

**For Immediate Release**

Monday, July 22, 2024

Contact: Mary Whitrock, Superintendent

WhitrockM@ripon.k12.wi.us

(920) 748-4600

**Odyssey Academy of Virtual Learning Principal Recommendations**

**Ripon, WI** – The Ripon Area School District announced Vince Propson as the recommended candidate for a 30% high school principal position beginning August 1, 2024, and Samantha Behnke as the recommended candidate for a 70% elementary and middle school principal position at Odyssey Academy of Virtual Learning beginning August 1, 2024. Mr Propson and Mrs. Behnke will replace Rebecca Miller who resigned from the position on June 20, 2024. Mr. Propson is the current Ripon High School Assistant Principal and Athletic Director, he would remain in both positions although the Board is being asked to create a 30% Assistant Athletic Director to fill behind Mr. Propson as he takes on new tasks with Odyssey. Mrs. Behnke is an instructional coach serving middle schools in the Oshkosh Area School District. She would take on the 70% principal position and pick up 0.30 of existing full-time equivalent (FTE) at Ripon High and Ripon Middle School acting as an interventionist and relieving teacher overloads where possible, especially in terms of supporting alternative programs for students. The two candidates are recommended following two days of interviews with two selection teams. The Odyssey Governance Council will interview the two candidates on July 25, 2024. The Ripon School Board could vote on the recommendations as soon as July 29, 2024.

The Odyssey Principal position was posted from June 26 - July 10, 2024. Staff and parents were invited to participate in a survey regarding characteristics they valued in their next principal. 22 people applied for the position through WECAN that was posted noting the potential for a shared position given the wide range of grade levels and student needs within the school. Three

applicants were internal. Through a screening process, six candidates were invited to interview on July 16, 2024. Three of the candidates had previous administrative experience. The selection team consisted of members of the Governance Board, administration, parents, teachers, and staff. Two candidates were invited back on July 19 to participate in a second day of interviews and a virtual Meet & Greet with staff, parents, and students. Other events of the day included a second writing sample, an interview with the leadership team, and a driving tour of the district.

Mr. Propson has served for one year in his current role as Ripon High School Assistant Principal and Athletic Director. Prior to being hired in Ripon, Mr. Propson served as the Activities Director (CAA), District Strength and Conditioning Coordinator, and the physical/health education teacher at Randolph School District, a position he held for three years; Athletic Director (RAA) and physical/health education teacher at White Lake School District for a year; and a physical education teacher in Fond du Lac High School for a semester. Mr. Propson has a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary physical education with a minor in secondary health education from Northern Michigan University and a Master of Science degree in Educational Leadership from Cardinal Stritch University.

Mr. Propson shared “I believe that behind every great teacher, support staff, or coach, is a supportive, continually learning, and competent leader. A leader that embraces candor, embodies the image of courage, and one who is brimming with loyalty to their staff.” To increase effectiveness in the classroom, Vince noted he “leads by utilizing reflective practices which permit extensive growth through the process of learning, unlearning, and relearning with a growth mindset and coupling that with the incorporation of technology, inquiry, and collaboration”. He worked to attract students marginalized by demographic hardship into extracurricular and athletic activities to build their self esteem, collaboration skills, and confidence.

References described Mr. Propson as an excellent athletic director, coach and mentor of students. He was noted as having the ability to build relationships with students and staff and possesses strong communication and interpersonal skills. Mr. Propson is known for his unwavering “vision and his commitment to working with students to reach their athletic and academic goals”. In addition it was stated, “his leadership in these endeavors was unmatched as was his desire to improve and continue to learn.”

Mrs. Behnke has 10 years of experience in education, first teaching for 5 years in Grade 5 in Menasha and then as a literacy teacher in Grades 7 and 8 in the Oshkosh Area School District. Over the past three years, Mrs. Behnke served as an instructional coach in two different middle schools in the Oshkosh Area School District as those schools came together into one school. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education with a minor in reading from the University of Evansville and a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership from Marian University.

Mrs. Behnke shared, “the most important thing that I have adopted into my philosophy of teaching is having a student-centered environment that focuses on building strong student-teacher relationships. A teacher needs to not only be passionate about the subject they are teaching but more importantly, passionate about the success of their students.” In her role as an instructional coach, Mrs. Behnke noted, “I use data on a daily basis when working with our teacher teams. This year, our content area teams have used our formative, summative, and iReady assessment data to build digital data walls that are being used to guide our instructional planning.”

One reference described Mrs. Behnke as an “outstanding educator who keeps students at the heart of all she does,” and noted “Samantha ranks in the top 10% of educators that I have worked with in my 32-year education career,” as she can “build capacity in the colleagues and educators around her in a way that builds community, produces results and meets goals”. One reference shared, “One of Mrs. Behnke’s strongest assets as a building leader is her genuine desire

to connect with and work with ALL of our students. She believes it is her role to always start by asking ‘How can we help?’.”

“The Ripon Area School District attracted high-quality candidates through our recruiting process. The selection committee was impressed with all six of the candidates interviewed,” stated Superintendent Whitrock. “Mr. Propson and Mrs. Behnke both have reputations as outstanding educators and are prepared to lead Odyssey Academy of Virtual Learning to even greater success.”

Any comments or questions, please contact Dr. Mary Whitrock at (920) 748-4600.

###