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First student in PBHS history to be Named to National FFA Band

SEPTEMBER 19TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

First student in PBHS history to be Named to National FFA Band

A student has been chosen to be a member of the National FFA Band for the first time in the history of Poplar Bluff High School since the local chapter of the leadership development organization was chartered in 2002, confirmed advisers of past and present.

PBHS sophomore Preston Ethridge has been selected to perform among 100 students across the United States, and six total in Missouri, to play trumpet Wednesday through Saturday, Oct. 23-26, during the 97th annual National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis.

"There are over one million FFA members nationwide [representing] the largest youth organization in the world," stated PBHS agriculture instructor Mike Melson, FFA adviser. "Out of a million members, they pick 100 of those who tryout to be chosen for the band. As a sophomore, that's just crazy unheard of."

Preston, a section leader for the Sho-Me Marching Band, will perform "and help bring full instrumental balance to the band" several times including at Lucas Oil Stadium, the Artsgarden and various special awards functions, according to a National FFA press release. To be considered, he submitted a video audition and application over the summer and was notified of his placement last month.

"He is a very hard worker and is a very reliable member of the band," commented Junior and Senior High music teacher Stephen Winters, the band director, noting that Preston placed in the Southeast Missouri All-District Band last year as a freshman.

He will arrive in advance to rehearse and maintain a rigorous schedule while his fellow FFA chapter members attend breakout sessions and presentations at the convention with Melson and chaperone Branden Smith, who teaches another section of agriculture education. A total of eight PBHS students will attend the school-sponsored event out of 48 members, based on last year's FFA involvement in activities and student fundraising.

"Anybody that can learn their music [sight unseen] with three days practice, that's pretty intense," Melson continued. "How many students do we have that are gonna get the opportunity to play in front of an audience of

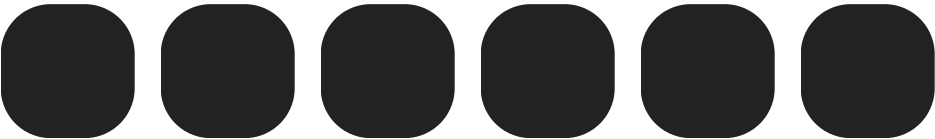
70,000? It's the best of the best."

Above: Preston Ethridge receives multiple accolades during the annual FFA banquet held last school year at PBHS.

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Registrar Office Established Alongside New Student Information System

SEPTEMBER 05TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Registrar Office Established Alongside New Student Information System

“Easier,” “more convenient,” “less time consuming” and “long overdue” were sentiments shared by parents over social media concerning the Poplar Bluff School District’s launch of its online enrollment process this school year.

The streamlined registration system was coupled with the creation of a new district office to assist families, housed in the former Mules Café area of the Administrative Building, approved by the Board of Education in March.

“This new role will address the growing need for accurate record-keeping and streamlined enrollment processes district-wide,” described the memo presented by Aaron Badgley, R-I chief technology officer. “This strategic position will improve data integrity and ensure reporting compliance within our student information systems.”

Later in the spring, Taylor Russom was hired as the district’s very first registrar. Russom, a Poplar Bluff native, transferred internally from the Kindergarten Center, where she had been employed as secretary for the past few years, before which she served in the front office of the Middle School since 2017/18.

“I think one of my favorite parts of my job previously was the enrollment process,” said Russom, who started her new role in June after assisting Kindergarten with early registration on the new system. “I love that you’re meeting brand new people—you are welcoming them into the district. Every registration is completely different, so you don’t know what your day is going to look like or what you’re gonna encounter.”

When Russom began at the Kindergarten Center in 2020, parents and guardians were filling out several pages of paperwork by hand. With some of the information being redundant, Russom said she was able to consolidate the packet to only a few pages. However, caregivers with multiple students at different sites had to visit each building annually in order to verify any changes in demographical data.

“All the buildings did things a little bit differently, but ultimately [the data] is going to the same place, so it’s nice to have a uniformed process,” Russom explained. “Parents are the ones entering the information, so we’re no longer having to scour over the info as closely, when you were second-hand entering it from a sheet of paper, deciphering handwriting.”

Now families can take care of their enrollment or verification from the district website, including uploading copies of documentation such as birth certificates, immunization records and proof of residency, according to Russom. If assistance is needed, appointments may be booked online or over the phone, and generally

take less than 15 minutes. For those without access, a public computer station and scanner are available in her office.

School leaders have discussed the increasing need for the position since 2022, but the decision was expedited when the district's SIS vendor informed its clients it had reached the end of its life cycle and would discontinue offering support. The BOE approved Infinite Campus the following year after a committee of 15 stakeholders vetted three proposals. The new platform went live district-wide this school year, including the enrollment component, after the Instructional Technology Department hosted a series of trainings for employee groups.

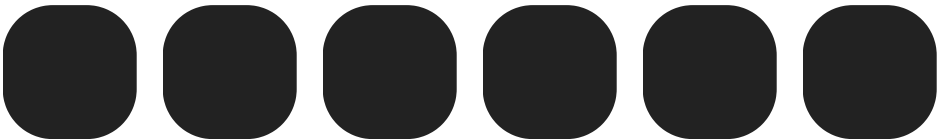
“Since we were also gonna be utilizing the online registration feature, it has become a lot easier for parents going to one location with one person to talk to,” Russom continued. “My communication with parents doesn’t just stop at new registration either. I’m happy to assist with Parent Portal as much as I can and troubleshoot any account issues they are having.”

