

# NEWSLETTER

## Redbird Ready Our Call to Action for 2025–26

*Superintendent Mekelle Neathery*



As we begin a new school year, Virginia CUSD 64 is excited to launch our Portrait of a Graduate initiative, known as Redbird Ready: Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow. This vision was created last spring with input from community members, parents, staff, and students, who came together to define what qualities our graduates need to thrive in the future while honoring our community's traditions.

The result of this work is a commitment to five essential competencies that define our graduates: Driven Learners, Effective Communicators, Empathetic Leaders, Innovative Problem-Solvers, and Responsible Contributors. These qualities reflect both the values of our community and the skills students will need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

This year, our call to action is clear: everything we do—our teaching, programs, and activities—will connect back to these competencies. Staff will be focused upon these competencies during our scheduled SIP days this year, while student leadership teams will provide their voices to guide how Redbird Ready comes to life. Together, we will ensure that every student not only learns today but is prepared to lead tomorrow. We look forward to an exciting school year ahead and to building even stronger partnerships with our community as we bring this shared vision to life.

## Introducing Our New Team Members

**Maggie Allen** - Kindergarten Teacher  
**Jefferson Bell** - Custodian  
**Paula Belobrajdic-Stewart** - Elementary Principal  
**Christina Brunk** - Cook  
**Ashley Grubaugh** - Title I Aide  
**Jennifer Knoop** - 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Teacher  
**Rita Lindley** - Paraprofessional  
**Kim Nelson** - Parent Educator  
**Jessica Orr** - Cook  
**Jeremiah Roberts** - High School English Teacher

*Visit the Staff Directory on our Website for a  
Full Listing of our Faculty and Staff*



# Tech Tips for Families

Tech Liaison Linda Brown

Parents today are in uncharted territory. The digital age has changed the landscape, and the challenge is to find a way to equip your children to build great connections, make wise choices and develop resiliency in dealing with harmful or inappropriate content and contact. Dealing with the issue of your child's screen time and online behavior doesn't have to be daunting. In fact, it is likely to involve many of the approaches that you use in other areas of parenting. Throughout the course of the school year, tips for helping your child use technology positively and safely will be shared in this newsletter.

## Bark for Schools



Bark for Schools is available at no cost to all K-12 schools across the U.S. Bark for Schools provides monitoring for Google Workspace. It is an invaluable safety net for schools, their faculties, and their students. The monitoring service not only detects potential issues but also helps the administration better understand their student body. The product analyzes the Google products for worrisome content whether the student uses their account on a school or personal device. More information about Bark for Schools will be forthcoming in future newsletters.



## Picture Day

Date: Friday, September 19  
Order online at <https://inter-state.com/>  
Prek-5 Order Code: 0099VGF  
Grades 6-12 Order Code: 0105SPF  
Forms will also be sent home with students prior to this day.

## Calendar of Events

**September 19, 2025**

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Midterm

**September 19, 2025**

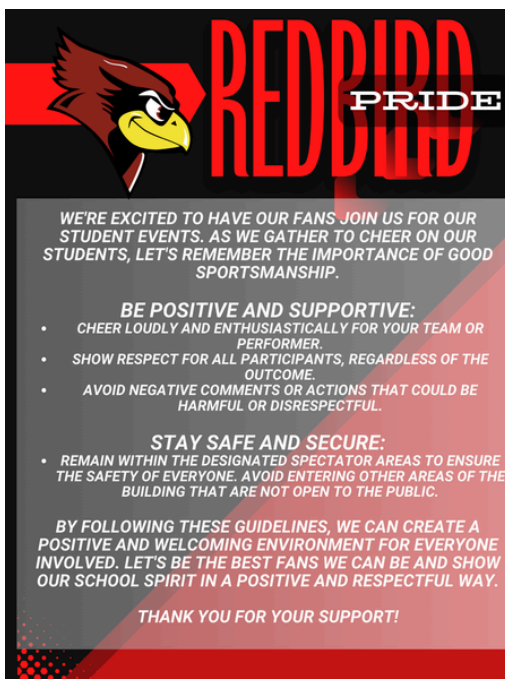
Picture Day

**September 26, 2025**

11:20 a.m. Dismissal SIP Day

**September 28-October 4, 2025**

Homecoming Week



## Redbird Pride Reminder

As we cheer on our Redbirds this season, let's show our Redbird Pride by being positive, respectful, and supportive. Cheer loud, avoid negative comments, and stay in designated spectator areas to keep everyone safe.

