

PUSD

PAGE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Monthly Newsletter August 2023

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Vision

A community of learners who direct our collective actions and resources toward the unique learning needs of every child in order for all students to become college and career ready and successful in a global society.

Motto

Collectively Committed to Every Student, Every Day, Every Minute.



Mission

Our schools are passionate about the learning-for-all mission and understand that every student matters. We are responsible and accountable for the education of every student that walks through our doors every day.

Superintendent Anderson's Contract Extended



PUSD's Governing Board extended the contract of Superintendent Bryce Anderson by one year. The extended contract goes through June 30, 2025.

Superintendent Anderson said he was ecstatic at the news, and looking forward to continuing what he has started.

"I am excited to continue the improvement initiatives that we have begun as a district to further opportunities for our students to reach their true potential," Supt. Anderson said. "I truly enjoy the community of Page. From the people to the incredible surroundings it is a special place that I am happy to call home."

Since coming on as PUSD's superintendent, Dr. Anderson has really enjoyed his time at the district, particularly with the relationships he has forged.

"I have enjoyed working with our dedicated and capable staff across the district, the opportunity to interact with students, and working with our community to improve as an organization," he said. "Page Unified School District is fortunate to have quality people who are dedicated to making our schools and community a better place."

Dr. Anderson initially came to PUSD as an interim superintendent in November 2021 and remained in that role to the end of the school year. The governing board officially hired Dr. Anderson on July 1, 2022.

Desiree Fowler Named ASBA Board President

Desiree Fowler has been selected to serve as President of the Arizona School Board Association (ASBA) board of directors. Fowler will be the first indigenous person to serve in that position.

Fowler is also a board member on Page Unified School District's school board. She has been a PUSD board member for six years, including a term as president. Fowler will be formally inducted as ASBA president this December at the board's annual conference. Fowler plans to continue serving on PUSD's school board as well.

Fowler lived in Steamboat, Ariz. from her birth to age six, then she moved to Coppermine, Ariz., on the western side of the Navajo Reservation. She grew up in the traditional Navajo lifestyle raising sheep, pigs, cattle, a donkey and a very large cornfield.

Fowler says the values she learned growing up in the traditional Navajo way mean a lot to her, and it shaped the way she views and interacts with the world.

"The way I was raised is very important to me," she said. "It taught me to be humble, and to respect the Earth and the elements we live with."

Fowler is honored to accept her new position and takes it very seriously.

"This isn't just about me, but the kinship of our Navajo people, a celebration of our ancestors and the current generation, and the opening of greater prospects for future generations," she said.

Fowler will strive to make a positive impact in her capacity as ASBA Board President.

"It's a great time to make awesome opportunities happen," she said. "One of my biggest priorities is to bring recognition to schools outside of Maricopa County. Arizona is filled with small schools that need to be recognized for the great things they're doing. My platform has always been the small schools and the rural schools. I'd like to bring more attention to schools in northern Arizona."

Coach Billie Strives to Help His Players Become Successful Adults

Explorer's love a blank map. Artists love a fresh sheet of toothy paper. Water skiers love a glassy lake. Coach Billie loves a freshly mown football field with a hundred hash-marks chalked down the side.

It's the first day of summer football camp, which as far as Sand Devils head football coach Leland "Bubba" Billie is concerned, is the first day of the 2023 football season. The walls of his office are adorned with Sand Devils pennants and jerseys, newspaper clippings and photos of previous football teams in action. This is his happy place.

Prospective Sand Devils football players reported to summer football camp the morning of Monday, July 10. The camp ran till Friday, July 14 at noon. The players – along with Coach Billie and some other coaches – stayed overnight in the football field house. They slept on cots and the floor. The coaching staff and some volunteers cooked and prepared the meals.

Part of the five-day camp was dedicated to drills and trainings that developed the players' physical strength, fitness and endurance. Some activities promoted team bonding and brotherhood. Some of the drills were designed by the coaches so they could see who has the drive, who has the heart.

Summer football camp is a great sifting and sorting mechanism. Several important things came into focus for Coach Billie and his staff, such as who his team leaders are, what players best fit into what positions, the overall readiness of his team, and who his starting line-up will be.

Coach Billie is very happy with the results that came from football camp.

"We had a great turnout, the kids worked hard all week long, and the coaching staff got a lot answers to questions we had about our players," said Coach Billie. "At the beginning of the week I had five people vying for varsity quarterback, and we have a frontrunner in that spot now. Our offensive line started separating themselves and we have a solid group we're looking at now. We'll just go from there."

Coach Billie grew up on Holbrook, Ariz. He started playing football as a kid in a flag football league. His town didn't have youth football at the time. In high school, he played noseguard and center for the Roadrunners. He loved it.

