prior to that she was an assistant Principal at Jefferson Elementary having worked in Wichita schools for 13 years. Mrs. Lowrance completed her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Wichita State University. She and her husband Patrick both grew up in a rural community, they have 5 children between the ages of 18 months and 15 years and she looks forward to working in a rural school again. In her free time, Mrs. Lowrance enjoys bike rides and walks with her family and they also enjoy cheering on the Kansas City Chiefs. Mrs. Lowrance and her family currently reside in Andover and are actively seeking to relocate to the district. Mrs. Lowrance and her husband would appreciate any leads in locating rural property available within the district. Officially she begins her duties on July 1, but Dr. Fast and Mrs. Lowrance have already been collaborating together in the transition.

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Staff and Students Transition to Continuous Plan of Learning

John Fast, Supt./Elem. Principal: On March 17, Governor Laura Kelly announced schools would be closing with the traditional method of instruction, to reduce the chance for COVID-19 to be transmitted across the population. During the week of spring break, our staff worked hard to put a plan into place that would continue to provide instruction to all students, pre-K through 12th grade. This new model of instruction introduced by Kansas State Department of Education looks very different from the traditional method of delivering instruction on campus and it also varies depending on age level and subject level. Below you will find input from a cross section of our staff and a senior student to help you understand what our Continuous Plan of Learning looks like in Goessel.

Scott Boden, JH/HS Principal: March 17, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly ordered the closure of all schools for the remainder of the year. From there KSDE went to work and on March 19, guidelines for Continuous Learning for schoolchildren to continue receiving education. Instead of returning to the classroom after spring break, staff began working on plans for having online schooling for the remainder of the school year. Fortunately our school is 1:1 with Chromebooks for every student in grades 6-12. This allowed staff to plan lessons using Google Classroom, Meet, and other digital tools. One challenge staff worked to overcome was assisting families with limited or no internet at home. Teachers have also worked hard to be flexible, caring and supportive as students and parents adjusted to a new way of having school. Staff greatly appreciate the support parents have provided at home that has resulted in approximately 80% of students completing their assigned work on schedule. Regularly scheduled video chats and check-ins have been an important part of staying connected. Students and families will wrap up the year with a fresh appreciation for in-person school and high hopes for a return to normal school in August.

Kacie Schmidt, K-12 Art Teacher: Creativity lives on in the homes of our district's families! At the elementary level, students were given art packets that included a polymer clay craft and weekly choices that encouraged students to get outside and try different art challenges. These were designed to be stress-free, kind of like brain breaks for kids and families to create together. I have loved the emails and posts I've seen with the #bluebirdartist hashtag! The high school level has been a bit more challenging to create from home without access to the art room's supplies. Because of this, students have been thinking outside the box and creating art with materials they have at home. Some examples have been mud paintings, art history, drawing exercises, and digital artwork. Creating has had a big impact on students as it allows them to have an expressive outlet during these challenging times.

Harmony Gerlach, HS Social Studies Teacher: I've been using Google Classroom to communicate with students about assignments (this makes seeing due dates and instructions very easy, as well as allows me to provide copies of the assignment for individual students to fill out so it is easier for them and me to keep up with). I have been using a tool called Loom to provide video lessons and clips of instructions. I believe this has been helpful for students who are more verbal and also helps me make sure that students are getting the instructions in a variety of ways. I have been trying to connect with my classes once a week for more of an informal chat time just to see how students are doing, clarify anything they need me to, and to give them some peer interaction that they wouldn't be getting otherwise. What I have found to be one of the more challenging parts of distance teaching is the lack of classroom interaction time. Students learn so much from each other as we learn together and that is a very difficult piece to fill during distance learning.

Sheri Janzen, Kindergarten Teacher: When the decision was made to close schools and introduce distance learning, the teachers at Goessel Elementary had to determine what information would be most practical and engaging to their students. During the week of March 22, staff worked to put together all the materials and lessons for seven weeks' worth of learning. The students were given weekly packets that included math and reading lessons, art and music ideas, and all the supplies they would need. The next step in April involved all the teachers reaching out to families through email, phone calls and text messages to determine if each student had what they needed and to help parents whenever possible. Teachers have used Facebook, Youtube, SeeSaw, and other learning platforms to share lessons, songs and stories and have recorded their own activities for their students to learn from. The students are responding by sending videos of themselves reading, pictures of their artwork, and voice recordings of their math answers. Parents, siblings, and grandparents are supporting their children and helping them to understand the lessons and activities they are learning. Teachers will continue to have regular contact with students and families through the middle of May or as long as their families need support. This has been a challenging time for many of us but our students continue to learn and grow for the next grade.

