

Good morning everyone! I'm Caleb Clark, School Board Chair this year. I'm happy to see you all this morning. I hope you all had a restful and rejuvenating summer, with time for family, friends, and maybe a bit of adventure.

During my time of service on the Board, I've had the joy of meeting many of you at various events, including our "Bagels with the Board" gatherings, school presentations, listening sessions, and school tours. I've even run into some of you at the State Street Park and Target! These experiences have given me a deeper appreciation for the dedication and passion you bring to your roles. It's clear that your commitment goes beyond the classroom and is woven into the very fabric of our community.

This year feels especially exciting for me because my daughter is starting her kindergarten journey at Meadow View. Like so many other parents, I'm feeling a mix of emotions both as a board member and as a parent. So I wanted to share something personal I recently posted on Facebook. It's a reflection on my wife and I sending my daughter, Vesta, off to kindergarten:

*Titled Into the unknown*

*Yesterday, I shared the kinder smart start schedule with Vesta, telling her when she gets to explore the school, see classrooms, gyms, bathrooms, cafeterias, playgrounds, and other kids who will be feeling hopeful, excited, anxious, and maybe even scared.*

*I told her about the half days leading up to her first full school day.*

*I told her she needs to keep practicing on her bike so I could come and ride home with her after her first full day.*

*And she listened, and she asked questions, but I know she didn't fully understand. Up until very recently, she equated "going to school" with her big brother disappearing for a week.*

*I struggle with trying to prepare her while knowing that I can't. I struggle with knowing she's going to absolutely love being around other kids her age, but also knowing that she has no inkling of the journey she's about to begin.*

*I struggle to be excited for her in front of her and only to worry when she's not around.*

*I've never done this before. Kent didn't go anywhere for kindergarten (because of covid), I struggled differently back then.*

*We are the hopeful, excited, anxious, and maybe even scared kid that'll be walking beside her. She's going to be great, and so will we.*

I share this with you because I know that each of you understands these emotions all too well. Your work is not just about imparting knowledge; it's about guiding our children and their families through these important transitions.

We are here today because we share a common belief: that education is one of the most powerful tools we can provide to our children. It shapes not only their minds but their character, values, and future. You, as educators, administrators, support staff, counselors, on and on, are the stewards of this great responsibility, and I can't express enough how much we value your dedication, passion, and expertise.

As we begin this new school year, let's continue to endeavor to make a positive impact on the lives of our students. Let's embrace the opportunities that lie ahead, support one another, and approach each day with the enthusiasm, dedication and joy that makes the Bethel School District exceptional.

Thank you for all that you do. Here's to a wonderful and successful school year. Welcome back!