

# NEWSLETTER

## Families, Schools, Community—One Team

*Superintendent Mekelle Neathery*

As the age-old saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” At Virginia CUSD 64, we believe it also takes a team—families, educators, and community members—working side by side to help students reach their full potential. When we come together, students gain the support, encouragement, and guidance they need to succeed.

As we finish our first quarter together, we encourage families to attend our upcoming Parent Teacher Conferences, scheduled for the evenings of October 21st and 23rd. More information will be shared with families soon, but we hope every parent takes this opportunity to be an active member of their child’s team by attending.

In our district, success comes from working together. The first point of contact for any questions or concerns is always your child’s teacher, sponsor, or coach. From there, our process ensures families are connected to the right people—principals, support staff, or the superintendent—so that we can be focused on what matters most: supporting students.

We also want to highlight parent organizations within our District that further support our students and families through their efforts. Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), and Sports Booster Club each add something unique to the Redbird experience. If you are looking for ways to be more involved, we encourage you to connect with these organizations or reach out to your child’s teacher or building administration for more information about volunteer opportunities. Every hand makes a difference, and your involvement helps strengthen the entire Redbird team.

As a team, we create the best possible environment for every student to learn, grow, and be successful.

Together, we are the village. Together, we are Redbirds.



*Community members, parents, and staff working together to develop our Redbird Ready Framework during the Spring of 2025*



*PAC feedback led to the development of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade orientation session hosted by student-leaders and staff last April.*



*Virginia PTO members who volunteered to assist with the elementary end of the year blast enjoyed by all of our students the last week of school.*

## Tech Tips for Families

Tech Liaison Linda Brown

### Help Your Children Use Technology Appropriately:

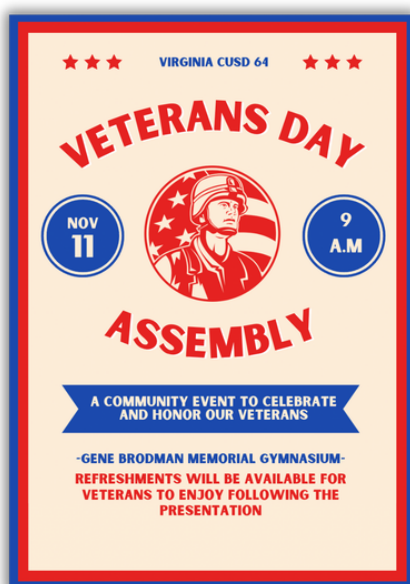
There can be two temptations as a parent when it comes to technology: one is to see it as negative and ban it completely, and the second is to ignore the dangers and bury your head in the sand. Neither approach will equip your child effectively. Like most things in life, technology can be used for good or for bad. As a parent, you can help your child to be aware of the difference. With you as their guide they can learn to overcome any challenges and make good choices in the way they interact online.

## Bark for Schools

Bark for Schools was developed as a response to the tragic Parkland shooting, as a way to help schools protect students online at no cost to them or their communities. It has become the trusted partner of 3,700 school districts.

Bark monitors for signs of potential issues such as: Cyberbullying, Threats of violence  
Danger to themselves or others.

## Photos of Veterans Wanted



Virginia CUSD 64 is collecting photos of local veterans (including relatives of students/staff) for our Veterans Day Program. Please send photos with the veteran's name, rank, and branch to Jeff Bennett (jbennett@virginia64.com) by Friday, Nov. 7, 2025. If previously submitted, no need to resend.



## Calendar of Events

**OCTOBER 4, 2025**

HOMECOMING DANCE

**OCTOBER 6, 2025**

HEARING AND VISION SCREENINGS

**OCTOBER 8, 2025**

WALK TO SCHOOL DAY

**OCTOBER 13 2025**

NO SCHOOL

**OCTOBER 17, 2025**

END OF 1st QUARTER

**OCTOBER 21, 2025**

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

**OCTOBER 23, 2025**

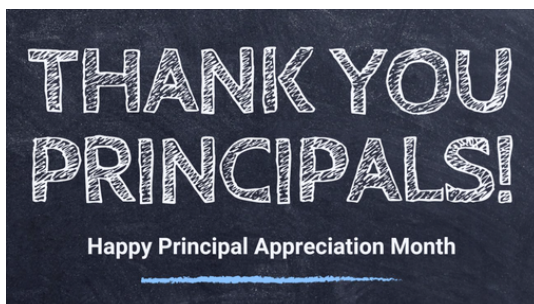
PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

