

Memo

To: Governance Council
From: Dr. Mary Whitrock, Superintendent
Date: July 22, 2024
Re: Odyssey Elementary/Middle School Principal Recommendation

This memo is to formally recommend Mrs. Samantha Behnke for the .7 FTE elementary and middle school principal position at Odyssey Academy of Virtual Learning beginning August 1, 2024. She would replace Rebecca Miller whose last day was June 20, 2024. Mrs. Behnke is an instructional coach serving middle schools in the Oshkosh Area School District. It is also recommended that the School Board approve Mrs. Behnke at .3 of existing full-time equivalent (FTE) at Ripon High and Ripon Middle School to act as an interventionist and relieving teacher overloads where possible, especially in terms of supporting alternative programs for students including Odyssey students. Mrs. Behnke would be full time within the Ripon Area School District.

The Odyssey Principal position was posted from June 26 - July 10, 2024. Staff and parents were invited to participate in a survey regarding characteristics they valued in their next principal. 22 people applied for the position through WECAN that was posted as full time and also as .3 and .7 FTE noting the potential for a shared position given the wide range of grade levels and student needs within the school. Three applicants were internal. Through a screening process, six candidates were invited to interview on July 16, 2024. Three of the candidates had previous administrative experience. The selection team consisted of members of the Governance Board, administration, parents, teachers, and staff. Two candidates were invited back on July 19 to participate in a second day of interviews and a virtual Meet & Greet with staff, parents, and students. Other events of the day included a second writing sample, an interview with the leadership team, and a driving tour of the district.

Mrs. Behnke has 10 years of experience in education, first teaching Grade 5 at Lourdes Academy and then middle school language arts at the STEM Academy Charter School in Fond

du Lac under Tim Scottberg. She went on to teach Grade 5 Menasha and then as a literacy teacher in Grades 7 and 8 in the Oshkosh Area School District. Over the past three years, Mrs. Behnke served as an instructional coach in two different middle schools in the Oshkosh Area School District as those schools came together into one school in one building. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education with a minor in reading from the University of Evansville and a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from Marian University.

Mrs. Behnke shared, “the most important thing that I have adopted into my philosophy of teaching is having a student-centered environment that focuses on building strong student-teacher relationships. A teacher needs to not only be passionate about the subject they are teaching but more importantly, passionate about the success of their students.” In her role as an instructional coach, Mrs. Behnke noted, “I use data on a daily basis when working with our teacher teams. This year, our content area teams have used our formative, summative, and iReady assessment data to build digital data walls that are being used to guide our instructional planning.”

The Assistant Superintendent in the Oshkosh Area School District described Mrs. Behnke as an “outstanding educator who keeps students at the heart of all she does,” and noted “Samantha ranks in the top 10% of educators that I have worked with in my 32-year education career,” as she can “build capacity in the colleagues and educators around her in a way that builds community, produces results and meets goals”. One reference shared, “One of Mrs. Behnke’s strongest assets as a building leader is her genuine desire to connect with and work with ALL of our students. She believes it is her role to always start by asking ‘How can we help?’.”

Recommendation:

Approve Mrs. Samantha Behnke for the .7 FTE elementary and middle school principal position at Odyssey Academy of Virtual Learning, and recommend the School Board, in addition to approving her as .7 principal, also approve her as a .3 FTE interventionist at Ripon High School and/or Ripon Middle School and/or Odyssey.