

April 13, 2016

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
POLARIS AT EBERT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
410 PARK AVENUE WEST
DENVER, CO 80205



Dear Families,

I hope you had a wonderful break! It is so nice to come back and see all the happy, rested faces! I missed our community!

The Parent Safety Committee has been hard at work! I am grateful to Tana Padilla and Christa Payne for their time, thinking and collaboration! You will notice a new safety patrol in the next few weeks. Our special student volunteers will be helping guide traffic in the kiss and go lane. We are asking everyone to pull up as far as you can to make room for others behind you. We hope this will help alleviate the need for backing up to parallel park. We will be trying this new system from now until the end of the year to see how it goes. On behalf of our students and the Safety Committee, I appreciate your cooperation. As we look at school safety, we'd like your input. Please use the following link to answer the very short (I promise) survey about safety at Polaris. This will help inform future decisions.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8KX82BK>

This time of year brings many occasions for visits to the school. Please be sure to use the proper door, check in at the office, and wear your visitor tag. Thank you to all who are using the crosswalk! It's much less nerve wracking out there since we don't have to worry about children crossing all over the street!

Thanks again to all the parents who have provided the monthly staff lunches and the delicious breakfasts. We feel very special!

The Personnel Committee has been hard at work. Mr. Lloyd and Ms. Abeyta not only leave warmth in our hearts, but they also leave big shoes to fill! We have used a rigorous process including performance tasks, interviews, and observations. We want the very best for our wonderful students! At this time, we have finalized our hiring. Ian Hodges will be joining us from Park Hill, where he is currently teaching third grade, and Kim Rebholtz is joining us from Kunsmiller School of Creative Arts, where she is currently teaching fourth grade. Polaris Personnel committee (Angela Dire, Vickie Swift, Jessica Rogers, and Marissa Arney) invested countless hours ensuring the best fit for our school! Although they cannot discuss the process or details with you, I know they would appreciate a thank you!

Here at school, we have also been busy hiring paraprofessionals. We welcome back Lindsey Matson as a paraprofessional. Ms. Lindsay worked here as a paraprofessional a few years ago and left us to go to school for teacher certification. She has finished her certification and we are happy to have her join us again! Carol Friesen, another experienced para will be joining us for the remainder of the year. She is highly qualified and we are thrilled to have her share her talent with us!

It is with great excitement that we have begun planning for next year! Together with PTO, we have scheduled new family events, and are thrilled to meet all the new faces.

At Polaris, we will have some changes with enrollment over the next two years of which I want to make you aware. CSC, PTO and teaching staff have been involved in conversations with several district departments throughout the year regarding the need to ensure a more diverse population of students at Polaris and a need to ensure that we are equitably meeting the needs of highly gifted and talented students in our school, from our priority area and across the district. More equitable access to first grade and increasing the number of GT classrooms are suggestions that were introduced early in the year. Polaris will be able to provide a better education for all our students when they have the opportunity to learn from, work with and befriend students from a variety of backgrounds and when all highly gifted students have equal access to our programming.

The result of this collaboration between our school (teachers and parent leadership groups), the Gifted and Talented Department, The Elementary Education Department, and the Exceptional Student Services Department is that the class of kindergarteners in 2016-17 school year will be tested for gifted and talented in the fall of their kindergarten year (this is being done across the district). After tests are scored the GT department will inform parents about optimal programming for their child(ren) and options for the following year prior to the first round of the choice enrollment process. Parents will then apply to their chosen school and be placed in the lottery for that school.

In addition to the above changes these collaborative conversations also brought to the surface another need that necessitates a shift in our practice. This one also comes from the change in the GT identification processes. We have always had more demand than seats, and this year it's even greater. This year we had to turn away 126 students who listed Polaris as first choice. Therefore, to meet the growing need for highly gifted and talented programming, we will be discontinuing advanced kindergarten in 2017-18 school year, and we will use the additional space to open another classroom for identified highly gifted and talented students. Neither of these two decisions impact students who are currently attending Polaris. I appreciate your support and I sincerely thank those who have provided information, asked questions, and participated in the process.

As always, if you have questions, compliments for staff or other comments, please feel free to pass them on to me. I am at your service! Thank you all for being the best community out there!

Sincerely,



Anne Sterrett, Principal
Polaris at Ebert