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Mendota Elementary School students kick off the school year with community support

By Amber C. Walker 20 hrs ago



Students enter Mendota Elementary School as they are greeted by community members.

PHOTO BY AMBER C. WALKER

On Tuesday morning, over 30 community members greeted Mendota Elementary School students at the front door as they entered the building for the first day of school.

The event, organized by Madison365, the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, Nehemiah Center for Urban Leadership Development and the Focused Interruption Coalition, is in its second year.

Central office administrators from the Madison Metropolitan School District and members of the Madison Fire Department were also present to welcome students back for their first day.

Anthony Cooper, Sr., who has volunteered every week at Mendota for the past three years, said it was important for him that students see positive male role models in their schools from day one.

“We want these kids to be excited about school and let them know they have support and school is a fun place to be,” he said.

Michael Johnson, CEO of BG CDC, said the effort helps ensure teachers and students feel welcome coming back to school after their summer recess.

“I think it is encouraging for kids to see adults encouraging them, supporting them and having the community to come out and say, ‘We want to be here for you today and everyday,’” Johnson said. “We have gifts for every teacher. We want to show them we are thankful for their profession and the work that they do. We want to let them know there are community leaders who stand behind them.”

Mendota’s principal, Carletta Stanford, said the Mendota community appreciates the event because it helps strengthen the bonds between the school and Madison’s north side residents.

“I think that it is a really great way to start the year. It lets the scholars and parents know that the community is here for them,” she said. “It takes a village.”

Robby Moreau, who has a son in fifth grade at Mendota, enjoyed Tuesday’s welcome and said it represents the sense of community Mendota faculty, staff and parents work to cultivate for their students.

“We’ve seen all these kids grow up,” he said. “My son loves this school, he loves the camaraderie, he loves his friends. It is everything I remember from going to elementary school.”

Matt Kalua, a father of two young boys, drove 45 minutes from Madison’s west side to welcome Mendota’s students. He brought his son, Eli, 3, along to show him the importance of education. Eli will start pre-K on Wednesday.

“Supporting children and their education is the first priority for me,” he said. “I have two little, black boys. I am letting them know and see that education is fun.”

Henry Sanders, CEO and publisher of Madison365, is a Madison native and graduate of Mendota. He enjoyed returning to his alma mater to meet current students and families.

“I love seeing the diversity. The school has changed so much. I just love seeing the kids enjoying all of this and the people who showed up and showed love,” Sanders said. “The north side has a real community feel and I am glad to be here, it feels like home.”

The group also plans to welcome students at Cherokee Heights Middle School on Wednesday morning.

Amber Walker