

**School District of River Falls
Personnel Committee**

February 9, 2026 - at 7:00 PM or immediately following the 6:00 PM Educational Program Meeting
District Office
852 E Division Street
River Falls, Wisconsin 54022

Personnel Committee members: Stacy Johnson Myers (Chair), Alison Page, & Alan Tuchtenhagen

A quorum of the Board may be present for information-gathering purposes only.

Agendas can be viewed at <https://www.rfsd.k12.wi.us/district/school-board.cfm> or at
<https://meetings.boardbook.org/Public/Organization/1447>

1. CALL TO ORDER - 7:00 PM (or immediately after Educational Program Committee)

2. MANNER OF PUBLIC NOTIFICATION OF MEETING

3. HEARING OF VISITORS OR DELEGATIONS

4. STAFFING UPDATE

3

Description: The administrative team will share a 2026-27 staffing update.

Recommended Action: None, informational only.

5. APPROVE RECOMMENDED 2026-27 STAFFING PLAN: PHASE I

4

Description: Administration will share a tentative staffing plan that includes certified staff positions considered to be essential additions for the 2026-27 school year. These positions are hard to fill, and approval of this plan will allow for early posting of these positions.

Recommended Action: Approve 2026-27 Staffing Plan: Phase I.

6. APPROVE 2027-28 SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR

7

Description: The calendar committee is recommending the 2027-28 school calendar. The school calendar will include the school year start/end dates, in-service days, and vacation days.

Recommended Action: Approve the 2027-28 School Year Calendar.

7. APPROVE 2026-27 SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR IMPORTANT DATES

8

Description: The calendar committee is recommending the 2026-27 school calendar's important dates. This calendar includes back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, and graduation.

Recommended Action: Approve the 2026-27 School Calendar Important Dates.

8. NEW STAFF MID-YEAR CHECK-IN FEEDBACK

9

Description: The Director of Human Resources and Leadership, Nate Schurman, will provide a summary of new staff feedback related to their experiences in the School District of River Falls.

Recommended Action: None, informational only.

9. NOTICE OF COMMENCEMENT OF CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS

Description: River Falls School District will be commencing contract negotiations with the Teacher Employee Group (RFEA, WEAC Region 1) and the Bus Driver Group (WEAC Region 1). This notice satisfies Wisconsin State Statute 19.84(1)(b) and 19.86. The Personnel Committee, Director of Human Resources, and Superintendent will serve as the District Negotiations Committee.

Recommended Action: Approve Commencement of Contract Negotiations.

10. CONSIDERATION OF ADJOURNING TO CLOSED SESSION PURSUANT TO WIS. STAT. SEC. 19.85(1)(C), WHICH PERMITS CONVENING IN CLOSED SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONSIDERING THE EMPLOYMENT, PROMOTION, COMPENSATION OR PERFORMANCE EVALUATION DATA OF ANY PUBLIC EMPLOYEE OVER WHICH THE GOVERNMENTAL BODY HAS JURISDICTION OR EXERCISES RESPONSIBILITY, TO DISCUSS TEACHER CONTRACT DAYS AND COMPENSATION, AND PURSUANT TO WIS. STAT. SEC. 19.85(1)(E), WHICH PERMITS CONVENING IN CLOSED SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DELIBERATING OR NEGOTIATING THE PURCHASING OF PUBLIC PROPERTIES, THE INVESTING OF PUBLIC FUNDS, OR CONDUCTING OTHER SPECIFIED PUBLIC BUSINESS, WHENEVER COMPETITIVE OR

BARGAINING REASONS REQUIRE A CLOSED SESSION, FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING 2026-27 CONTRACT NEGOTIATION MEETINGS, COMPENSATION STUDY DATA, POTENTIAL NON-RENEWALS AND POTENTIAL BUDGET REDUCTIONS. ROLL CALL REQUIRED.

11. CONVENE TO CLOSED SESSION PURSUANT TO THE ABOVE

12. RECONVENE INTO OPEN SESSION FOR POTENTIAL ACTION RELATED TO CLOSED SESSION BUSINESS

13. PROPOSED/SUGGESTED ITEMS FOR THE NEXT REGULAR AND FUTURE PERSONNEL MEETING AGENDA(S)

Description: As always, committee members will be given the opportunity to suggest items for future committee and/or School Board meeting agendas.

