

"INSIDE UPDATE" P-H-M Staff Newsletter - August 2015

Back to School Special Edition

WELCOME ONE AND ALL



Superintendent Dr. Jerry Thacker visited all schools the first week of school. At Schmucker, he was greeted by Gretchen Kujawa and Andrea Hoover who really got into the "pink" theme!

It's easy to offer the greeting "Welcome back!" at the start of the school year, but it fails to acknowledge **all the new folks who are joining P-H-M for the first time!**

So we want to extend an outright **"Welcome!"** to the more than 50 new teachers taking assignments in our schools ([click here for the link to see their pictures](#)), the 200+ members of the Exceptional Ed staff—both certified and non-certified—coming on board, and the several dozen new bus operators, ESP and support staff members filling the ranks.

In addition to all the new staff, we have new preschoolers, new kindergartners and new non-resident students at nearly every grade level. **It's great to be part of a thriving school district!**

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

The preparation paid off! School Year 2015-2016 got off to a great start on August 19, thanks to our committed parents, teachers and students. We invited parents to share their "first day of school" pix with us via social media using #PHMBACK2SCHOOL and they did, posting dozens of great photos of smiling children at all grade levels. View them at [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) – see who you know!



R-E-V-V-I-N-G UP for a great year! Principal Tressa Decker, P.E. teacher Cindy Batalis and Music Teacher Jon West greeted Horizon students on the first day of school. Arriving students loved the race car theme!

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2015-2016

Here's a brief summary from many of the district's busy departments:

- **Business Services** – Presented the 2016 Budget to the Board of School Trustees at the August 24 Budget Work Session. Based on student enrollment increase, the district's General Fund may increase by 3.5% and is projected at just under \$68 million.
- **Transportation** – Has made it even easier for parents to understand school bus routes by providing infoFinder *i* – an online tool that lists scheduled stops, making it especially helpful if a route must be reconfigured! infoFinder *I* is also available online a few days before the parents receive a hardcopy in the mail.
- **Maintenance/Facilities** – Among their many summer projects were redesigning parent pickup and drop off zones at Elm Road, Moran and Prairie Vista to ease traffic congestion and keep car riders safer. Oh, and carpet, carpet, carpet!!! Carpet was installed at six schools.
- **Learning Division** – Will support new instructional approaches including ENL “push-in” services, co-teaching classrooms and the integration of special education with general education.
- **Exceptional Ed** – Formerly known as Special Education, this staff is now part of the P-H-M family and the new Exceptional Education staff has been a whirlwind of activity “setting up shop.” See the article later in this newsletter...
- **Food Service** – Predicts a trouble-free transition from MyLunchMoney.com to MySchoolBucks.com, the payment portal set up for parents' use.
- **Kids Club** – Is happy to open a 10th site, this one serving the students at Meadow's Edge Elementary School. Additionally, Jayson Snyder will provide administrative support to existing Kids Club leadership.
- **Community Ed** – Is offering a great fall lineup of classes, including eight new ones: Introduction to Guitar, Drawing Foundations, Digital Painting and Two-Block Quilt.
- **Communications** – Is increasing the use of social media as an excellent way to reach our community and connect with our patrons. The district's Facebook, Twitter and online impact is growing.

- **Human Resources** – Is building on last spring’s successful “bonus pay for subs” pilot. The newly enhanced program in place this fall (not a pilot) will reward reliable subs with up to \$1,000 a year in bonus money!
- **Technology** – Matt Hapke and his team delivered on the promise of putting an internet-ready Chromebook in the hands of every student in grades 6 – 12 within the first days of school. Amazing!
- **Preschools** – Penn PALS (for ages 3, 4 and 5) will operate under Exceptional Education guidance at four locations (Bittersweet, Elm Road, Elsie Rogers and Mary Frank Elementary Schools) and the Early Learning Academy full-day program (for age 4) will operate at Horizon as well as Mary Frank Elementary Schools.
- **Safety & Security** – Over the summer months the employee database that provides Honeywell badge information and electronic door access was refreshed for every current employee. Also, digital upgrades were made to the camera systems at Discovery and Penn.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

We have two colleagues stepping into administrative roles this year:

- Ryan Towner is the new principal at Madison Elementary School
 - Last year Ryan served as an assistant to the principal at Walt Disney Elementary School.
- Kevin McMillen is the new assistant principal at Schmucker Middle School
 - Kevin has been a valued member of the Discovery Middle School teaching staff in past years.
- Aaron Leniski “kicked off” the new school year as the Penn’s new Athletic Director. Aaron has been working over the summer to make sure the fall sports programs get off to a smooth start, starting with football.

