



# Goodhue County Education District

Enhancing educational opportunities through interdistrict cooperation

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## Important Upcoming Dates

- **River Bluff Building Dedication and Open House:** October 1, 3 pm, 395 Guernsey Lane, Red Wing, MN
- **K-12 Assessment Windows:** 9/14/15—9/25/15, 1/6/16—1/19/16, 5/16/16—5/27/16
- **K-1 November Assessment Window:** 11/9/15—11/20/15

## The Progress, September 2015: Volume 1, Issue 1

### The Progress archive

[Click here](#) to view past issues from the current school year.

### Comments? Suggestions for new articles?

Contact Jillynne Raymond, Editor, The Progress, [jraymond@gced.k12.mn.us](mailto:jraymond@gced.k12.mn.us)

## River Bluff Education Center: Come in, we're open!



GCED's job is to step in when its member districts can't meet those students' needs. Collaborating to serve students is one way that districts can both save money and provide appropriate services to student populations that change over time.

River Bluff Education Center is the result of many years of both informal and formal studies which culminated in a recommendation to consolidate the center-based programs into one school facility near Red Wing High School. The formal studies completed by Springsted stated that the Education District and its member

*By Cherie Johnson, Executive Director, GCED*

Just over one year from the groundbreaking, River Bluff Education Center (RBEC) opened its doors on time to students this fall on a beautiful sunny day. The \$15 million, 68,000-square-foot school was designed down to the last detail to serve students who struggle in their home school. Natural light is abundant, classroom spaces adaptable and the acoustics softened to provide students with a more soothing school environment.

The learning environment is a huge part of helping these students succeed. It will help them to be in a place where they can feel comfortable.

RBEC serves preschool through age 21. The Goodhue County Education District (GCED) is a collaborative of six school districts. RBEC provides specialized education services to more than 150 students each year from mostly its member districts.

A decade ago, GCED mainly served older students. Now, more member districts are seeking services for preschool, elementary and middle school students that have complex needs and require specialized services that are difficult for their home districts to provide. Educating these students is also difficult to do in traditionally designed schools.

districts could ill-afford to maintain the cost/ineffective operation of three school facilities. Consolidating to one site would provide significant operational savings in terms of utilities, maintenance, transportation, and staffing. Additionally, there was no solution to cover the deferred maintenance needs and ADA upgrades at the former sites.

Thanks to the school boards and superintendents for working together to make River Bluff a reality. Please join us for our Open House on Thursday, October 1, 2015 at 3pm. We hope to see you there.

## The Eddy: Floating down a river between the banks of chaos and rigidity

*By Jayna Fink and Tira Petersen*

Through the good fortune of a mental health grant, GCED has contracted with Fernbrook Family Services for two mental health therapists. We welcome Jayna Fink and Tira Petersen. Both of these professionals will be available to help problem solve challenging student behaviors in our member districts. For now, they are helping support behaviors at RBEC. Flowing with our river theme, Ms. Fink and Ms. Petersen operate "The Eddy".

Imagine you're in the water, peacefully floating in your canoe/kayak, you feel like you're generally in a good relationship with the world around you. You have a clear understanding of yourself, other people, and your life. You can be flexible and adjust when situations change. You're stable and at peace. (*The Whole Brain Child*, D. Siegel).

All of a sudden you see rapids ahead; the water flows faster, things become turbulent, navigating your boat is difficult, and you start to

panic because you have no idea what lies ahead or the skills to ride out the waves! On the river, eddies welcome refugees amidst the swift currents of whitewater rivers. They're good places to stop and scout, or bail, or catch your breath. In the school we would like the Eddy to function in a similar way.

Sometimes the Eddy may appear like a place where kids are having fun. Like on the river, Eddies may be used at times to stop and play, but they are much more than just parking places and play spots. The Eddy, both on the river and in school is a tool that everyone can use! Even good boaters catch eddies and use them to control their descent downstream or work their way back up stream.

We all need tools to help us navigate the river and turn "Survive" moments into "Thrive" moments. During challenging moments we can move to the Eddy where we can catch a deep breath, stop to look at what lies ahead and learn a new skill to help us remain calm in turbulent waters.

## Pathways Program Grows

*By Brian Cashman, Coordinator of Alternative Programs*

During the 2013-2014 school year, the Goodhue County Education District (GCED) implemented an alternative pro-gram, called the Pathways Program, which was housed in at Twin Bluff Middle School in the Red Wing School District. The intent of the program was to provide at-risk grade 6 and grade 7 students an alternative education option in order to foster student engagement, student learning, and student success.