**OCTOBER 24, 2025**

NO SCHOOL

**OCTOBER 31, 2025**

PTO TRUNK OR TREAT



October is National Principals Month, and in Illinois we celebrate Principal Appreciation Week, October 20–24, 2025, with Principal Appreciation Day on Friday, October 24. This annual, state-endorsed recognition honors the dedication of principals, assistant principals, and deans who lead our schools with vision and care. We encourage everyone—students, staff, parents, and community members—to join us in thanking our principals for their leadership and commitment to student success.

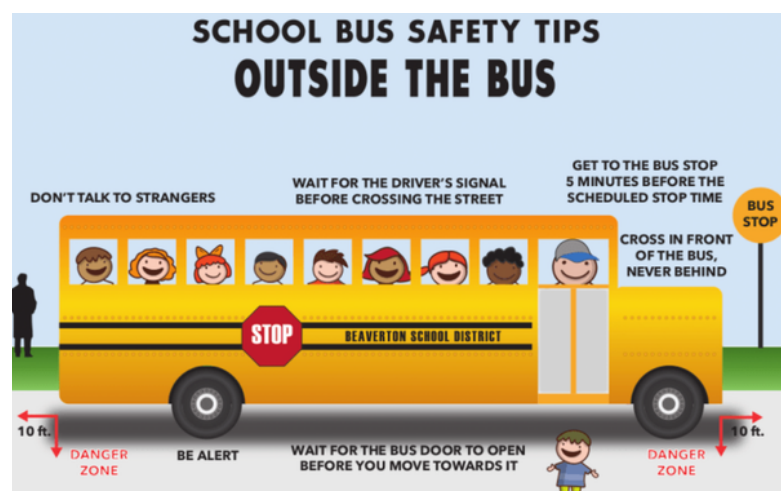


*Mrs. Paula Stewart,  
Elementary Principal*



*Mr. Matt Owens  
Jr. Sr. High School Principal*

### School Bus Safety Week is October 20th-24th



Graphics <https://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/departments/transportation/school-bus-safety>



*Our Custodial Team:  
Ty Gebhardt and Jeff Bell*

Every October 2, schools across the nation recognize National Custodian Appreciation Day. Custodians play an essential role in keeping our learning environments clean, safe, and welcoming for students, staff, and families. Their hard work often happens behind the scenes, but their impact is seen and felt every day. Please take a moment to thank and celebrate the custodial staff who help make our schools shine.



We extend our deepest gratitude to Gene Brunk for his years of dedicated service to our schools and community. His last day with the District was Friday, September 26, and we wish him the very best in his next chapter. Thank you for all you have done—you will be greatly missed!

*Thank you*

# Homecoming Hall Decorating 2025



On Friday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, Junior and Senior high students spent the morning of our SIP day to decorate doors and hallway for the up coming Homecoming Week. Hallways were decorated in the themes of different decades. Classes worked collaboratively to compete and promote our school culture. It was revealed at the Pep Rally that 8<sup>th</sup> grade and Seniors were the big winners. Also, at the Pep Rally 8-12 students competed In games, danced, and cheered. Having a student body that is proud of their school is something to celebrate and what better time to celebrate than Homecoming. Homecoming week included multiple sporting events, themed days, 9-12 field day, a parade and of course the Homecoming dance.



*This month members of the junior high and high school student councils met to begin working upon leadership skills and how they can impact their schools through their actions.*

## EVERY DAY COUNTS

**Grades 6–12 are competing for the fewest tardies to win a pizza party during the week of September 29 – October 3.**

**Get to class. Get a pizza.**

NEWSLETTER

## What Is Leader in Me—and Why It Matters for Your Teen

Middle and high school are full of exciting opportunities and real challenges. That's why it is so important for students to learn how to lead their lives with confidence, purpose, and integrity—and why we are proud to be a Leader in Me School.