Being part of a team appealed to him. Having a clearly



stated objective appealed to him. Having a clearly stated role to help the team complete their objectives appealed to him. Receiving feedback and critiques about how he could improve at his position appealed to him. The pride he felt from being part of the team appealed to him. Everything about football appealed to him.

Coach Billie graduated from Holbrook and his playing days were behind him; but he wasn't ready to be done with the sport he loved so much, that had given him so much and provided his life with direction, purpose and meaning.

Coach Billie attended Arizona State University where he received his bachelor's degree, then Northern Arizona University where he obtained a Master's Degree, all with the intention of returning to Holbrook, and returning to the school's football program.

"I wanted to coach football at Holbrook, and eventually rise to head coach," said Coach Billie. His life was moving in that direction, but his circumstances changed abruptly in 2015 when his father was hospitalized in Page. Coach Billie, who was living in Tempe, Ariz. at the time, packed his things and moved to Page to help his father recover.



“Once I got here, I started falling in love with this town,” he said. “I learned that Page had an opening for an assistant coach and I came onboard.”

Coach Billie coached football as an assistant under Coach Wheatley, then Coach Stephens. After Coach Stephens left, Page High School’s athletic director, Ernie Rivers, offered the head coaching position to Coach Billie. This is Coach Billie’s fifth year as the Sand Devils head coach.

Coach Billie’s goals for the 2023 are straight forward. “Win the North, win the region, make a run in the playoffs,” he said.

But Coach Billie has some larger, long-term goals in mind too. As head football coach, he recognizes that he has an amazing opportunity to help shape the lives and futures of the young men who come through this program.

“I always tell my players that they are Sand Devils for life. We are a brotherhood,” he said. “I want the members of this team to support each other. And not just during the football season, but throughout the rest of the school year and all their years at high school. I want my players to be role models. I want them to be people others look up to. One of the big things we want to push – at camp and throughout the season – is pride in who we are, and pride in being a Sand Devil. We want that to carry over into the school and beyond.”

A football program is a great place to learn a lot of the attributes it takes to be a successful adult, said Coach Billie.

Things such as pushing through the difficult parts, and working together as a team.

“One of the big things team sports teaches a player is

that they are part of something that’s bigger than they are,” he said.

As a Sand Devils head coach, Coach Billie once again finds himself on a team. The other members of the team are the students’ parents, grandparents, teachers, counselors and other coaches. And they have a big goal. The big goal they share is preparing the students for healthy, happy, productive futures, where they may be fathers, providers, contributors and community leaders. Helping shape his players into men is something Coach Billie takes very seriously. It’s not a side goal. It’s not a nice-if-it-happens goal. It is one of his primary objectives.

“I don’t see this job as an August to November job, this is a year-round job for me,” he said. “Come spring time I’m still popping into classrooms if my kids are tardy, or if they’re not showing up. I still run grade checks on them throughout the entire year.

“It is a team effort. I rely on the other teachers and on the school counselors a lot. The counselors do a great job dealing with the players whole mind and whole body. They do a lot of things I’m just not equipped to do.”

Coach Billie loves watching his team successfully execute a play they’ve been working on. He loves fourth quarter comebacks, redzone stands, and watching his team rise in the rankings. But what gives him the deepest level of satisfaction is watching his boys go on to become men.

“Few things give me more pride than seeing my former players out in the community living a good life, a successful life, being positive role models. I like to think I played a role in that.”

Back to School Events Are Very Successful



PUSD held seven Back to School/Meet and Greet events in the weeks leading up to the first day of school with the intent of connecting parents and students with the information, materials and resources necessary to start the new school year as prepared as possible.

Those who attended the Back to School events had a chance to meet with the superintendent, school principals, assistant principals, the athletic director, Student Support Services, and department directors, all of whom were available to answer questions parents, guardians and students had.

PUSD held Back to School Events at Page High School, and chapter houses in Inscription House, Kaibeto, The Gap, Bitter Springs, Coppermine and LeChee.

“It’s important for us to engage with our stakeholders every way we can,” said PUSD Superintendent Bryce Anderson. “Many of them live on the reservation and it’s not always easy for them to come into Page on a specific date to meet with us. We’re more than happy to travel to them and engage them where they live.”



Middle School Gets New Mascot

The Page Middle School Panthers are now the Dust Devils. The change in mascots became official when Page Unified School District entered its new school year on July 1. The middle school's colors will still be red and black, and the Dust Devil logo will share similarities with the Sand Devils logo.

The decision to change the mascot came last school year in an effort to provide continuity between Page Middle School and Page High School: Dust Devils mature into Sand Devils).

"The main idea behind it is to create unity between the schools and in the community," said Megan Moore, PUSD's athletic director. "The goal is for our students to become Sand Devils. This helps create that culture and will make us more unified as a community."