Recommended Action: As needed.

14. SCHEDULE NEXT PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING

Description: Upcoming committee meeting dates, times, and locations will be reviewed.

Recommended Action: Set the meeting schedule as follows:

Personnel Committee meeting, Monday, March 9, 2026, 8:00 p.m. *(or immediately following Finance & Facilities)*
The meeting will be held at the District Office Conference Room, 852 E. Division Street.

15. ADJOURN

2026-27 CERTIFIED STAFF HIRES

	LOCATION	POSITION	APPLICANTS	INTERVIEW	REPLACES	REASON	NEW EMPLOYEE	YOE	NOTES
1	HS	Asistant Principal		2/23	Lisa Goihl	Retirement			
2	RFPME	Counselor (.8)			Karen Swanson	Retirement			
3	WS	3rd Grade Teacher			Lori Rosenow	Retirement			
4	MMS	CC Special Education (ID)			Kari Nutting	Resignation			
5	RFPME	CH Teacher			Stephanie Thompson	Resignation			
6	RFPME	CC special Education			Betsy Manning	Resignation			

2026-27 STAFFING PLAN: PHASE I

7	RB	SPED (.5 CC)			New				
8	RFPME	SPED (.5 CC)			New				
9	DISTRICT	Sp/L (.6)			New				
10	District	Physical Therapist (.4)			New				
11	RB	SPED (.5 ECSE)			New				
12									
13									

2026-27 STAFFING PLAN: PHASE I

Location	Position and FTE
Rocky Branch	Special Education Teacher (.5 FTE Cross Categorical)
District	Physical Therapist (.4 FTE)
RFPME	Cross Categorical Special Education Teacher (.5 FTE)
District	Speech Therapist (.6 FTE)
Rocky Branch	Special Education Teacher (.5 FTE Early Childhood)

2026-27 STAFFING PLAN: PHASE I, Feb. 9, 2026
RATIONALE

Rocky Branch Cross Categorical SPED Teacher: 0.5 FTE

School	Projected Enrollment 26-27	Avg. Fall/Mid-year Move In	Current FTE	Proposed FTE
Rocky Branch	53	7.5	4.0	4.5
Greenwood	48	2	4.0	4.0
Westside	40	2.5	4.0	4.0

RFPME Cross Categorical SPED Teacher: 0.5 FTE

School	Projected Enrollment 26-27	Current FTE	Proposed FTE
Montessori	18	1.0	1.5

- 12 Students: 1 Teacher aligns with Greenwood Special Education staffing.
- Montessori serves multiple disabilities, making it very difficult to provide proactive and responsive services with 1 staff member.

Speech/Language: 0.6 FTE

Year	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27	Current FTE	Proposed FTE
IEPs	187	188	199	213	?	5.4	6.0

- 25-26: Average caseload = 39.4
- 26-27 Average caseload = 35.5
- Serves all district buildings, daycares, and 4K

Area comparisons average caseload

- Hudson 31.1
- New Richmond 39.9
- Menomonie 39.4
- Rice Lake 29.6
- Prescott 33.3
- Amery 26.9

2026-27 STAFFING PLAN: PHASE I, Feb. 9, 2026
RATIONALE

Physical Therapy: 0.4 FTE

Year	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	Projected 26-27	Current FTE	Proposed FTE
IEPs	24	30	28	37	41	1	1.4

- All district schools and UWRF 4K
- IEP meetings and Progress Reports for entire caseload

4K/Early Childhood: 0.5 FTE

- The primary duty of the added 0.5 position, would be to establish another co-taught 4K site if necessary.
- Currently we have 20 students who are 4K eligible based on age, but many of them are very young, and may end up continuing in Early Childhood for another year.
 - Can increase Early Childhood sections from 4-6 to accommodate the second year of Early Childhood with existing staff.
- There is also uncertainty about the status of 4K sites and potential Get Kids Ready sites, who need to make a decision by the end of February.

