Welcome Students and Parents to the New School Year

It’s that time, time for our kids to load up their backpacks, put on their new school clothes and head back to school. The Sacaton Elementary School District would like to extend a warm welcome to students, parents and family members as we begin the 2016-2017 school year. We hope everyone had a safe and relaxing summer and that our students are recharged and ready to take on another engaging and interesting year of learning.

This is the perfect time to remind everyone of the Mission Statement of the Sacaton School District when it comes to educating our students. The mission statement reads:

“To provide excellence in student achievement, Community involvement and educational guidance for the future success of our children.”

And to compliment the Mission Statement is this inspirational and powerful quote to help you and your children start off the new year with the right mental outlook.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela

2nd Annual Grillin’ Up a Good Time Back-to-School BBQ

The District’s 2nd Annual Grillin’ Up a Good Time Back-to-School BBQ will be held on Thursday, August 11 at Sacaton Middle School starting at 5:00 pm. This is a great way for students, parents and staff alike to begin the new school year on a positive note. We hope you plan to attend this fun back-to-school event that will serve some of the best BBQ meat and other fixins’ in the county!

If for some reason you have not formally completed your child’s school Registration Packet forms, there will be an opportunity to do so that evening in the Middle School Library.

On behalf of all the teachers, administrators and staff, we look forward to seeing each of you here on August 11th!

“Superintendent’s Corner”

Dear Sacaton Parents, Students, Patrons, and Staff Members,

The beginning of a new school year, like the dawning of a new day, reminds us that the future holds infinite possibilities. I hope that your summer was relaxing, filled with adventures and good health because you deserve it. The opportunity to refuel over the summer is a necessary component of the important work that we do as parents, teachers, and Community members. I know that we are about to begin a great school year filled with hope, vision and excitement. As we begin this new year, I wish everyone the greatest success as we welcome over 500 students to their educational journey of 2016-2017.

This year will continue to be shaped by our efforts as outlined in the Sacaton Elementary School District Goals document. We will continue our focus on teaching and learning so that students will gain a minimum one-year of academic growth for the academic year of their enrollment.

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We also plan to enhance staff support and development in core content areas, augment individual and small group student support with additional teacher aides, and intervention support in both our elementary and middle schools. We will also continue the use of Ready Core and iReady for our K-8 math curriculum. There will be an added focus in writing at all grade levels this year. We will implement Writing Up a Storm as a core K-8 program, along with Scholastic Core and Read 180 for grades 5-8. In addition, we will continue our English Language Arts (ELA) efforts using the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Core in grades K-4. Scholastic and System 44 will continue in our ELA programming for grades 5-8.

The District is piloting a new Gifted and Talented Program under the direction of Mrs. Angela Weddle this year. We’ve added new identification assessments that will expand the number of students who qualify for this extended program. In our elementary Technology Lab we will implement new coding and programming lessons for K-4 students. Coding.org and Tynker.com will help our students learn how to create the computer language that will enable them to program and create code as a part of their technology education.

Clearly it is a year of great ambition and promise. Henry Ford once said, “If you think you can do a thing or you think you can’t, you’re right.” We have a faculty and staff that believes in the promise of educational excellence. We know that we have work to do, work that requires commitment, focus and collaboration, and we know that we will succeed.

I need not remind you of how important our jobs are as parents, caregivers, teachers and family on behalf of our children in Sacaton. Our children need our wisdom and care. My hope is that through our reinvigorated character education programs with the blending of Capturing Kids’ Hearts and P.B.I.S., we all think of our schools as places as a community of learners coming together to do interesting, consequential and culturally relevant work. As a staff of educators, we will attempt new things this year that will challenge our students and us. It is the mission of the School Board and District administration to provide the infrastructure and human capacity to support our students, staff, and Community in making great things happen.

In closing, I invite you to think about something written so long ago, but something that still resonates today. Emerson said, “Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” I am confident that we will blaze a trail filled with success and accomplishments as, together, we launch the best year yet for Sacaton Elementary School District students and their families.