Building on the momentum of the grade 6 and 7 program, the Pathways Program expanded to include grades 8 and 9 in 2014-2015. The site of this program was Red Wing High School.

With the opening of the new River Bluff Education Center (RBEC), the Pathways Program took two major steps at the start of the 2015-2016 school year: (1) The 8-9 program was moved to RBEC and (2) the Pathways Program expanded to include grades 10 through 12. The 8-12 Pathways Program joins alternative high schools in Cannon Falls, Red Wing (Tower View), and Zumbrota-Mazeppa as an alternative option for

at-risk students in Goodhue County.

The intent of the program remains the same – to provide students an alternative education option that fosters student engagement, student learning, and student success.

## Welcome RBEC New Staff Members

In addition to the staff members that come with us from Jefferson, River-side, and Wastedo we are happy to welcome new faces at River Bluff Education Center:

**Maggie Helwig** joins the GCED team as Assistant Director of Special Education and Principal at River Bluff.

Maggie joins us from District 622, where she most recently served as Student Services Coordinator for a center-based education center. This role is her debut in school administration.

When not at school, Maggie keeps busy with her family in Lake Elmo. Her husband, Jed, is an Activities Director in the metro area. Together they try to keep up with Jacob, 12, Rhya, 10, Colby 5, and Finn 3.

**Becky Alsop**, Secondary Science Teacher. Becky joins us with 13 years of experience in education. Most recently she came from the Southeastern Minnesota Technical College where she served as an Associate Dean and Faculty member. She is happy to be back in the science classroom.

**Julie Braford** comes to us from REM, where she served as Program Coordinator for many years. She was looking for a career move and teaching in our Upwards program was an ideal opportunity for Julie and for us.

**Alisha Dalsin**, River Bluff Coordinator. Alisha came to us from across town. She had been a Due Process Coordinator, case manager, and teacher at TBMS. She is currently working on her administrative internship.

**Kate Dullard**, Secondary ELA Teacher, joins us for her 2nd year of teaching from Red Wing High School.

**Molly Fassbinder**, Elementary EBD Teacher, is a brand new teacher this year. She is a recent graduate of UW-Green Bay.

**Nicole Gnotke** is not new to GCED. Nicole has served as a paraprofessional for 6 years. This career change is a natural fit for Nicole. When not at school, she and her husband Tom raise their daughter (12th grade) and two sons (7th & 10th grades) in Lake City.



**Jenny Marquardt** begins her 10th year of teaching at RBEC. She has been a DCD/ASD/LD teacher in Kasson-Mantorville. “Free” time is devoted to her children ages 4, 2, and 6 months.

**Becky McQuiston**, Elementary EBD Teacher, is a brand new teacher this year. She is also a student of Bethel University.

**Joel Messick**, Elementary EBD Teacher, is a brand new teacher this year. He is a recent graduate of Winona State.

**Caitlin Reed** is the school psychologist for RBEC. She shares her time with TBMS as well. This is Caitlin’s debut as a school psychologist following grad school; she attended the U of WI—Eau Claire. Caitlin loves the out-doors and hopes to have a hobby farm filled with animals some days.

**Darren Uetz**, Secondary Social Studies Teacher, comes to us from Rochester Off-Campus Charter High School with 21 years of teaching experience. Darren is an Iowa native.

**Adam Walther**, Secondary Math teacher is in his sixth year of teaching. Most recently he taught math for Pine City Public Schools. In the past he helped students build a basketball playing robot.

**Paraprofessionals** joining our team this year include: Deb Brown, Jill Buxengard, Kerry Goihl, Jamie Hall, Cindy Kane, Missy McGaffey, and Whitney Votra.

## In the Spotlight

Starting next month we plan to bring you a story that puts someone or some program in the spotlight. Contact Jillynne Raymond at [jraymond@gced.k12.mn.us](mailto:jraymond@gced.k12.mn.us) or 651.327.2426 to recommend a staff member, student, or program in your district!

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Goodhue County Education District is a group of six southeastern Minnesota school districts: [Cannon Falls](#), [Goodhue](#), [Kenyon-Wanamingo](#), [Lake City](#), [Red Wing](#) and [Zumbrota-Mazeppa](#). Working together, the districts provide effective and efficient educational services and funding for special education programs, staff development, extended and alternative summer school services.