School District of River Falls
2027-28 SCHOOL CALENDAR

August 2027

M	T	W	TH	F
2	3	4	5	6
9	10	11	12	13
16	17	18	19	20
23♦	24♦	25♦	26♦	27
30♦	31♦			

16-17 – New Teacher Orientation
18 – K Boost
19 – New Para Orientation
26 & 30 – Teacher Curriculum Academy
23, 24, 25, & 31 – Teacher In-service

September 2027 **21**

M	T	W	TH	F
		1	2	3
6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17
20	21	22	23	24
27	28	29	30	

1 – First Student Day
6 – No School (Labor Day)

October 2027 **19**

M	T	W	TH	F
				1
4	5	6	7	8♦
11	12	13	14	15
18	19	20	21	22
25	26	27	28	29

8- No School (Teacher In-service)
(HS Virtual Day)
11 – No School (Vacation)

November 2027 **18**

M	T	W	TH	F
1	2	3	4Q	5♦
8	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23T	24	25	26
29	30			

5 – No School (Teacher In-service)
24-26 – No School (Thanksgiving Break)

December 2027 **15**

M	T	W	TH	F
		1	2	3
6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17
20	21	22	23	24
27	28	29	30	31

22-31 – No School (Winter Break)

January 2028 **20**

M	T	W	TH	F
3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20Q	21♦*
24	25	26	27	28
31				

21– No School (Teacher In-service)

February 2028 **19**

M	T	W	TH	F
	1	2	3	4
7	8	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21♦*	22	23	24	25
28	29			

18 – No School (Vacation)
21 – No School (Teacher In-service)

March 2028 **18**

M	T	W	TH	F
		1	2	3T
6	7	8	9	10
13	14	15	16	17
20	21	22	23	24
27	28	29	30	31Q

20-24 – No School (Spring Break)

April 2028 **19**

M	T	W	TH	F
3♦*	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28

3– No School (Teacher In-service)

May 2028 **21**

M	T	W	TH	F
1	2	3	4	5*
8	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24	25	26
29	30	31		

5 – No School (Vacation)
29 – No School (Memorial Day)

June 2028 **5**

M	T	W	TH	F
			1	2
5	6	7	8♦*	9♦*
12	13	14	15	16
19	20	21	22	23
26	27	28	29	30

7 – Last Day of School
8-9 – Teacher In-service

Quarters (Secondary):

- 1: 9/1/27-11/4/27 (44 days)
- 2: 11/8/27-1/20/28 (43 days)
- 3: 1/24/28-3/31/28 (43 days)
- 4: 4/4/28-6/7/28 (45 days)

Trimesters (Elementary):

- 1: 9/2/27-11/23/27 (56 days)
- 2: 11/29/27-3/3/28 (59 days)
- 3: 3/6/28-6/6/28 (60 days)

First Student Day: September 1, 2027
 No School Days:
 Graduation Day: TBD
 Last Student Day: June 7, 2028
 Possible Make-Up Days: *

Student Days	175
Parent Teacher Conference Days	2
Work/In-service Days ♦	13
Total Days	190



August 2026				
M	T	W	Th	F
3	4	5	6	7
10	11	12	13	14
17	18	19	20♦	21
24♦	25♦	26♦	27♦	28
31				

September 2026				
M	T	W	Th	F
	1▲	2	3	4
7	8	9	10	11
14	15	16L	17	18
21	22	23L	24	25
28	29	30L		

October 2026				
M	T	W	Th	F
			1	2
5♦	6	7L	8	9
12	13	14L	15	16
19	20	21L	22	23
26	27	28L	29	30Q

November 2026				
M	T	W	Th	F
2♦	3	4	5	6
9	10	11L	12	13
16	17	18L	19	20T
23	24	25	26	27
30				

December 2026				
M	T	W	Th	F
	1	2L	3	4
7	8	9L	10	11
14	15	16L	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
28	29	30	31	

January 2027				
M	T	W	Th	F
				1
4	5	6L	7	8
11	12	13L	14	15Q
18♦*	19	20	21	22
25	26	27L	28	29