I look forward to a school year filled with stories of great success and great learning. Welcome back to the 2016-17 school year.

Best wishes,

Dr. Douglas Price
Superintendent

In Memoriam

The Sacaton Elementary School District was greatly saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Mrs. Beatrice “Bea” Vezie (Diné) on July 22, 2016 in Chandler following a brief illness. Bea served as the Accounts Payable Clerk for the District since March 2010. She was very dedicated to ensuring her work was always done in an accurate, timely and professional manner. Bea loved working for Sacaton Schools and was especially fond of doing her best for the children of the district. She was very thoughtful, kind and generous in working with her colleagues in the Business Office as well as other staff from throughout the District.

The District extends its deepest sympathy and condolences to her husband Dan, the Vezie Family and all other extended family members. Our District staff is most grateful for having had the opportunity to have Bea in our lives for the past six and a half years. Bea has enriched all of our lives by knowing her. We will not forget our friend and colleague, Bea Vezie. Rest in peace, Bea, and thank you for all you did for the students and staff of the Sacaton School District.
“A Moment in Time in O’odham History”

“Famine and Starvation, 1880-1904”

In this edition of the District Newsletter and in subsequent publications, the intolerable and devastating time period in O’odham history commonly known as “The Starvation Period” will be chronicled. The effects of this horrendous time of mass starvation and drought are still being felt today after the life blood of the Pima people, the Gila River, failed to flow anymore beginning in 1895. Here is a look at what happened to the hard-working, industrious and highly successful farmers of southcentral Arizona (the O’odham people) who were reduced to subsistence farming and for many, starvation during the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In 1881, President Chester A. Arthur added lands to the Pima reservation. The following year, he issued another Executive Order, doubling the size of the reservation from 180,000 to 360,000 acres. However well-intentioned, the government’s actions failed to address the longstanding concerns of the Pima people – the lack of water. It was water more than land the O’odham needed.

While individual families still maintained fields and each village continued operating irrigation ditches, there was no water with which to irrigate. While Upper Gila River Valley diversions by non-Indian farmers continued, the death knell of the Pima was the completion of the Florence Canal. The latter decades of the nineteenth century proved to be even more challenging to the Pima. Government neglect of their water rights grew more pronounced. The O’odham people were headed towards the years of starvation.

By 1880, the surface flow of the Gila River was insufficient for Pima agriculture with many families lacking even domestic water. As a result, half of the Pima moved off the reservation to work in order that they survive. Pima elder Chir-Purtke reflected on these difficulties, noting the Pima were unable “to irrigate all our fields. We were forced to abandon them little by little, until ... we were left high and dry.”

The construction of the Florence Canal in 1886 diverted nearly all the remaining surface flow of the Gila River above the reservation. Even the United States Geological Survey admitted the natural flow of the Gila was “all appropriated now by the white settlers above the reservation.” More farmers in the Upper Gila River Valley diverted additional water, increasing their take of the river from 13.57% to 41% of the flow between 1878 and 1910. The Pima were on the brink of social and economic displacement seeing their share of river water decline 62% between 1866 and 1910. Scores of Pima farms were abandoned. Others were “only partially cultivated, yielding scant and uncertain returns.” Using available surface water, the Pima grew enough food on which to subsist, but they were completely marginalized from the local economy.

The lack of water from the Gila River followed by a period of drought would make conditions even worse in the ensuing years to a point of desperation. This incredibly sad story of human deprivation will continue in the September issue of the District Newsletter.

Family Engagement

It is important for both educators and parents alike to remember that the field of education is a people-oriented business that holds engaging people as one of its core values. Teachers, para-professionals, administrators and all school staff are expected to embrace good “customer service” skills when interacting with parents and families. This is absolutely vital in establishing good relationships between family members and staff. In terms of family engagement in the Sacaton School District, the culture surrounding this important educational component revolves around four key values:

- All families will be treated with respect by everyone at the school
- All families will be seen as a potential source of valuable expertise
- All staff will take personal responsibility to engage parents/families
- All staff must believe that student performance can be improved with family engagement

Students Selected as Chief Azul Scholar Award Winners

Two students from the Sacaton School District were selected and recognized this past May as recipients of the 2016 Chief Azul Scholar Award. Alayna Mark (4th grade) from the elementary school and Azaria Enos (5th grade) from the middle school, received this prestigious award granted to students that show
exceptional character traits and citizenship. Candidates are nominated by their schools based on criteria such as attendance, desire to achieve, letters of reference and positive behavior.

