

Kudos to school classified staff

Written by Supt. Bret Miles, Holyoke School Dist. Re-1J

When people think of schools, two things immediately jump to mind: students and teachers. The core mission of our school district is to prepare students with the necessary skills to contribute to our democracy and to provide for themselves.

However, to make teaching and learning happen on a daily basis requires the efforts of many others. In fact, over 40 percent of the employees in our school district are not teachers. These hardworking individuals make up what we call our classified workforce.

The bus driver is the first interaction of the day for many of our students. This person is not only charged with getting our children to and from school safely, but also with setting a tone for the day. If the first interaction of the day is pleasant, welcoming and warm, we have drastically increased the likelihood that the student will be ready to learn an hour later when the first bell rings.

When students are hungry, they are not learning at their full potential. This research is very clear on this topic and was so compelling, that schools initiated breakfast programs. Our brains will not perform higher functions if basic needs are not being met.

Like the bus driver, the obligation for our cooks does not end there. They also get to contribute to the environment in which the students dine and have the opportunity to be yet another adult making sure our students get the message that we are glad they are in school today.

I don't think there is a teacher around who doesn't understand the impact good custodians make. When the room is clean there are fewer roadblocks to learning. The custodians take care of the flickering light bulb that is distracting, wipe the computer monitors clean, empty the trash and make sure the board is cleaned nightly and ready for teachers in the morning.

I know we all noticed the shiny floors, clean walls and sparkling building on back-to-school night.

There are also many classified employees who directly touch instruction. Commonly referred to as teacher aides, these individuals save teachers valuable time by making copies and cutting out shapes. But they do so much more.

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Many of our classified staff members are teaching small reading groups and working one-on-one with students on all subjects. They are the critical link to lowering our teacher-to-student ratio, providing more opportunities for individualized attention.

Often, the first people parents get to know in our schools are the secretaries. They are the ones who check up on sick kids, get them off to the right place after school when plans change or even get our kids registered in the school. I know from personal experience that the warm reception of a secretary on the first encounter has a lasting impression on new students and their families.

There are many classified job categories and I won't try to highlight all of them. However, if the lawn gets mowed, computers stay connected, bills and people get paid, phone calls get returned, meetings get scheduled, papers get filed, water fountains get fixed and brakes get checked, then a classified staff member is to thank.

In recognition of their efforts, Holyoke School District Board of Education passed a resolution recognizing Oct. 11-17 as Classified Employees Appreciation Week.

Please join us in letting some of our classified employees know that you have noticed the work they do to make it possible for our students to learn each day.