February 2027				
M	T	W	Th	F
1	2	3L	4	5
8	9	10L	11	12
15♦*	16	17	18	19
22	23	24L	25	26

March 2027				
M	T	W	Th	F
1	2	3L	4	5T
8	9	10L	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24L	25	26
29	30	31L		

April 2027				
M	T	W	Th	F
			1Q	2♦*
5	6	7	8	9
12	13	14L	15	16
19	20	21L	22	23
26	27	28L	29	30

May 2027				
M	T	W	Th	F
3	4	5L	6	7*
10	11	12L	13	14
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28
31				

June 2027				
M	T	W	Th	F
	1	2	3	4▼
7*♦	8*♦	9	10	11
14	15	16	17	18
21	22	23	24	25
28	29			

- ▲ First Student Day
- ▼ Last Student Day
- No school
- * Possible make-up days
- ♦ In-service Days
- L HS Late Start: 8:15am

AUGUST 2026

17-18	New Teacher Orientation
19	K Boost
19	Renaissance GEDO 2 Info. Meeting (4:00-6:30 pm)
20	New Para Orientation
20	Teacher Curriculum Academy
24-27	Teacher In-Service
25	MMS Back-to-School Open House (12:30-7:30 pm)
26	HS Parent Night Open House (5-8 pm)
26	RCA Back to School Parent Night (4-6:30pm)
26	Elementary Back-to-School Open House (3-6 pm)

SEPTEMBER

1	First Student Day of School (all schools, including RF4C)
7	No School (Labor Day)
28	HS & RCA Parent/Teacher Conferences (4:30-7 pm)

OCTOBER

5	No School for Grades 4K-8 (Teacher In-Service) Virtual Day for Grades 9-12
30	End of Quarter One (Secondary Level)

NOVEMBER

2	No School (Teacher In-Service)
2	Elementary Parent-Teacher Conferences (4-7:30 pm)
5	MMS Parent-Teacher Conferences (3:45-7:30 pm)
5	Elementary Parent-Teacher Conferences (4-7:30 pm)
11	MMS Veterans Day Program (1:30 pm)
20	End of Trimester One (Elementary Level)
25-27	No School (Thanksgiving Break)

DECEMBER

7	HS & RCA Parent/Teacher Conferences (4:30-7 pm)
23-31	No School (Winter Break)

JANUARY 2027

1	No School (Winter Break)
15	End of Quarter Two (Secondary Level)
18	No School (MLK Day) (Teacher In-Service)
25	HS Course Registration Night (5-8 pm)

FEBRUARY

15	No School for Grades 4K-8 (Teacher In-Service) Virtual Day for Grades 9-12
15	Elementary Parent-Teacher Conferences (4-7:30 pm)
18	Elementary Parent-Teacher Conferences (4-7:30 pm)
18	HS & RCA Parent/Teacher Conferences (4:30-7 pm)

MARCH

5	End of Trimester Two (Elementary Level)
15-19	No School (Spring Break)

APRIL

1	End of Quarter Three (Secondary Level)
1	MMS Parent-Teacher Conferences (3:45-7:30 pm)
2	No School (Teacher In-Service)
7	HS ACT Day for Grades 9, 10, 11 Service to Community Day for Grade 12

MAY

10	HS & RCA Parent/Teacher Conferences (4:30-7 pm)
7	No School (Vacation)
14	Renaissance Senior Celebration (4:30-7:30 pm)
31	No School (Memorial Day)

JUNE

4	Last Student Day of School
6	High School Graduation (1-3 pm)
7-8	No School (Teacher In-Service)

2025 Mid-Year New Teacher Feedback

Core Mentor Program:

Positive Themes

1. Approachability and Temperament

Mentors are consistently described as "friendly faces," "genuine," and "easy to talk to."

- **Key Strengths:** Mentors create a safe space where mentees feel comfortable asking questions without feeling like a "burden" or feeling "guilty."
- **Emotional Support:** There is a strong appreciation for mentors who check in on a personal level (e.g., supporting a new mom or recognizing when someone is overwhelmed).