Together, we can create a fun and welcoming environment that reflects the best of our school spirit!

## Recognize Outstanding Redbird Staff & Volunteers

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is now accepting nominations for the 2026 Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Awards, a program that honors outstanding teachers, administrators, school personnel, and volunteers who make a difference in our schools.

Any person or organization may submit a nomination, and eligible candidates will then be invited to apply. Nominations are due by October 1, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. This is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the incredible dedication of our staff members and community volunteers.

To learn more about the awards and to submit a nomination, visit the ISBE Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year webpage. <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/teacher-of-the-year.aspx>. Questions can be directed to [awards@isbe.net](mailto:awards@isbe.net) or by calling 217-782-6811.


Let's take this opportunity to celebrate the people who go above and beyond for our students every day!



## EVERY DAY COUNTS

Every Day Counts, a section in our newsletter focused on the importance of student attendance. Our district is committed to reducing chronic absenteeism by aligning with Illinois policies and sharing practical ways families can support consistent routines at home. September is a critical time to set habits that last all year, and by working together we can show students that showing up matters—because Every Day Counts.

## Our Commitment to Student and Staff Safety



**STANDARD RESPONSE PROTOCOL**

**INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS**

Our school has adopted The "I Love U Guys" Foundation's Standard Response Protocol (SRP). Students and staff will be training, practicing, and drilling the protocol.

**COMMON LANGUAGE**

The Standard Response Protocol (SRP) is based on an all-hazards approach as opposed to individual scenarios. Like the Incident Command System (ICS), SRP utilizes clear common language while allowing for flexibility in protocol.

The premise is simple - there are five specific actions that can be performed during an incident. When communicating these, the action is labeled with a "Term of Art" and is then followed by a "Directive." Execution of the action is performed by active participants, including students, staff, teachers and first responders. The SRP is based on the following actions: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate, and Shelter.


**LOCKDOWN**  
"Locks, Lights, Out of Sight"

**Students are trained to:**

- Move away from sight
- Maintain silence
- Do not open the door

**Adults and staff are trained to:**

- Recover students from hallway if possible
- Lock the classroom door
- Turn out the lights
- Move away from sight
- Maintain silence
- Do not open the door
- Prepare to evade or defend




**EVACUATE**  
"To a Location"

**Students are trained to:**

- Leave stuff behind if required to
- Follow instructions

**Adults and staff are trained to:**

- Bring roll sheet and Go Bag (unless instructed not to bring anything with them, dependent on reason for evacuation)
- Lead students to Evacuation location
- Account for students and adults
- Report injuries or problems using Red Card/Green Card method.



**SHELTER**  
"State Hazard and Safety Strategy"

**Hazards might include:**

- Tornado
- Hazmat
- Earthquake
- Tsunami

**Safety Strategies might include:**


- Evacuate to shelter area
- Seal the room
- Drop, cover and hold
- Get to high ground

**Students are trained to:**

- Appropriate Hazards and Safety Strategies

**Adults and staff are trained to:**

- Appropriate Hazards and Safety Strategies
- Accounting for students and adults
- Report injuries or problems using Red Card/Green Card method.




**HOLD**  
"In Your Classroom or Area"

**Students are trained to:**

- Clear the hallways and remain in their area or room until the "All Clear" is announced

**Adults and staff are trained to:**

- Do business as usual
- Close and lock the door
- Account for students and adults
- Do business as usual




**SECURE**  
"Get Inside, Lock Outside Doors"


**Students are trained to:**

- Return to inside of building
- Do business as usual

**Adults and staff are trained to:**

- Bring everyone indoors
- Lock the outside doors
- Increase situational awareness
- Account for students and adults
- Do business as usual





The safety and well-being of our students and staff remain our highest priority. As part of this commitment, we are implementing the Standard Response Protocols (SRP), a universal language that allows us to communicate clearly with first responders and respond effectively during crisis situations. This shift provides consistency for our schools and enhances our ability to keep everyone safe.