These teachers-on-assignment will serve as assistants to the principals in three of our busiest elementary schools:

- Lisa Duerksen at Meadow’s Edge
- Amy Fadorsen at Horizon
- Cindy Tachman at Walt Disney

Another teacher-on-assignment:

- Mindy O’Malley now serves as the director of the Planetarium/Digital Video Theater
 - Mindy’s experience as a science teacher at Discovery Middle School makes her a good fit!

WE ARE FAMILY!



Preschool site coordinator Kristi Vandygriff welcomed parents, grandparents and preschoolers to the Penn PALS Community Preschool Open House at Bittersweet Elementary on Friday, August 28. Penn PALS is operated by P-H-M's Exceptional Education division and replaces the Growing Together Preschool Program.

Have you heard? Joint Services is no more! P-

H-M now has its own special education services division, now called Exceptional Education. The Joint Services partnership with Mishawaka Schools ended June 30, officially giving P-H-M its own division. You may recognize some familiar faces, that's because those staff members joined the P-H-M family ... so we are all P-H-M now!!! Exceptional Education is headed up by Director Gena Todd. Administrative Assistant Ashley Wright has worked alongside Gena in the past year to develop and staff the program. Rounding out this core group are Dr. Jennifer Sears in the role of Ex. Ed. Program Supervisor and Caroline Brill as Ex. Ed. Program Coordinator. Gena, Ashley, Jennifer and Caroline's offices are all in the lower level of the ESC. If you happen to be at central office, pop in and see their new digs!

Seven more professionals will work at the district level, but maintain offices at Penn High School. That group includes Cassie Schmucker (Division Secretary); Marcia Abrams (IIEP Coordinator); Travis Block, Stephanie Burger, Mike Manis, Kevin Runyan and Brittany Stall – all school psychologists. And of course every school will be staffed appropriately with assigned resource teachers, educational assistants (formerly referred to as program assistants) and therapists. If you need help navigating the changes, call Cassie at 968-9600 and she will be happy to assist you!

Gena and her staff have a vision to integrate special education services and general education services in a way that better serves the entire student population. We should all expect to notice the difference -and to be part of the process!

“WELCOME TO TCU FREED FIELD, HOME OF THE PENN KINGSMEN”

That's what the new signs in the end zones and on the press box say, making it official: Freed Field is now TCU Freed Field! The renaming recognizes and honors this valued community partner's ongoing support. P-H-M and TCU's partnership dates back to 1966—P-H-M was TCU's first Direct Deposit relationship. TCU has also partnered with the P-H-M Education Foundation for the past 20 years supporting a variety of events along with co-curricular student activities such as Penn Robotics.

All three organizations are excited about the opportunities and the long term impact this new partnership will have on our communities. This continued partnership does not simply grant naming rights for the TCU Freed Field; more importantly, it gives us the opportunity to empower the students, their families and our communities with the financial literacy tools that will impact their future.



Dr. Jerry Thacker stands with Mari Linn Wise, executive director of the P-H-M Education Foundation, and TCU CEO and President Paul Marsh, representing the three organizations who are partnering for student success.



Joining Thacker, Wise, and Marsh on the newly-named TCU Freed Field are School Board members Randy Leliaert, Vice President Larry Beehler, Jamie Woods and Gary Fox. Associate Superintendent, Dr. Denise Seger, is on the right.



Members of the Penn Color Guard perform in front of the new TCU Freed Field signs ahead of the August 28 varsity football game.

JACKIE WALORSKI VISITS PENN HIGH SCHOOL

Indiana's 2nd district Congresswoman, Jackie Walorski, visited Penn High School on Wednesday, Sept. 2 as part of her Northern Indiana EDUCATION TOUR. She'd asked for a behind-the-scenes look at the Health and Human Services Academy and Principal Steve Hope and staff were happy to oblige!



The group went into Physical Education classes to observe students involved in CrossFit conditioning and Science classes, where students were solving “crime scenes” using forensic science as part of the PLTW biomedical training. Students enjoyed their interaction with the congresswoman, and Rep. Walorski expressed her admiration for the diverse educational programs and Academy structure at Penn High School.

EARN A REFERRAL BONUS!

Just a reminder: A P-H-M employee who refers a new sub to start working in our schools will earn a \$50 bonus after that sub has worked ten days. Employee referrals typically make good candidates, and the district wants to reward those who make the effort. It's a win-win-win situation! Contact Human Resources for more information.



Stories compiled and written by [Jill Spencer](#) and [Lucha Ramey](#) in the Office of Communications. Please feel free to contact us if you have news about your school or department that you'd like to share with your fellow P-H-M colleagues. "Inside Update" is typically distributed the last day of the month during the school year, except for December and this "Back to School" special issue. Please send us your story ideas by approximately the 19th day of the month your news should run.