The review of applicants for this illustrious award encompassed the evaluation of many applications from local schools on Gila River as well as many that are located off the Community. The District is proud of these two students, but also realizes that their success not only lies within each of them, but also parents and family members who helped them realize their potential on a daily basis. We have high expectations for these young ladies in their academic achievement as they prepare for high school and hopefully college.

**Students Shine at International Robotic Competition**

Some fifty-one students from Sacaton Middle School performed exceedingly well in the 2016 Roborave International Robotic Competition May 6-8 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Sacaton students first began receiving instruction in September of last year and competed against over 600 students from thirteen countries, vying in five of the eight different competitions.

Listed below are highlights of the Sacaton successes at the international robotics event.

**EVENT: Elementary A-mazing** (robots timed running through a 15’ long, raised track) {elementary & middle school-aged students}

- 8th Place for Sun Devils Team (Lightfoot Howard, Brian Kelly, Anthony Braveheart)
- 9th Place for Batman #2 Team (Illianna Miguel and Danielle Whitman)

Four other Sacaton teams placed 20th, 22nd, 33rd, and 41st out of a total of 46 teams

**EVENT: Elementary Jousting** (robots imitating a knight on a horse with each team’s robot trying to knock off the opponent’s knight) [elementary & middle school-aged students]

Four Sacaton teams placed 37th, 38th, 39th, and 40th out of a total of 50 teams

**EVENT: Middle School Alpine** (robots attempting to climb a one-meter length ramp positioned at a 60 degree incline in which three different friction surfaces were used)

The Gila Bots Team attempted to qualify in this first-ever event

**EVENT: Middle School Fire Fighters** (robots attempting to extinguish four burning candles) {most difficult event at the completion with primarily high school and post high school students competing}

The Toothless Team qualified for this event (Lluvia Rios, Alicia Pedro, Ayana Lewis)

The Fyre Fly Team attempted to qualify

**EVENT: Aerial Drones** (drones were flown through an obstacle course including both static and moving hoops, pylons, and landing the drone in a strong crosswind) {Sacaton teams were combined with high school teams with a total of 26 teams competing}

- 5th Place for 3 Braves Team (Zachary Lewis, JaQuar Alewine, Martees June)
- 7th Place for Glado’s Team (Damien Encinas, Mickey Pasquale, Jayce Makil, Darrius Ameelyenah)

10th Place for Red Bird Team (Isaiah Francisco)

Four other Sacaton teams placed 13th, 14th, 22nd, and 24th respectively

**NOTE:** When an Aerial Drones competition was held strictly among middle school-aged students, Sacaton competitors performed very, very well. (See below)

- 1st Place for 3 Braves Team
- 2nd Place for Glado’s Team
- 4th Place for Red Bird Team
- 7th Place for Bad Pony Team (Quincy Randall)
- 8th Place for Delta Force Team (Jacob Ochoa, Josiah Ochoa, Damien Pahona)

Two other Sacaton teams placed 15th and 16th respectively
Middle School Students Create Community Street Signs

Have you noticed the new street signs recently installed around the Community during your travels? If you have, thank a Sacaton Middle School student. Some twenty-four fifth through eighth graders cut, sanded, stenciled, and painted a large number of wooden street name signs to be placed on widely-traveled roads throughout Districts 2, 3, 4, and 5. The idea came from District bus driver and teacher’s aide, Mrs. Barbara Wilson who has worked in the Community for 13 years and still has difficulty at times navigating the reservation due to the lack of street signs. Historically, directions for any student’s home, public building or Tribal office has always been based on landmarks rather than on signage. This can prove to be very challenging, especially for people from outside the Community who are not familiar with the area in trying to locate a specific place. The signs will benefit the Community as well as those from outside Gila River in more readily locating their destination. In regard to sign visibility at night ... no problem. Students applied a layer of glow-in-the-dark paint so the signs are readable at night.

