

## Heidi Taylor-Eliopoulos: Start of school year is true renaissance



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Spring often is seen as the renaissance of the year. It's a season of renewal and a time for freshness and newness. For students attending schools, families and community members supporting schools, and staff working in schools, however, our renaissance comes in September.

Back-to-school time is our time of newness. The cyclical nature of the school calendar affords us a fresh start each year. We start September with crayons that are pointy, folders that are unwrinkled and cool bus-stop mornings that give way to sticky afternoon recess.

Some of my earliest memories of the Chippewa Falls Area School District include those images: having my picture taken with knobby knees and clean tennis shoes, my green backpack on my shoulders, waiting for Doris to come around the corner in Bus No. 247. That bus brought me to Halmstad Elementary School, later to the

Chippewa Falls Middle School and finally to Chi Hi.

Growing up, my parents taught me that I could be anything I wanted to be if I was willing to work for it. That resulted in a young girl's tendency to dream big. When I went into administration fairly early in my career, I joked that 2029 was the year I would run for state superintendent. Somebody has to do the job, so why not someone from Chippewa Falls? I believed I would save the world. Up until a few years ago, I dreamed that might be my path.

Then, three years ago, a completely new perspective slammed me in the face. As I was welcoming fifth-grade families to the middle school during our orientation night, I stood on the stage and looked out at the audience. Staring back at me were the faces of people I knew well, people I grew up with or know now as an adult.

I saw people I rode the bus with in elementary school, people who were in my youth group in middle school, people who attend my church, people to whom I'm related, people from my favorite stores and restaurants, people I worked with at Shopko while I was in high school, people with whom I graduated, people who were my neighbors, people who worked with my parents.

In that moment, I gained a new perspective. People I had known for years were staring back at me, waiting to hear about the school I was running where they were going to send their children, their most precious treasures. They were entrusting them to me.

I have always cared about our children. That wasn't new. But I then had a greater perspective of my personal responsibility to our community.

From that moment on, 2029 and saving the world seemed like a frivolous feat. I renewed a laser-like focus on these children, in these schools, in this community. My job as an administrator in this district became increasingly personal.

I know the people in our district and community. I know their stories. I know their triumphs and their struggles. I know that we must give this community a district that will prepare children to successfully follow their dreams, whatever those dreams might be. It is our fundamental purpose to ensure that our future in Chippewa Falls is better than our past.

So with the renaissance of the new school year upon us once again, we have reason to feel great hope. As the superintendent in a district and community I love, I'm confident we can feel pride in the resources we have here in Chippewa Falls.

We have great children, engaged parents and a supportive community. We have a strategic plan that was developed with input from parents, staff and community stakeholders. We are connecting with local post-secondary institutions and business industries to introduce students to post-graduation options. We are planning and implementing an increasing number of opportunities for students.

Most importantly, though, despite the solid foundation we have in Chippewa Falls, we maintain a mindset of continuous improvement. Today is good. Together we will make the tomorrow of our district and community even better.