2. Proactive but Balanced Communication

Mentors seem to have mastered the "sweet spot" of checking in.

- **Consistency:** Mentees value the "frequent touches" and regular check-ins.
- **Respect for Time:** Mentees specifically praised mentors who did *not* schedule unnecessary meetings and were mindful of not "overburdening" veteran or busy staff.

3. Reliability and Resourcefulness

Mentors are being utilized as vital "sounding boards" for ideas and problem-solving.

- **Responsiveness:** Praise was given to mentors for seeking out answers they don't know and get back to the mentee quickly.
- **Material Sharing:** Mentees appreciated receiving physical materials and help with Infinite Campus (IC) or character education.

4. The Value of Outside Perspectives

While there was initial skepticism about cross-department mentoring, several mentees now see it as a benefit.

- **Fresh Eyes:** General Education mentors are providing valuable "different perspectives" to Special Education (SPED) teachers and vice versa.
-

Areas for Improvement

1. The "SPED/Content/Grade Level Knowledge Gap"

A few specialized teachers mentioned the lack of specialized knowledge from mentors.

- **Specific Needs:** Mentees feel that while their mentors are "great," they lack the specific SPED knowledge required for their "highest priority items."

2. Time and Scheduling Constraints

- **Limited Sit-Downs:** Several notes mentioned a lack of formal "sit-down" meetings due to busy schedules.
-

First Month Experience:

1. High-Quality Onboarding & District Support

Mentees were impressed by the New Teacher Orientation and the structural support provided by the District.

- **Concise & Relevant:** Multiple people noted that the orientation was "miles better" than previous experiences and felt the topics presented were "perfectly concise."
- **Valuable Content:** Topics like goal setting, character education, and IC support gave teachers the feeling of having their "feet under them" before students arrived.
- **Early Logistics:** The communication over the summer and "open days" to pick up technology were specifically appreciated.

2. Team & Admin Welcome

The strongest recurring theme is the sense of community. Teachers across the board felt "welcomed" and "seen."

- **Visible Leadership:** Admin "bopping in" was seen as a positive, making leadership feel accessible and supportive.
- **Collaborative Planning:** Having dedicated time to plan with colleagues and neighbors was a major factor in a successful first month.
- **Proactive Outreach:** Teammates and veteran staff reached out early and often which mitigated the stress of a new environment.

3. Heavy Workload

Even with great support, the first month was described as "a lot" and "overwhelming."

- Information Overload: Terms like "drinking from a fire hose" and "didn't know what I didn't know" suggest that while the content is good, the sheer volume of new info is taxing.
- Role Transitions: Those moving to new age groups, managing adults (paras), or taking on "tough" students felt the weight of the transition more acutely.

4. Logistical & Environmental Barriers

While the "people" part of onboarding was great, the "physical" and "scheduling" parts had some friction.

- Classroom Access: A few teachers mentioned that the hardest part was not getting into their rooms early enough due to construction.
- Managing Staff: Special Education and specialized roles found it "tricky" to manage and delegate tasks to paraprofessionals on the very first day.
- Schedule Confusion: Some confusion exists regarding prep times and caseload management, particularly for those without a traditional "team prep".

5. Connections

Despite the support, a small undercurrent of isolation exists for some.

- One teacher mentioned feeling "a bit lonely," and another noted that it "takes time to connect with co-workers". This suggests that while professional support is high, the social integration into a new building can still be a slow process.

What kind of training or support would have made your transition smoother?

1. The "Time" Deficit

The most universal theme is the need for more time—specifically, time that is unstructured or dedicated to individual classroom needs.

- In-Service Density: Certain schools' inservice schedules were noted as being "pretty full," leaving little room for teachers to "weave in" their own ideas or curriculum plans.

- Curriculum Deep-Dives: Beyond an overview, teachers want more time to go through actual lesson manuals and practice the curriculum before students arrive.

2. Technical Mastery of Systems (IC & EE)

There is a call for more intensive, specialized training on the software used for grading and Special Education.

