

Buffalo Hide Academy School Board Report
8/6/24

SBE Week – August 2024



We've been hard at work at Buffalo Hide getting ready for the new school year as part of SBE week. Nick Rink, Jake ArrowTop, Rick Hagberg, Chris Lewis, Greg Klauk, and myself have been meeting as a group to formulate some strategies and plans moving forward to maximize our potential and meet the needs of our student population. Our focus, as always, is providing a safe and welcoming environment where our students and families feel seen, honored, and supported.

One of our primary objectives this week has been to identify areas where we've been successful in the past, and to build on those strengths and augment them if needed. For example, one of the pillars of our school environment has been our universal approach to welcoming all students and engaging with them empathically and compassionately. This serves a multitude of clinical purposes (relationality, fosters connectivity, deescalates/prevents conflict, strengthens confidence, nourishes bonds) and also provides a format where our students can explore, attempt new lessons and activities, and ultimately thrive. Our plan is to lean into this element of our school even further and to reach more families of the Blackfeet Reservation with this approach.

As always, our compass has oriented us toward the issue of **adolescent suicide** as one that deserves great care, attention, and clinical preparation. In fact, suicide has been identified as the leading cause of death in Indian country for 11-17 year old's (Montana DPHHS, 2024). We've structured our school to be one that is responsive and prepared to deal with this issue with our specialized training, and clinically informed counseling approach. Our long term suicide

assessment and intervention strategies are systematically designed to reduce suicidality (suicidal thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and patterns) and have been a critical element of our overall school operations. We've identified that not only is it imperative to be prepared and informed to work with students individually in this regard, but our school climate is also designed to offset issues and factors that contribute to suicidality. And we plan to continue to be torch bearers in this matter, as we recognize that we can be very impactful if our students are struggling in this area.

In addition, we've also tried to identify aspects of our school that could use more support. For instance, communicating with students' families is an area that we could always improve upon. This year, we've decided to enlist the help of a third-party app (Remind) to attempt to correspond with students and families electronically via text messaging, group chats, etc. (without the use of our personal cell phones).

A new era at BHA

It would be remiss of me not to mention the fact that we are entering a new era at Buffalo Hide Academy. Our entire BPS family has experienced a tremendous loss with the recent retirement of our former principal, **Matthew Johnson**. His shoes cannot be filled, and he leaves behind a vast hole with his one-of-a-kind presence and irreplicable wit. To say that he will be missed is an understatement, more accurately, it's just not gonna be the same school without him. We are forever indebted to Matthew for his endless contributions to our school community. Our hope is to continue down the path he helped forge, and to honor his presence here by always working tirelessly to help our students love themselves. We owe a lot to Matthew, and his spirit will remain here always – we'll make sure of it.