Leader in Me is more than just a leadership program—it is a schoolwide way of thinking and learning. It is built on strong, lasting ideas about how to be our best selves and work well with others. Leader in Me helps students grow into life-ready leaders. That means developing the skills and mindsets to make good choices, handle stress, set and reach goals, and build healthy relationships—skills that matter just as much as academics.

At our school, we believe:

Everyone can be a leader.

Everyone has genius.

Change starts with me.

Empower students to lead their own learning.

Educators and families partner to develop the whole person.

These beliefs guide how we teach, how students learn, and how we work together as a school. With Leader in Me, your student will take on leadership roles, set personal and academic goals, lead service projects, reflect on how they want to grow, and so much more. These experiences help them build confidence and strong character—things they will need for life after high school graduation.

We invite you to be part of this journey. Ask your student how they're showing leadership at school or what goals they are working on. You might be surprised by how much they are learning and leading every day.

Thank you for learning up with us to help every student see their value, use their voice, and prepare for a successful future.

# Virginia Elementary School

Principal Paula Belobrajdic-Stewart

## Meet the Staff: Miss Nicole Johnson



Hello! My name is Nikki Johnson, and I'm excited to share a little bit about myself. I have been teaching for 26 years. This is my 21st year in Virginia. I believe that learning should be both challenging and fun. I love doing hands-on activities and projects. I love bringing real-world experiences into the classroom to make learning meaningful.

I have been around education my entire life. My father and mother were both teachers. Therefore, I knew from a young age that this is what I wanted to do. My favorite part of being an educator is seeing the moment when something "clicks" for a student—it reminds me why I love what I do.

I earned my bachelor and master degree from Western Illinois University, and over the years I've had the privilege of teaching 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th combined classroom, and PE. and Science to 7th and 8th graders. I have also had the opportunity to coach Junior High basketball. My teaching philosophy centers on creating a safe, welcoming classroom where every student feels valued and encouraged to grow.

Outside of school, I enjoy watching sports, playing golf, spending time with family and friends, and going hiking in National Parks. I am a die heart fan of the Duke Blue Devils, Dallas Cowboys, and Chicago Cubs. I'm grateful to be part of this community and look forward to continue working with families, colleagues, and students to make this a wonderful year of learning and growth. I love being a member of the Redbird family.

Once a Redbird always a Redbird!



### EVERY DAY COUNTS

**Students who were more frequently absent in any year of elementary school demonstrated lower academic, executive function, and social emotional outcomes**

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

## Virginia Jr-Sr High School

### Rising Above: Junior High's SOAR Initiative

Principal Matt Owens

The Junior High is proud to continue its SOAR program—which stands for Self-Motivation, Optimal Effort, Accountability of Attitude, and Respect for Self and Others. The program recognizes students who go above and beyond to make a positive impact on our school community. Some examples of ways that students can earn points include assisting classmates, being punctual, using work time productively, and demonstrating good citizenship. Students quickly see that small acts of responsibility and kindness make a big difference.

At the start of the year, students are placed into one of four “Houses,” themed this year around the four seasons. Teachers and staff award points when they “catch” students doing good. Each month, the house with the most points earns a homework credit as recognition.

The year ends with a special project: students write letters to request donations from local businesses and community members for a SOAR auction. At the auction, students can spend their points on these donated items—celebrating their efforts and reinforcing the value of hard work, respect, and community support.



### Meet the Staff: Mr. Rob Hymes



With 27 years of teaching experience, Mr. Hymes brings a wealth of knowledge and passion to Virginia Schools. Over the years, he has taught 4th and 5th grade, ESL/Bilingual Education in Beardstown, and now takes on an exciting new role teaching 6th Grade Orientation and ELA, ESL supports, and High School Spanish. Spanish has been a lifelong passion, first developed through high school and college courses, and further strengthened by friendships with many Spanish-speaking mentors.

A lifelong resident of Beardstown, Mr. Hymes lives with his wife—who also works at Virginia Schools—and their three cats. Outside the classroom, favorite pastimes include reading, bicycling, antiquing, fishing, traveling, and working around the yard. They are also an active member of First Christian Church and enjoy time with family and friends. One especially meaningful moment this year is teaching the child of a former student.