The District is proud of the time and effort students placed in this hands-on project which was both educational as well as being a productive and beneficial Community service project. It is hoped that there will be more engaging projects like this for our students during the school year as part of their overall educational experience.

New Teachers for 2016-2017 School Year

There will be eleven new teachers in the classrooms this year in Sacaton Public Schools. The District extends a warm welcome to each and looks forward to them providing great learning and high student achievement.

In this newsletter, four of the new teachers will be featured with the remaining highlighted in upcoming issues of the District newsletter.

Kristin Kennedy - Sacaton Elementary School welcomes Mrs. Kristin Kennedy as the new music teacher. Mrs. Kennedy is excited to begin working with students in providing them with a well-rounded education in music.

Mrs. Kennedy attended elementary and junior high school in Elmhurst, Illinois before her family moved to Casa Grande where she graduated from Casa Grande Union High School. She then attended the University of Arizona where she majored in music education and minored in Italian. While at the university, Kristin was a part of The Pride of Arizona - the 250+ member University of Arizona Marching Band in which she played both clarinet and trumpet. During her freshman year in the band, Kristin was voted Rookie of the Year - an honor for which she is very proud. The Pride of Arizona Marching Band was named one of the top five marching bands in the country in 2009 by the College Band Directors National Association.

Prior to her employment with the District, Mrs. Kennedy taught music for three years at the American Leadership Academy (charter school) in Mesa where she also taught band to 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students. Kennedy additionally taught dance and color guard. Previously she was a substitute teacher for two years in the Casa Grande Elementary School District.

Mrs. Kennedy is married and has a three-year-old daughter, Rylie. She and her family reside in Mesa where in their free time enjoy kayaking and riding jet skis, or doing anything that is water related.

Welcome, Mrs. Kennedy!

Michelle Covarrubias - A new member of the Sacaton Elementary School staff this year is Mrs. Michelle Covarrubias who will assume the role of Elementary School Behavior Coach. In this position Mrs. Covarrubias will handle all behavior and disciplinary matters.

A native of the Albany, New York area, Mrs. Covarrubias obtained a BA Degree in Elementary Education from the State University of New York at Oswego and an MA Degree in Educational Leadership from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) - the most respected professional certification available in education designed to develop, retain and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide. Completion of National Board Certification signifies that teachers have voluntarily gone much further than the basic licensure requirements to teach in each state. NBCTs have developed and demonstrated the advanced knowledge, skills and practices required of an outstanding educator.

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**New Teachers for 2016-2017 (Michelle Covarrubias) Continued ....**

Covarrubias is a veteran educator of 26 years and leaves the Roosevelt School District in Phoenix to join the Sacaton staff. She is fluent in Spanish and has traveled extensively throughout Mexico. She is married and has one adult-aged child who is a student at Arizona State University. In her spare time she enjoys playing with the family’s pet cats and dog, and serves as an Adjunct Faculty member at South Mountain Community College where she teaches various education classes. Welcome, Mrs. Covarrubias!

**Karen Zagami** - After teaching thirteen years at Blackwater Community School, Mrs. Karen Zagami joins the Sacaton Elementary School faculty as a Special Education teacher. She will be working in the inclusion of Kindergarten through second grade students into the regular education classroom.

Zagami spent her formative years in Foxborough, Massachusetts before entering Southern Methodist University where she earned a BA Degree in English while minoring in education. She would later obtain a MA Degree in Special Education from Grand Canyon University in Phoenix and recently completed coursework as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst through the University of Massachusetts Lowell. The focus of this program is to train educators in student behavior modification, and particularly for those diagnosed with autism.

Mrs. Zagami lives with her husband in Casa Grande along with their basset hound. They enjoy travel, camping, biking, swimming, and many other outdoor activities. Welcome, Mrs. Zagami!

