New Preschool Program Up and Running at APS

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> - Grade school principal Chanc McIntosh on new preschool program

APS Photo

Morning preschoolers have fun peeking through the bars of new playground equipment that has been installed on the East Campus. Arnold Grade School Principal Chanc McIntosh (pictured left) and preschool teacher Emma Stelling (right) welcomed 24 children to the facility and into the new program at the start of the school year.

By **Janet Larreau**

Twenty-four children made history at the start of the 2021/2022 school year, when they entered Arnold Public School's East Campus to get an early education in the new preschool program.

The idea for implementing the new program started last January, when the school board held a community night for patrons and community members to express their views. Of those that attended and shared views, the majority wanted a school preschool program.

"From my understanding, it has been a community desire to have a preschool program that was offered daily for a few years now," said Arnold Grade School Principal Chanc McIntosh. "The school board saw the many benefits of having a preschool program and the expressed want from the community led to the decision of approving the start of the program."

The old Lutheran Church was purchased in the spring of 2020. The east part of the building was used for storage and the front part was an area for Board, IEP and teacher development Zoom meetings. Before the building was ready to accommodate students, some updates needed to be made to meet early childhood requirements. A new HVAC system had to be installed, a door on the north side was replaced, and new light fixtures, playground equipment, and a fence were installed.

Construction or updates to the building had to be on hold until July 31 due to an application for a Early Childhood grant, which was received. The school looks for continued updates and remodeling in the future to meet early childhood requirements.

The Creative Curriculum was recommended to the Arnold curriculum committee and then approved by the school board. This curriculum is recommended by Teaching Strategies, which is aligned with the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines.

There are two preschool sessions being held four days a week, Monday through Thursday. The morning session that consists of 3-year-olds is held from 8:00 a.m. to 11:20 a.m. The afternoon session that consists of 4-year-olds is held from 12:15 p.m. to 3:44 p.m.

"It seems to be working very well to have the preschool students in the East Campus building," said Mr. McIntosh. "Having the separation allows the students to have their own facility that is catered to them and meets those NDE Early Childhood Guidelines for facility space and equipment. I think this is just another way that Arnold shows how it is progressing as a community and district. This is another step toward continual school improvement and shows that student needs are a priority for the Arnold District."

Age requirements that are eligible to register for the program are: 3 by July 31st or 4 by July 31st. Children that are 5 by July 31st are eligible for kindergarten, but not required unless they turn 6 before January 1.

Photo/Debbie Connelly

Teacher Emma Stelling welcomed preschoolers to her classroom on the East Campus at the beginning of the school year.

Excited for the challenge ahead

Teacher Emma Stelling greeted the preschoolers on their first day and has lots of fun things in store for them.

"We just got done doing an instrument petting zoo where we all sat down and tried each one of the instruments," she said.

Ms. Stelling, who graduated from Norfolk Catholic High School and received her degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from Wayne State College, is looking forward to the challenge of her very first teaching position.

"Arnold checked a lot of boxes that I wanted in a school. I wanted a welcoming, organized, and smaller school. The school size was one big thing for me, as I grew up with smallish classes," she said.

Her family consists of her parents, Brent and Marie, and her little sister Audrey. Brent works for NPPD and Marie works for a local government bidding agency. Her sister attends UNK.

"The first thing I told my parents when applying for the job was that this could be so much fun and I would love the opportunity to help start a program.

So, long before I had the interview, I knew that this challenge had my name on it. I felt as though I had quite a bit of experience in preschool and that it would help me if I got the opportunity," she said.

Ms. Stelling gained a lot of experience while attending Wayne State through the Northeast Nebraska Teaching Academy (NENTA). Wayne State is the only Nebraska college that offers this program – a one credit hour class that was created to give education majors the chance for raw experience in the field and to help the substitute shortage. Through the program, she has subbed well over 30 times. She recommends any WSC student going into education to enroll in the program and get paid for that experience.

At Arnold, she wants to create relationships with her students so that she can meet their needs easier.

"I am still adjusting to the small community, but both the school and the community have been very welcoming," she said.

Lt. Gov. Mike Foley Makes Stop In Arnold

Nebraska Lt. Gov. Mike Foley spent about 2 1/2 hours in Arnold on August 19, touring businesses and meeting the owners. Lining up the agenda was AEDC Director Cheryl Carson, who accompanied Foley on all the stops.

"Due to COVID-19, business owners who may have purchased or opened businesses right before or during the pandemic were not able to be recognized," said Carson. "Those owners, including businesses making a transition, were recognized this past May, but due to a schedule change, Lt. Foley was unable to attend the festivities."

Foley, who enjoys stopping in Arnold, made up for that. During his visit, he was able to congratulate the owners and visit with them about their business and what challenges they are facing post-COVID.

Businesses he visited were: Same 24 Fitness, Four County Boutique, Nails for Starz, Sugar Sand Boutique, and Mighty Mart. He also learned about the recent expansion and relocation of Smooth Aesthetics Spa.

During his walk around town, attention was drawn to the recent changes at Nansel's Best Service and the proposed duplex project south of downtown. His day concluded with a stop at BrewBakers for some refreshments for the road.

Courtesy photo

Lt. Gov. Mike Foley poses under the Grazer's Bar & Grill sign for his 2021 Nebraska passport on August 19. Foley toured several businesses with AEDC Director Cheryl Carson while visiting Arnold.