- Infinite Campus (IC): Teachers are asking for an "IC 101" or a "practice run". Specific pain points include behavior referrals, documenting missed minutes, and grading standards.
- Educator Effectiveness (EE): There is confusion regarding timelines and what specifically needs to be entered into the fields.

3. Special Education (SPED) Process Clarity

The transition into the District's SPED processes is causing some anxiety due to lack of familiarity.

- IEP Expectations: Mentees want more time to review caseloads with someone who knows the school's specific IEP culture and processes.
- Division of Labor: There is confusion over who handles what (e.g., in previous districts, Psychs handled parent contact for re-evaluations, but that may be different here).

4. Professional Isolation vs. Collaboration

Teachers in specialized roles (Music, SPED Science, Speech) feel "secluded" or "isolated" due to scheduling conflicts.

- Cross-House Barriers: Schedules often prevent teachers from attending meetings with their subject-matter peers, leading to a feeling of being on an island.
- Shadowing & Observation: An interest was expressed in "shadowing" or watching other teachers work to understand the local flow and community "place".

5. Historical Perspective

- Existing Challenges: Some teachers expressed a desire for a "heads up" regarding existing challenges in their specific programs or classrooms before stepping in.

Overall Experience:

Things you've enjoyed the most.

1. A Culture of Trust and Autonomy

Teachers feel empowered by the leadership style within the District. They appreciate being treated as professionals. This was viewed as a "breath of fresh air" when compared to prior experiences.

- Lack of Micromanagement: Multiple notes mention feeling "trusted" and "not micromanaged to death". This freedom allows them to build their own programs and "weave in" their own teaching styles.
- High Standards with Support: There is a sense that while they are held to a high standard, they have the leadership and resources necessary to meet those expectations.

2. Collaboration & Support

The "open door" policy seems to be a reality rather than just a slogan. Mentees feel they can ask questions without fear of being judged.

- Positive Intent: "Everyone assumes positive intent", which creates a safe environment for new teachers to seek help.
- Departmental Synergy: Specific mentors were praised for sharing resources, discussing pacing, and offering constant support.
- Integrated Teams: Collaboration isn't just within departments; Gen-Ed teachers are described as "accepting and welcoming" of co-teachers and specialists (like therapy/SPED).

3. Deep Connection to Students & Community

The "joy" of teaching is a recurring sentiment, largely driven by the quality of the student body and parent relationships.

- Student Behavior: Teachers are pleasantly surprised by the students, describing them as "genuine", "sweet", "respectful", and "engaged". One teacher noted a lack of bullying and a general sense that "kids want to be here".
- Breakthrough Moments: There is a high level of job satisfaction derived from "true teaching moments," such as seeing a high-needs student progress to completing assigned tasks.

- Parental Support: Relationships with parents were highlighted as a positive force, particularly during conferences.

4. Physical & Material Resources

The environment itself—both the building layout and the available tools—is seen as a major asset.

- Strategic Spaces: Teachers appreciate having their own rooms and being in "close proximity" to their teams (e.g., the pod spaces for projects).
- Resource Abundance: There is a strong feeling that "anything I want to do, we have the resources for", which removes a significant barrier to creative teaching.

5. Emotional Well-being and Job Satisfaction

The overall "vibe" of the workplace is described as "upbeat" and "full of positive energy".

- Looking Forward to Work: Several teachers explicitly stated they "actually look forward to coming to work", comparing it favorably to previous, less supportive districts.
- Sense of Community: There is a "school-wide sense of community" that makes staff feel like they aren't just employees, but part of a family.

Challenges

1. Structural & Professional Isolation

Some teachers feel "disconnected" from their peers or the established school culture.

- Social/Professional Fit: Some staff feel their ideas are seen as "different" or that the current systems are "locked-in" leading to a struggle to fit in with established groups.
- Building Relationships: Some teachers are experiencing a lack of deep connections as they shift from a smaller, more intimate school climate to a larger one.

2. Constraints on Professional Autonomy

Experienced teachers are feeling the "pinch" of following plans that don't always align with their best work.

- "Following the Plan": Teachers expressed frustration when asked to follow someone else's plan exactly, especially when they have high-quality materials of their own they want to "weave in".