To schedule an appointment with Russom at 1110 N. Westwood Blvd., click the enrollment icon at poplarbluffschoools.net or call 573-850-0850.

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2023 Puxico High School Retiring Homecoming King and Queen Featuring Jera Backus and Cole Barnfield

FEBRUARY 12TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

2023 Puxico High School Retiring Homecoming King and Queen Featuring Jera Backus and Cole Barnfield

The Puxico High School held their annual Homecoming Coronation.

The retiring 2023 Puxico High School Homecoming Queen is Jera Backus.

Jera is the daughter of Amy and Todd Backus.

Jera is currently aspiring for a career in Finance.

The 2023 Puxico High School retiring Homecoming King is Cole Barnfield. Cole is the son of Tracy and Chris Barnfield.

Cole is currently attending Southeast Missouri State University - Cape Girardeau and majoring in Cyber Security.

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Bus Tracking App for Families Piloted at Early Childhood and Kindergarten

MARCH 09TH 2023 BY DEE LOFLIN

Bus Tracking App for Families Piloted at Early Childhood and Kindergarten

The Poplar Bluff School District is piloting its new bus tracking app Here Comes The Bus at the Early Childhood and Kindergarten centers with plans to roll out the parent access tool district-wide for the 2023/24 school year.

The R-I Transportation Department began receiving its initial training followed by webinars shortly after Jon McKinney took the reins as director in July, a software technician position was created thereafter, and the associated hardware continues to be installed as the bus fleet expands.

“This is just a better way to communicate with our parents so they have a sense of security knowing their son or daughter is on the bus and when they get to school,” McKinney explained. “On our end, it should cut down on phone calls, because parents should literally be able to look on their phone and see when and where their child stepped on the bus.”

Under the pilot, parents and guardians of bus riders will soon receive letters in the mail providing instructions for downloading the app or visiting the website, then entering the unique student identification number supplied, and setting the preferred radius for receiving communication via text or email.

Students will scan their district-issued ID when entering and exiting the bus, and drivers will have access to a touchscreen with a name-based ridership module for the lower grade levels. The geofence can be set between 750 feet and two miles eliminating wait times at bus stops, and real-time alerts will automatically be sent to caregivers when students have arrived at school.

The locator has the capacity to refresh every 15 seconds using a single primary address drawn from the district's student information system. Families of multiple children riding different buses can be tracked simultaneously. Individuals may only sign up for push notifications if they are on the student's emergency contact list.

The Board of Education approved the acquisition of the fleet management system prior to McKinney's arrival, selecting Synovia Solutions CalAmp as the low bidder, applying startup dollars from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund to "create a more predictable transportation experience for kids and parents," R-I Superintendent Dr. Scott Dill stated last school year.

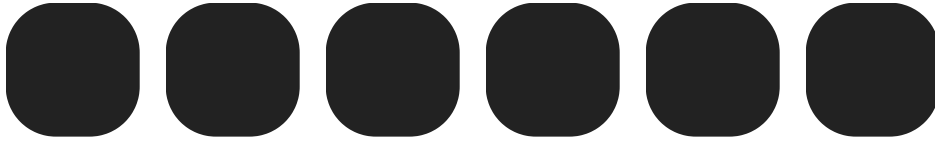
According to the proposal, the GPS-based transportation management software supports more of the top 25 largest school transportation systems in the United States than other vendors. The app was launched in 2014 and interfaces with Transfinder, the district's routing system that has been utilized for several years, along with offering other administrative features.

"Basically we are moving to a time where school buses will have the same navigation system available in cars or Google Maps on your phone, which greatly helps new drivers and substitute drivers not as familiar with the routes," McKinney continued. "Technology is pushing into this industry, making everything accessible, from arrival time to departure time of buses and the ability to live track them, hopefully making our routes more efficient, safer and consistent."

The plan is to launch Here Comes The Bus across the entire school system next academic year, after the soft rollout is completed this spring in order to troubleshoot. So far McKinney says "the technology has honestly surpassed our expectations," and he anticipates that the district's approximately 2,200 riders on over 200 bus routes built into the database will be fairly accurate in advance of the first day of school.

Article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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PBHS Students Make Missouri All-State Choir

DECEMBER 12TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

PBHS Students Make Missouri All-State Choir

Four Poplar Bluff High School students have been selected to perform with the Missouri All-State Choir in January at Osage Beach.

Emma Tinsley will perform in the alto section; Gabriel Burke and Bralin Duckett will perform with the tenors; and Dawson Vaughan will serve as first alternate bass. Alyssa Roy received an honorable mention.

The students auditioned during the All-District Concert held on Saturday, Nov. 12, at Cape Central High School. Of the 14 students who performed, the six juniors and seniors were eligible to audition, according to Joshua Allen, director of vocal music.

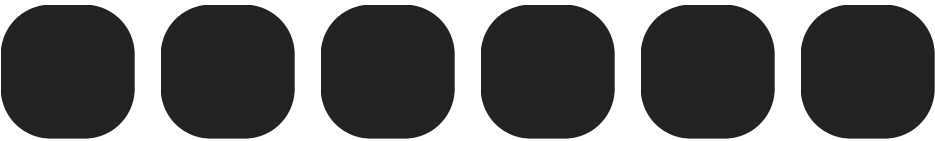
Pictured: Poplar Bluff High School is represented (in red) alongside the Missouri All-State Choir on Saturday, Nov. 12, following an audition in Cape Girardeau.

Article and photo by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

LAST UPDATED ON DECEMBER 12TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

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