

# PRESS RELEASE



## Certified Staff Celebrated at PCPS Back to School Assembly

All Ponca City Public School certified employees were celebrated on August 9 at the Back to School Assembly held in the PCPS Concert Hall. It was obvious that this was no normal Back-to-School Assembly. Po-Hi Football players were door greeters and Po-Hi Cheerleaders, Hi-Steppers, Band, and Color Guard were all there to welcome staff with fanfare!

Superintendent Shelley Arrott welcomed everyone and reported that Oklahoma Legislators are taking steps to make education a top priority by increasing teacher pay and adding money into the state funding formula for schools. Because of increased state revenue and years of excellent fiscal management, the district was able to restore eight teaching positions that had previously been cut due to budget constraints.

The district also used building funds to create a secure entrance at the Washington Prekindergarten Center. "All schools in the district now have secure entrances," stated Arrott. "We appreciate the support of our community and for passing over \$85 million dollars in bond issues over the last ten years." Some of the other significant improvements were made to the FFA Farm facilities, and \$70,000 worth of new Promethean Boards were ordered to replace old ones that were not working very well. New seating was installed at both the Po-Hi Howell and West Middle School Auditoriums. Many other needed purchases were made as well.

New band uniforms were purchased as well, and the Po-Hi Big Blue Band marched across the stage, down the aisle of the first floor, and up to the second level balcony to the cadence of the drumline as they unveiled their new uniforms to the staff. Everyone was awed with the fanfare and the impressive uniforms with the Wildcat head on the chests and tall, white plumes in the hats.

Arrott introduced members of the PCPS Board of Education and all district administrators. She then discussed district celebrations. The district's Academic Mission is, "All students are prepared to live and work in a global society." The district set a goal to increase growth 10% each year. With last year's report card including a growth component, the district now has baseline data established for growth.

In 2017-2018 two cultural goals were set and action items were put into place to accomplish these goals. The first goal was to develop a unified, positive working and learning environment to foster teacher retention and

student success. The district set a goal to reduce the number of teachers who leave the district for reasons other than retirement or spouse transfer by 10% each year due to the severe teacher shortage crisis. At the end of July 2018, the district lost 44 teachers for reasons other than retirement or spouse transfer, and by July, 2019, they had only lost 32 teachers, which is 12 teachers less than July 2018. That is 30% fewer teachers than the previous year!

Goal number two was to promote and build school spirit and eliminate barriers for ALL students to be involved in positive activity. The district set a goal to increase the number of students participating in extra-curricular activities by 10% each year. They established action items such as limiting expenses for students, naming the **Wildcat as the district-wide mascot**, **Spirit Nights** for elementary students at athletic events, **March the Halls** at the elementary sites by the Po-Hi band, along with **Athletes Greeting Students** in uniforms at the elementary schools on game nights. The district also implemented **Wildcat of the Week** with TEAM Radio selecting students who exemplify the **Wildcat Way**.” Arrott explained, “When I first collected the baseline data in February of 2018, we had 49% of 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders participating in at least one extracurricular activity. I had the data pulled again in May of 2019, and we had increased participation by 448 students, which is a staggering 74% of our secondary students! Every student in our district now knows they are the **Wildcats** and what our school colors are! I think we need to celebrate these goals with the **Wildcat Victory Song!**”

The theme for the 2019-2020 school year is **The Wildcat Way**. Arrott discussed the reasons for the theme - characteristics synonymous of a **Wildcat** starting with each letter. She also reported that a donor allowed for the purchase of T-shirts for all PCPS employees with the **Wildcat Way** characteristics on the back. Principals at each school have planned ways to implement the **Wildcat Way** at their site. Po-Hi Head Football Coach Scott Harmon came to the stage with some of his football players and told how each one of them exhibited the **Wildcat Way** characteristics. Po-Hi students MaKenzie Cummings (Hi-Stepper Captain), Daysha Gilpin (Cheerleader Captain), and Drew Markle (Drum Major) all spoke about what the **Wildcat Way** meant to them.

The Po-Hi Big Blue Band, Cheerleaders, Steppers, and Color Guard all performed the Ponca City Fight Song, and PCPS Principals asked their new teachers to come to the stage for introductions. There will be a short video from each school introducing their new staff on the PCPS Facebook page.

Employee years of service were recognized next. Superintendent Arrott presented employees a service pin in increments of five years. Employees who had 25-40 years of service were asked to come to the stage to be recognized. Tanya Gibson, the teacher who has been with the district the longest, was recognized for her 43 years of service. Arrott showed a video and discussed the recent water damage that occurred at East Middle School. “We were very concerned about how we would be able to start school at East until we began receiving so many texts, emails, and phone calls from PCPS employees and patrons asking how they could help,” said Arrott. “Because of that, and the help of our project construction manager, Rick Scott Construction, sending in restoration crews to work round the clock, we will start on time and students will be in the restored classrooms. The district has also developed a schedule to accommodate the many employees who want to help their East teammates. There will be a few people from every site and department in the district coming to help teachers at East prepare on Monday and Tuesday so that classrooms will be ready on Wednesday, the day school starts. After all, It’s the **Wildcat Way** – Team First – Always!”

After closing remarks, Arrott introduced PCPS Association of Classroom Teachers President Zach Murray to the stage to discuss with teachers the recent Negotiations and Ratification of Negotiation Terms.

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