- Loss of Specialization: Some are missing teaching their "passion" subjects while being assigned to subjects they are less excited about.

3. The "Manager of Adults" Challenge (SPED/Paras)

A burden is being placed on teachers who manage other adults without enough time or training to do so effectively.

- Para Management: One teacher is managing 7 paras and 9 classrooms, which leaves no time for modeling or hands-on coaching. They expressed a need for a half-day to work with their staff.

5. Systems, Grading, and Tech Fatigue

The technical side of the job continues to be a hurdle, particularly regarding the transition of data and grading.

- The "Grading" Gap: Moving from Traditional Grading to Standards-Based Grading has been a challenge.
- Information Overload: Teachers feel the information they need exists, but they "don't know where it is".

Possible Action Steps

Area	Action Item
Technical Support	Create 2-minute "Loom" video tutorials or "Cheat Sheets" for IC grading and EE timelines to reduce anxiety.
SPED Clarity	Provide a 4-hour "Deep Dive" for SPED staff specifically on local IEP culture, re-evaluation workflows, and "Skills" class expectations.
Adult Leadership	Grant a half-day of "Release Time" for teachers who manage paras to allow for team-building, goal setting, and modeling.
Curriculum Support	Share curriculum resources over the summer so new teachers can review scope and sequence as well as curriculum guides and resources.

New Teacher Ratings:

Mentor Support	Overall Experience	Likelihood of return to RFSD next year
9.0	8.3	9.5

2025 Mid-Year New Para Feedback

Core Mentor Program:

Positive Themes

1. Regular Check Ins

The most consistent positive feedback involves the frequency of informal touches.

- **The "Go To Person" Value:** Mentees value having one specific person they know they can turn to. Mentees described their mentors as "always available" and indicated they were never made to feel like they were a burden to the mentor.
- **Proactive Outreach:** Mentors are effectively "looping in" mentees on things they need to know via email or hallway chats, ensuring new hires don't feel forgotten.

2. The Shadowing Success

Observation is seen as one of the most high-value activities

- **Mentors Observing Mentees:** Mentees found tremendous value in being shadowed by their mentor.
 - Constructive feedback
 - In moment questions
 - Led to great discussion

3. Reliability and Knowledge Sharing

The "resourcefulness" of a mentor is just as important as their "niceness."

- **Seeking Answers:** Mentees have high praise for mentors who say, *"I don't know, but I'll find out,"* and then actually follow through.
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Areas for Improvement

1. Disconnects

There are outliers where the mentorship connection is not happening at all.

- **"Never Met":** At least one mentee reported having never met with their assigned mentor.
- **Late Identification:** Some mentees were a month into the year before the mentorship was formally established or active.

2. Structural & Scheduling Barriers

The "logistics of meeting" is the primary source of friction in the mentorship program.

- **Schedule Mismatch:** Incompatible schedules and different recess/lunch times are preventing the "sit-down" meetings that mentees crave, especially early in the year.

3. Shadowing

- **Mentees Observing Mentors:** A clear theme emerged that mentees want the opportunity to shadow their mentors as well. They want to see the "master at work" in a real classroom setting.

First Month Experience:

1. World-Class Onboarding and Hiring

The District's hiring and orientation process is a major standout for Paras.

- **Professionalism & Warmth:** Staff compared the experience favorably to other districts, noting that the communication from HR and the "outstanding" interview process set a positive tone.
- **New Para Orientation:** One staff member was "blown away" by the specific orientation for Paraprofessionals, noting it was a "game changer" for entering a new environment.
- **Leadership Approachability:** The Superintendent and district leadership are seen as "normal people" who are approachable and welcoming, which significantly diminished new-hire anxiety.

2. Instant "Family" Integration

There is a profound sense of belonging from day one.

- **The "First Day" Effect:** Being met at the door by mentors and immediately included in text groups/phone lists made staff feel like part of a family.
- **Retention through Connection:** Staff explicitly mentioned that this early "felt welcome" is what drives long-term retention.
- **The "RF" Vibe:** Multiple notes mention that you can "tell people here are meant to work with kids" and that the community is supportive and friendly.

