



Community Connection

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2050 Stoneridge Drive, Circleville, Ohio • (740) 474-7529 • www.pickawayesc.org

Westfall super right where she wants to be

Cara Riddel is the first to acknowledge that she took a different path to becoming a superintendent. But it was a path she knew would serve her – and the school district that hired her – well.

After spending more than two decades in education, Cara knew that she wanted to be a superintendent for a small local school system.

Westfall Local Schools was the right fit, and Cara has led that district since 2011.

"I've just been very honored to serve these children and this community," said Cara, whose background includes nearly 10 years in human resources.

"It's not common," Cara said of her human-resources background, "but it's a really good path."

"Eighty to 85 percent of money you spend in a district is on people. (Leading) is always about relationships."

Now completing her fourth year at Westfall, Cara is especially proud of the strategic planning that the district implemented, which she said will have long-term benefits.

"The strategic plan is by no means perfect, but it helps us stay focused," she said.

"It has helped us make progress. It may be going too fast for some and too slow for others. But it has helped

Pickaway Profiles

A semi-regular feature on educators in Pickaway County schools.



Cara Riddel, Westfall Local Schools superintendent, takes video as the high school marching band practices.

us stay the course."

Another feather in Cara's cap is the high school's Westfall Business Academy, taught by Chris Norris and Jennifer Unverferth, which is starting its second year.

The elective course provides students with the opportunity to run a print shop.

"It promotes entrepreneurship through project-based learning," Cara said.

Cara appreciates learning as an educator and as a student herself.

Last year, she was selected by the Buckeye Association of School Administrators to take part in a 10-day

tour of China, visiting Beijing and Shanghai.

She said the trip focused on schools in those cities, but also was an opportunity to learn about the culture.

"China is one of the best (countries) to collaborate with," Cara said. "It's kind of a rival but also a place for us to export."

Cara said the trip provided an understanding of a culture that is so different.

"To make a blanket statement about Chinese education, you can't do it," she said. "You think America is diverse, China is diverse."

Thirty-year career started with part-time job

When Lydia Rittinger completed Pickaway-Ross' high skills stenography program in 1981, she knew she needed a job with benefits.

But when she joined the Pickaway County Board of Education – now the Pickaway County Educational Service Center – she probably didn't expect she'd be there 30 years later.

"I needed a job to help support my family, but I didn't expect to find a career," said Lydia, an administrative assistant at the ESC.

She started as a part-time employee working three days a week in the basement cleaning 16-millimeter films.

At the time, said Treasurer Shannon Clark, "We were housed in an old brick house on Franklin Street in Circleville. The basement was just that, a basement that we called the dungeon. It was kind of dark and gloomy. But someone had to take care of all those big film reels."

Lydia toiled away in the basement for about five years. One day, Lydia recalls, two secretaries resigned and she was offered a full-time job.

In her current role, she compiles the monthly substitute teacher list, performs background checks and fingerprinting on prospective employees.

She's also a people person, always willing to help those who need a license as a teacher or aide.

The Ohio Department of Education now requires that everything for licensure be submitted online. Lydia often will sit down with those who are not tech savvy and walk them through the process.

"I enjoy helping people," Lydia said.

In her 30 years at the ESC, technology and superintendents have changed, but Lydia said growth in services has been among the bigger changes.

"Our office has grown by adding numerous programs and staff members and by offering so many more services to the city and local school districts and to all the children of Pickaway County. We not only work with the city and local districts by providing some related services, but also with Brooks Yates, Pickaway-Ross, PICCA Head Start, Early Head Start, Help Me Grow and Family and Children First



Lydia Rittinger, an administrative assistant, has worked at the ESC since 1985.

Council.

"I have always enjoyed my job, the changes, challenges and successes, and I plan to continue working."

Educators lauded for years of service

In addition to Lydia Rittinger, the following ESC employees were recognized last month for their years of service:

One year: Rex Cockrell, Brittany Kirby, Rachel Reem and Carolyn Stevens.

Five years: Kelly Conley, Kelly Duarte, Patricia Griebel, Rhonda McGuire, Christy Rigsby and Tammy Sutherland

Ten years: Jeanine McDowell and Patricia Southward

Fifteen years: Lisa Gribler, Eric Horvath, Melissa Kerns and Jane Osborne

Twenty years: Angie Overholt

Golden Apple (presented to an employee who has been in education for 30 years): Patti Webb

SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER: Children get a head start thanks to summer speech clinic

Several Pickaway County speech language pathologists spent July working with children to help them succeed this fall.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Julie Wolfe, Bethany McFerin and Sara Christ worked with about 50 children at the Head Start building providing a summer speech clinic. While the clinic was open to ages 3 to 13, therapists primarily worked with 3- to 6-year-olds.

Julie and Bethany said that while the eight sessions aren't enough to see progress in "leaps and bounds," they do keep



Ty Ankrom

Bethany said a perk of the clinic is seeing a child's progress.

children learning.

"Offering extra help with students' speech and language disorders over the summer allows them to keep up with their progress heading into the next school year," Bethany said.

"When I get to see the imaginary light bulb go off over their heads (because) they realize that they've made progress" was Bethany's favorite part of the clinic. For Julie, being able to connect with parents was a high point.

"Because parents are responsible for transportation, it provides us with the opportunity to share the session activities or outcomes with them face to face. This is a chance to share suggestions or cues we have used during the therapy sessions with the families," Julie said.

Bethany said another benefit of con-

necting with parents is their feedback.

The ESC is able to provide the clinic through a partnership with Hands for the Disabled and the four county school districts.

Parents or guardians who would like their child to take part in next year's summer clinic can contact the ESC at (740) 474-7529 or the speech pathologist at their child's school.

Ty Ankrom is superintendent of the Pickaway County Educational Service Center.

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