**David Roman** - The District is excited to have Mr. David Roman join the ranks as the new Technology Integrated Specialist. In this position Mr. Roman will be working with teachers and students at both schools in integrating technology with the curriculum in all subject areas.

Roman grew up in the metropolitan New York City area. He obtained a BA Degree in American History with a minor in Early Colonial American History and Russian and East European History from Colorado State University. He then earned an MA Degree in American History from the University of Connecticut while later completing Post Baccalaureate coursework to earn an Elementary Education Certificate from the University of Arizona.

David spent seven years teaching fifth grade and ESL in the nearby Toltec Elementary School District followed by five years heading up the Gifted and Talented Program. He then served seven years as the District Technology Director before leaving for the Phoenix Elementary School District where he taught in the Gifted and Talented Program for two years. Roman has spent the past six years teaching technology, math, history, school improvement and gifted classes to educators throughout the county for the Pinal County Education Service Agency.

Roman is married and has a 16-year-old son. His wife has a very similar position to his at Arizona State University where she instructs graduate students and professors in integrating technology into college classes.

David and his extended family are keenly aware of the various terrorist attacks that have occurred in the U.S. and around the world as his brother is a survivor of both attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City - the first occurring with the truck bomb detonation under the North Tower in 1993 and the second, of course, on September 11, 2001 when two commercial airliners were flown into the North and South Towers respectively that killed nearly 3,000 people.

The Sacaton School District extends a warm welcome to Mr. David Roman!

**Brad Pico Appointed to State Committee**

The Sacaton School District is proud and would like to congratulate Mr. Brad Pico, District Federal & State Programs Coordinator, on being appointed to the prestigious state Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title I Committee of Practitioners. It is an honor for the District to have a staff member on this statewide advisory board which will also be beneficial in alerting the District to federal program obligations that may be handed down with the upcoming change in administration in Washington later in November.

As a member of the committee, Mr. Pico will serve a three-year term in helping advise the Arizona Department of Education’s Title I Office on major rules and policies prior to their issuance.

The committee is currently scheduled to meet five times during the 2016-2017 school year at various school districts around the state. Congratulations, Mr. Pico!
How Can I Help My Child Succeed in School???

As a brand new school year begins, there are undoubtedly many parents asking themselves, “How can I help my child succeed in school?” Here are seven things you can do this year to ensure your child is successful, both academically and socially, in school.

TEACH YOUR CHILD TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR ACTIONS AND THEIR SCHOOLWORK

Read aloud with your child (elementary students) every night for at least 15-20 minutes

Help your child with his/her homework every night

Ask your child about school and encourage them to talk about their day

Make sure your child is getting plenty of sleep and is ready for school each day

Stay involved and feel free to contact your child’s teacher with any questions or concerns

DO NOT TALK NEGATIVELY ABOUT YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER OR SCHOOL

Summer Renovation Projects

The summer months are typically when most school districts take on necessary renovation and construction projects while students and staff are not on campus. This was the case for the Sacaton School District this summer, as well as numerous projects, both large and small, were completed. Here is a synopsis of what was completed on both the elementary and middle school campuses during June and July.

Elementary School: • New carpet was laid in many classrooms
  • New ceiling tile and LED lighting fixtures were installed in many classrooms
  • Several classrooms received a fresh new coat of paint
  • A stove and sink were installed in a Special Needs classroom to facilitate the teaching of Life Skills classes
  • The Pre-School playground was renovated with the installation of a rubberized play/activity surface and the removal of sand, the installation of a shade structure, and the installation of a 4’ high fence around the playground area

Middle School: • The exterior of the gymnasium received a fresh new coat of paint
  • New carpet was laid in several classrooms
  • Room C3 and C6 (very large room with two entrances) was divided into two Rooms
  • G.R.B.C. ?????????????????????
  • Parking lot ??????????????????
  • The administrative area and library were reroofed

The District would like to thank Mr. Kevin Allen, Facilities Director and his staff for successfully completing all these projects during the summer.