3. The "Relationship-Building" Curve

Despite the great start, the first two weeks with students are described as "difficult" and "intimidating."

- **Learning the Kids:** The primary challenge wasn't the paperwork, but getting to know the unique needs and "swing of things" for specific student groups.
- **Managing Expectations:** New staff felt the weight of having to learn different teachers' expectations and varying classroom routines simultaneously.

4. Logistical "Chaos" and Role Shifts

For some, the start of the year involved a high degree of movement and environmental instability.

- **Floats and Split Assignments:** Those assigned to two schools or moving from "floating" to a dedicated classroom felt a higher level of "chaos" and change.

What kind of training or support would have made your transition smoother?

1. Earlier Shadowing Opportunities

The most frequent request from new support staff is for a dedicated observation period before being expected to lead.

- **Observation Before Responsibility:** Staff expressed a desire for a "shadow day" to watch a veteran para or teacher before taking on their own responsibilities.

2. Skills Training

New staff often feel undertrained for the specific physical and developmental needs of their students.

Overall Experience:

Things you've enjoyed the most.

1. The "Family" Culture & High Visibility

There is a sense of community that extends beyond individual classrooms.

- **Warmth at All Levels:** Staff describe the environment as "warm and welcoming," noting that everyone from office staff to principals says "hi" in the hallways.
- **Sense of Belonging:** New staff feel like they are part of a "family" rather than just employees. This is bolstered by colleagues who proactively offer insights from previous years.
- **Appreciation:** Staff explicitly mentioned that it is nice to feel "appreciated" by the community and the administration.

2. Deep Satisfaction in Student Progress

The "daily wins" with students are the primary driver of job satisfaction.

- **Relationship-First Mentality:** There is a widespread understanding that "relationships and trust come first" before any academic or behavioral progress can happen.
- **The "Win" of Problem Solving:** Staff who work with "harder behavior" students find genuine joy in the problem-solving process and feel supported by feedback from leadership.
- **Connection Across Ages:** For those who work with multiple age groups, seeing student progress and building rapport with the "friends/peers" of their students is a major highlight.

3. Collaborative Camaraderie

When challenges arise, the staff relies on a strong "all-hands-on-deck" mentality.

- **Team Resilience:** One note highlighted that "paras all pulled together and figured it out," showing high levels of peer-to-peer reliance.
- **Flexibility:** The work environment is described as "flexible," where people are "there for each other" on difficult days.
- **Leadership Style:** Leaders alike are praised for creating "relaxed" environments that maintain high learning standards while utilizing a "great sense of humor."

4. Professional Autonomy & Contribution

Staff appreciate being treated as experts in their own right.

- **Bringing Own Skill Sets:** Beyond just following a schedule, staff feel they have the "opportunity to bring their own skill set" to the table.
 - **Collegiality:** There is a high respect for co-workers' expertise, with one staff member noting that colleagues "know what they are doing."
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Challenges

1. Scheduling Changes

- **Schedule Volatility:** Frequent changes to work duties, schedules, and being moved out of preferred classrooms caused a sense of instability.

2. Role Ambiguity and "Boundary" Stress

Staff are struggling to navigate the "gray areas" of their authority.

- **Behavior Management:** There is confusion over whether a para should step in to manage a classroom when a substitute teacher is present or when a teacher is in a different area of the classroom.
- **Crossing Territories:** There is a noted friction when SPED staff "cross over" into Gen Ed territories (like recess or lunch), where behavior expectations may differ.

Possible Action Steps

Area	Action Item
Role Ambiguity	Ensure paras have opportunities to discuss expectations with teachers and colleagues prior to the first day of school.
Early Support	Ensure principals introduce new paras to mentors early on and promote regular check in meetings and early shadow opportunities.
Adult Leadership	Grant a half-day of "Release Time" for teachers who manage paras to allow for team-building, goal setting, and modeling.
Para Shadowing Protocol	Ensure shadowing experience is provided in the first 2-3 weeks of the school year.

New Para Ratings:

Mentor Support	Overall Experience	Likelihood of return to RFSD next year
8.1	8.4	9.3