Jody Schmidt, Elementary Resource Teacher: Teaching elementary special education remotely has been an adventure! Delivering instruction and connecting with my students occurs primarily through weekly Zoom meetings as well as through instructional videos and emails. Highlights of remote learning have included seeing my students' faces during Zoom meetings, being able to continue to teach, being pushed out of my comfort zone to find new ways to connect with kids, and seeing the pride my students have when they are praised for a job well done. Virtual IEP meetings, and virtually assessing students has been challenging during this remote learning period. I am thankful for the parental support during this time and appreciate the efforts my parents are making to work with their children. I miss my students dearly and look forward to the time we can get back to the classroom for face-to-face learning!

Sherri Sells, JH Science: Online continuous learning has definitely been a challenge and learning curve for everyone involved. We already use Google Classroom and have the new Big Ideas Math online as well. Students already knew how to access and complete assignments through this platform. The challenge has been helping students one-on-one. I have been doing this through Google Meet. I was pretty excited about delivering science activities because I knew kids would not be involved in sports and would have time to get out and observe science concepts in action in their surroundings, such as the sun and moon and plants growing in spring, and it would be good for kids to get outside and involve the family. Flexibility and patience has been the key to success when links don't work or assignments have been uploaded. What I have noticed is parents are the key to success for students. Thank you, parents, for all you do to support our schools!

Brian Lightner, HS Math Teacher and A.D.: The high school math classes have been utilizing the Big Ideas Math online platform to complete assignments. Instruction has been delivered through several formats including recorded lessons uploaded to YouTube, lesson examples within the Big Ideas online platform or using videos and examples available from the free resource, Khan Academy. Many students have enjoyed the freedom to work on their assignments within their own schedule and have done a good job of asking me questions as they arise. Others have struggled with the extra responsibility and accountability it takes to work on their own, and I strived to let all students know that we are still here to help them. I understand that students may not have resources at home to assist them with high school math questions so I have been available through video chat, email and text on a daily basis. I am so proud of the kids who have stepped up and continued their schooling in their new learning environment and am looking forward to having them all back in the classroom as well!

Ilona Abrahams, 5th Grade Teacher: Every Sunday evening I email parents the lesson plans for the week. Using a variety of methods to teach students seems to work well for 5th grade. I actively interact with students through email. For some subjects, such as math, students use a workbook, supplemented with projects and on-line programs. Science involves experiments that utilize supplies they already have or are easy to obtain. YouTube videos provide access to virtual field trips, which supplement an on-line social studies program. Perhaps the greatest enjoyment comes when parents and students share pictures of their interactive projects with me and I share them on Facebook. The challenge is to provide a semblance of normalcy for students so they continue to be motivated to learn.

Elizabeth Alderfer, Senior Student: When school got cancelled for the remainder of the year, it felt like my own little world ended. Coming back from spring break was supposed to be the best time of the year. I was looking forward to prom, senior trip, music contests and concerts, and of course, graduation. I know a lot of the other students were looking forward to track and golf as well. I was looking forward to all the memories that I would make with classmates and friends. With all of these activities cancelled, I wasn't sure how the end of my senior year would turn out. This year I have been taking a few college courses through Hutch which weren't affected too much by the switch to online. My high school courses changed but all the teachers did a great job of staying in contact and making sure that learning continued. While I may not have gotten to experience a lot of the "lasts" like I wanted to, I am still proud to be a Bluebird and am continually amazed by our school and our Goessel Community.

Janna Duerksen, K-12 Counselor: During this time, your family may be experiencing different reactions. There are several ways you can find balance. The first step is to seek awareness. This requires you to slow down and focus on your feelings and assess your stress level. The next step is to seek balance in areas of your life including work, personal, family life, rest and leisure. Finally, build connections with each other, friends, co-workers, and community. One of the most powerful stress reducers is SOCIAL CONNECTION. Here are some additional ideas: practice brief relaxation techniques during the day, check in with others, increase exercise, pay attention to health and nutrition, practice good sleep routines, find things that you enjoy or make you laugh, keep a journal, draw, color/paint, recognize emotions and take appropriate self-care measures. Here are some additional resources:

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-children-kids-activities/>

If you would like any additional support or assistance, please contact me at duerksenj@usd411.org



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Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Will there be a graduation ceremony for our seniors?

A: Yes. The administration met with the seniors to discuss options. We are hoping to conduct a graduation ceremony sometime in late July or early August, pending relaxed guidelines from state health officials. The safety and welfare of our students and patrons will be our ultimate concern.

Q: Will school start up normally in August?

A: We have been told to plan for a normal start to the school year pending a final decision from state health officials.

Q: What about fall sports and activities. Will they start on time?

A: Again, the final determination will be made by state health officials and KSH-SAA and we will abide by those guide lines.

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