

Wanderings of the RR Superintendent



Gavin and Jacob reading to the kids

“Repeat after me: Su-per-in-tend-ent”

I wandered into Jody Negen’s kindergarten classroom in Laurentian Elementary and found myself in a phonics lesson on syllables. The kids were crowded around her in a semi-circle and they were verbally repeating the syllables she was asking them to learn. Of course, a teacher never loses a “teachable moment” when given the opportunity by a surprise visitor. “Class, do you know who this is?” she asked the class. Half of them shook their heads “no.” The teacher studied her pupils. “Well, he is the superintendent. Let’s try to break it down.” The heads of the kids swiveled back and forth, knowing a momentous teaching moment had arrived. “Repeat after me,” she said to the class. “Su..per...in...tend...ent.” The kids studied the teacher, as if syllables were dancing in the air. “Su...per...in...tend...ent,” they chortled back.

Then, two Rock Ridge football players arrived to read stories to the students. My popularity now plummeted to zero as the kids were enthralled by Gavin and Jacob (the quarterback and wide receiver on the team) as they each read a book out loud to the students.

Are you Smarter than a German?

The German students—yes, Germans from Continental Europe—visited our Rock Ridge students and were gathered together in the high school.

After some preliminary announcements and welcomes, Terri Kowalski, the Rock Ridge German teacher, said, “Now we are going to play Kaohot. You should have a partner to play with.” [Note: Kahoot is a notoriously simple but fun electronic game involving multiple choice questions.] Soon the questions began rolling off the screen and the American and German students were furiously answering questions. The questions were a mix of questions about America and also Germany. To find out if you are smarter than a German, here are some of the questions all students—American and German—had to answer:

- How many states are there in Germany?
- What animal is on the German flag?
- The exam at the end of every German’s Gymnasium education is called what?
- On what date was Germany reunified?
- What is the largest city in Germany?

If you answered all five questions correctly, you are at least as smart as a German.



Germans and Americans together in Rock Ridge



Would Shakespere have known how to weld?

I found myself in James Eicholz's welding class. "Follow us to the other room," a student said with a wave of his hand. And so I did. Soon I found myself sitting on a stool as Eicholz reviewed the types of welds he would be assessing in the near future. He said, "the fillet weld can be either slightly convex or concave or even flat."

The teacher scanned the room with his eyes. "Who knows what convex means? You might have heard about it in some of your other classes." After a few seconds a student answered, "It's round on the top." Several students nodded their heads in agreement. "What about concave? If a fillet weld is concave, what does that mean?" asked the teacher. Several students glanced at each other before one answered, while scooping his hands into an imaginary ice cream bucket. "It's got an indentation to it." The teacher said, "That is right." He then proceeded to talk about welds that had insufficient throats, undercuts, legs, and incomplete fusion.

Finally, after inquiring about what the size of a weld should be between a larger piece of metal and a smaller piece of metal, the teacher told the class to get their gear on and meet him at a welding station next door. [Hint for future welders. The size of the weld is based on the smaller piece of metal, not the larger.]

As a former English teacher, I wondered if William Shakespeare would have known how to weld? And if he had, would he have written "Henry V, the welding prince.?" We will never know.



Dr. Dan teaching the kids to thorow fox tails



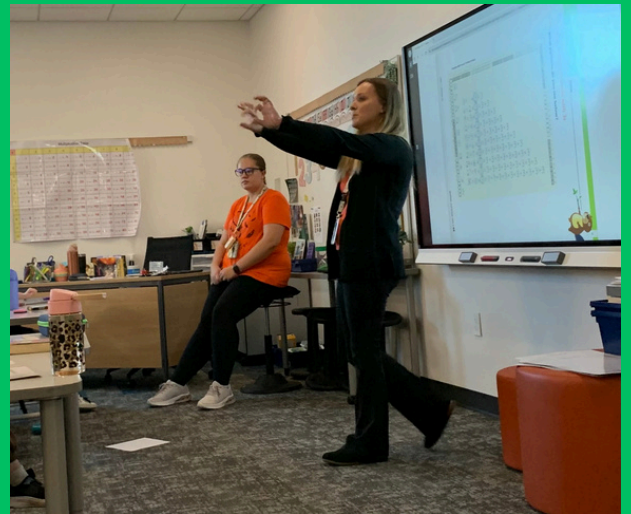
James Eicholz drawing a fillet weld

"Are you with me?"

I was walking down a hallway in Parkview Elementary when I heard the sound of kids running in the gym—so I opened the gym door to see what was going on. Inside the gym, I found Nina Sporich's second grade class running up and down the gym holding a modified lacrosse stick with a plastic ball. A very tall—probably 6'6"—man stood in the middle of the gym, telling the second graders when to run back and forth, from one end of the gym to the other, while eluding other students who were trying to knock the ball out of their lacrosse stick. "My name is Dr. Dan," I heard him say to the students. "And we are learning some Indigenous games." He then went on to explain a new game which involved the kids trying to throw a "fox tail" over their head, while laying down on the floor and using only their feet to throw the "fox tail." As he grouped the kids around him in a semi-circle, he explained the directions and then said, "Are you with me?" The kids nodded their heads, "yes." Soon students were wriggling all over the place, trying to throw a "fox tail" over their head while using only their feet to throw.

Is that Jingle Bells?

I ambled into Samantha Andrew's third grade class at North Star Elementary and found them working on the number three and multiples of three's. At first the kids worked on counting by three's by starting at zero and then moving up the numbering system by circling all of the three combinations. I saw kids scrunching and contorting their faces as they worked the number system. I noticed one student silently talking to himself, "three, six, nine, twelve, fifteen...." and then he paused to stare at the ceiling before continuing. "Eighteen, twenty-one, twenty-four...and so on until he got to thirty, where the teacher stopped the class. "I think we should sing the three song," she said, while wiggling her fingers in the air as an inducement for the young mathematicians. She promptly began singing the song and the kids joined in. While listening to the song, I recognized the tune. It was jingle bells.



Samantha Andrews at the start of the math sing along

Advice for Parents: Should I buy an e-bike for my child?

Answer: Probably not. The latest craze to hit retail stores and parents' pocketbooks are electric bikes. These are bikes that—you guessed it—do some or all of the pedaling for your child. After all, why should your child work hard at pedaling the bike, moving between friends' houses or grandma and grandpa, or the local convenience store? What's the harm in this, you ask? Well, actually, in most situations your child should work hard pedaling their own muscle-powered bike. They don't need an e-bike, even though they may plead with you that "everyone has one," or "Johnny down the street has one." These are pleadings which should fall on mostly deaf ears. In 2026 kids still need to stay in shape, build muscles, practice balancing skills, and work their cardiovascular system. Very little of this happens on an e-bike. I hate to say this but in the "old days," which weren't that long ago, it was not uncommon for kids to physically pedal and bike 2-5 miles a day, moving through the neighborhoods.

There are exceptions, of course. If your child is using the e-bike for occasional use for destinations over long distances or for specific family events, you can open your wallet and shell out \$500. Or you can save some money and buy them a more inexpensive regular bike. The rest is easy. Simply tell them to put on their helmet, start pedaling, and work their leg muscles and cardiovascular system while getting to their destination. It doesn't need to be any more complicated than that. As always, give kids all they need and little that they want.