In addition, the Board has continued to invest in safety measures, including updated video surveillance equipment, improvements to our intercom system, and the use of Crisis Go, a new communication platform. Each year we review and strengthen our procedures in partnership with local law enforcement and first responders to ensure our schools are prepared.

As we continue this important work, we recognize that safety is more than preparing for potential crises. Our efforts also focus on supporting the daily social, emotional, and mental health needs of our students and staff. By addressing the whole child, we strive to create a learning environment where every student feels secure, supported, and ready to succeed.

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact your building administration.



# From the Elementary Principal's Desk

Principal Paula  
Belobrajdic-Stewart



## Goodies with Grandparents

Save the Date for our PTO's Annual Goodies with Grandparents on Friday, September 26 @ 7:15 am-7:45 am in our elementary gym. Plan to join your grandchildren and take a tour of their classroom! We look forward to sharing some donuts and juice together. Thank you to our PTO for hosting this special event.



# HAPPY TO BE BACK

## Meet the Staff Mrs. Paula Belobrajdic-Stewart

This year we welcome Mrs. Belobrajdic-Stewart as our Virginia Elementary Principal. Mrs. Belobrajdic-Stewart brings more than 25 years of experience in education and a strong commitment to fostering positive, collaborative learning environments for students, staff, and families. Throughout her career, Mrs. Belobrajdic-Stewart has served in a variety of roles in both general and special education. She has been a dedicated classroom teacher, an advocate for students with multiple disabilities, and a leader in professional development for educators. Most recently, she served as a Regional Specialist for the Behavior Assessment Training (BAT) Project, where she developed and delivered training within the framework of Positive Interventions and Behavior Support.

She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from MacMurray College in Jacksonville; an LBSI endorsement from the University of St. Francis in Joliet; and earned her Master's degree in Educational Leadership and Administrative certification from the University of Illinois at Springfield.

Married for 36 years to her junior high school sweetheart, Mrs. Belobrajdic-Stewart has four grown children and three grandchildren and resides in South Jacksonville, Illinois.



## EVERY DAY COUNTS

**By 6th grade, chronic absence  
becomes a leading indicator that a  
student will drop out of high school**

AttendanceWorks.org

# From the JR/SR High Principal's Desk

Principal Matt Owens

## Meet the Staff Mr. Nathan Chilton

Mr. Nathan Chilton is in his sixth year of teaching and his first year teaching high school math at Virginia. He previously taught fifth grade at Virginia and spent four years teaching at Gard Elementary in Beardstown. A resident of Virginia since 2021, Mr. Chilton earned his teaching degree from Illinois College in 2020.

He has family in Ashland and Pleasant Plains and attends West Side Christian Church in Springfield. Outside the classroom, he enjoys exploring how things work through hands-on hobbies such as solving puzzles, knot-tying, origami, carpentry, biking, hiking, and even finishing houses. Mr. Chilton is excited to take on the challenge of high school math and looks forward to building connections with his students and colleagues.



## EVERY DAY COUNTS

**Students that are  
chronically absent  
are 4 times more  
likely to not graduate  
from high school.**

U.S. Department of  
Education

## Farm Progress Show

Virginia High School juniors and seniors enrolled in Industrial Arts and Agriculture courses visited the Decatur Farm Progress Show on Wednesday, August 27th. Throughout the day, students visited vendors from around the world and learned about the newest technology in production agriculture practices. We want to thank Jamie and Todd Behrends of Country Financial and the Industrial Arts Club for their support by covering the entry fee for our students this year.



## Homecoming 2025

Since 2016, the student councils of Virginia, Triopia, and Meredosia have come together to share one homecoming week filled with tradition and school spirit. The three districts collaborate on themes, spirit days, field day activities, and the crowning of each district's king and queen. Festivities begin with a Sunday parade, followed by a week of spirited competitions such as powder puff football, boys' volleyball, field day games, and pep rallies, with each school taking turns hosting events. This year's homecoming will be celebrated September 29–October 4. Meredosia will host the parade, while Triopia will host both the field day and the dance. Students, staff, and community members alike look forward to another exciting week of Redbird pride, tradition, and celebration across all three districts.