Several other districts in northern Arizona have transitional mascots. In Tuba City, the middle school Braves become Warriors as they enter high school. In Chinle, the Bobcats become Wildcats. In Monument Valley, the Colts become Mustangs.

The decision to change mascot was made with a great

deal of input from the Page community and stakeholders, part of which included a survey asking parents, students and others if they wanted to keep the Panthers mascot, or become the Dust Devils. Over 80 percent of respondents voted to become Dust Devils.

After the decision was made to change mascots, Page Middle School administrators worked with its student council to get input about what the new Dust Devil logo should look like. The initial concepts were then sent to a designer who used their ideas and created two versions of the logo. The student council student chose their favorite version, and made further suggestions to improve it.

The designer is still working on the final version of the logo and is expected to be finished soon. In the meantime, Page Middle school will use a temporary logo of two interlocking Ds, which will appear on the jerseys and uniforms as its teams begin the fall sports season.

"I'm very excited about this," said Kevin Anderson, Page Middle School assistant principal. "I think it will be great to have a unified look for the schools."

Navajo Cultural Acknowledgment Day is An Important PUSD Tradition



It is one of Page Unified School District's most important traditions: Navajo Cultural Acknowledgement Day. It's a hands-on, in-person way to introduce incoming teachers to Navajo culture, traditions, belief systems and ways of life.

For the last several years, the event has been organized by Carlos Begay, PUSD's Indian Education Office Coordinator.

This year's event was held in Inscription House at the residence of Arnold and Stella Tsinnijinnie. Last year it was held at White Mesa. The year before that it was held at Coppermine.

Navajo Cultural Acknowledgement Day spanned two days. The first day was optional for PUSD teachers and included an overland tour to Eggshell Canyon. Participants were also given the option to stay overnight on the property which included eating a traditional Navajo meal and campfire stories.

The main event occurred the next day, July 26, and was mandatory for all of PUSD's incoming teachers. The schedule included a land acknowledgement and presentations

about traditional food preparation, environmental stewardship and culturally relevant teaching methods. Hoop dancers from Red Heritage performed several different Diné dances.

"I think it's important for people to understand that we are a strong culture," said Begay. "Developing an understanding, an equity, showing interest in our culture can help our educators form a bond with the Navajo students. If a teacher ignores that part of it, they will often encounter resistance from the students"

PUSD's Navajo Cultural Acknowledgment Day began decades ago, but the practice faded away. Desiree Fowler and Dee McKerry brought the program back five years ago after they were seated on PUSD's Governing Board.

Begay says holding Navajo Cultural Acknowledgement Day on the Navajo Reservation is an important component of the experience.

"Visiting the reservation helps give our teachers a better idea of the way our lives are structured," said Begay. "Our ancestry, our time living on this land goes back thousands



of generations. We have developed a heritage and customs that are rich. If someone is going to be teaching our kids, I think it's important that they understand that."

One of the speakers was Hector Gallegos, who graduated from Page High School in 2020. He now attends Stanford University where he is majoring in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity.

Gallegos grew up on the reservation. Begay selected him to be one of this year's presenters because he could speak directly about his experience growing up on the reservation.

Gallegos says having new teachers attend an event where they can learn more about Navajo culture and their way of life is a great idea.

"For me, and a lot of other kids like me, this is normal life," he said, pointing to the hogan, the wood pile, the house in the desert. "What we experienced here today is what we do a lot of the time. As a culture its normal for us to gather together as family and share food like this."

Gallegos said growing up on the reservation, staying close to the land and practicing traditional Navajo upbringing is where he learned who he was. It's where his parents, grandparents and ancestors formed and learned their value system; then passed it on to the next generation. Gallegos says it's important for incoming teachers to understand that

their Navajo students choose to live on the reservation so the Dine way of life can continue to be practiced, taught and learned.

"It's important for people to know that we live here because we choose to live here, not because we can't afford to live in the city," said Gallegos.

Adam Telechbush is a first-year teacher with PUSD who attended this year's Navajo Cultural Acknowledgement Day. He will be teaching math at Page High School. Telechbush grew up in Lexington, Kentucky and graduated Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. When he moved to Page a couple weeks ago, it was his first time visiting the western U.S. He said he wanted to live and teach in a place with a beautiful landscape and experience living with a culture different than his own.

Telechbush got a lot out of his experience visiting the reservation. It was his first interaction with Navajo people.

"It's always great to have insight into another culture," he said. "It was very interesting. I loved how they emphasized that Navajo culture is not dead. I thought it was pretty amazing being invited to visit the reservation. They made me feel very comfortable to be in that space. I certainly think the experience of that day will help me better relate with my native students."