A Message From Superintendent Eric Olson:

Welcome to the 2018-19 school year, Magic community!

As a district, we look forward to serving students, families, staff, and community members well throughout this school year. One of our major initiatives within the district will be to create collaboration opportunities for stakeholders across our community. As superintendent, I believe it is imperative for me to listen and to have important discussions about the state of our district and our path to continued excellence. These relationships, and the ability to work together in and across our buildings, will be a constant emphasis in our school community. In fact, building healthy relationships is one of three goals that we have identified for our district that we believe will be key to creating the best possible learning environment for all children in Monticello Public Schools. Those goals are:

**Build healthy relationships** with all students, parents, and staff. Trust is the key ingredient in any successful organization. Trust will be valued and fostered both within the district and community.

**Emphasize school safety.** Create the safest learning environments in the state of Minnesota. This includes a focus on both building security and social emotional health.

**Foster a culture of engagement,** where students, parents, and staff love coming to school because they feel heard, valued, and inspired.

We are excited to build structures that allow us to meet ALL kids where they are in their social/emotional developmental stage. We believe that fostering this learning environment is the base upon which to build tremendous educational opportunities for all students. These structures will include timely programming, support, and care that helps reduce anxiety and helps all students feel connected to who they are, where they are, and where they want to go in the future. Through these structures, and the educational opportunities built upon them, we will make success a realistic outcome for “Every Kid, Every Day.”

Go Magic!

**Eric Olson**  
Superintendent
As activities, opportunities, and requirements continue to pile up for students everywhere, Monticello Middle School is making a conscious effort to give kids, and just as importantly, families, a mid-week breather.

For the 2018-19 school year, middle school administrators and educators will be making a conscious decision to reduce, and when possible completely avoid, handing out Wednesday night homework.

The idea is that avoiding Wednesday night assignments will reduce some mid-week stress, eliminate a need for screen time for at least one night, and increase family time and face-to-face opportunities.

Inspiration for the new approach came from a couple of different places. Assistant Principal Matt Coalwell was previously the athletic director for the school, where he spent a considerable amount of time at Mississippi 8 meetings. The conference has long kept Wednesdays as a family night, avoiding scheduling games or activities on that night throughout the school year.

Then Coalwell heard Dr. Joe Mahoney present at a Monticello School Board meeting last year about the dangers that come with too much screen time, and the general lack of face-to-face interaction in today's society. That was enough to send Coalwell and Principal Jeff Scherber into action.

“It’s been on our mind a lot how busy kids are,” Coalwell said. “You start to wonder, what can we do? What’s our responsibility? We talk about a healthy balance, and we thought with this approach we can help play a role with that in the middle of each week.”

Administrators met with their teacher leadership team several times in the spring to run the idea by them, and to iron out any complications or issues that may arise.

One big benefit is that the new focus blends perfectly with the modified schedule the middle school is incorporating this year. Students will have block scheduling on Wednesday and Thursday, meaning they will see all of their teachers on Tuesday and then see half on Wednesday and half on Thursday. Therefore, Wednesday teachers will never be in position to assign something for Thursday. And projects that are due on Thursday will have been assigned by at least Tuesday, if not further in advance, so students will have the opportunity to work ahead and keep their Wednesday night clear.

Scherber noted that the middle school is also uniquely set up to be the first school in the district to take on this initiative, as they have teaching groups that have the same kids day after day, and those groups get consistent chances to plan together.

“We have an opportunity where every team meets every week to plan out their week, so it’s different than an elementary or a high school,” said Scherber.

The principal noted that they’ve even heard from students in recent years that a slight reduction in screen time could be beneficial.

Scherber and Coalwell are hopeful this is something that parents and families will buy into and will use to help create a culture of family time and bonding opportunities on Wednesdays.

“It’s a start,” said Scherber. “Hopefully it becomes part of the culture of this community, where both the school and the community recognize that.”

Scherber, who gives all credit to Coalwell for starting and pushing this change through, cautions that he can’t guarantee no homework or screen time, as he understands kids have busy nights and weeks that could lead to projects or studying getting pushed to a Wednesday night.

“But, I’m directing my staff to meet and be conscious of Wednesday nights, for that purpose,” said Scherber. “The only thing we ask for the parents is that they be conscious of that choice that the teachers are making, and use that to put the cell phone down and limit screen time.”

Coalwell, who has kids of his own around the middle school age, says he’s seen first hand, and heard many other stories, about the battle with kids and screen time.

To him, there was no time like the present for the school to jump in and do their part to try to help strike that healthy balance.

“We want to help,” he said. “We’ve got to do what’s best for kids.”
The start of each school year rings with the sound of new opportunities and new adventures for children, families, and staff alike. That sound will have a special ring to it this year in Monticello School District, as the district begins a brand new opportunity for families - school age child care under the ISD 882 umbrella.

Magic Adventures School Age Child Care, set to open on Sept. 4, will afford the district the opportunity to impact children beyond the K-12 educational spectrum, as well as to ease transitions into Magic Preschool and from Magic Preschool to kindergarten.

The child care program is provided by the Monticello School District’s Community Education Department and will serve children in preschool through 5th grade at all three elementary schools. Magic Adventures offers care before school, after school, during non school days/early release days, and summer, as well as all day care for preschool students at Eastview Education Center.

Magic Adventures Coordinator Andrea Greenwald has high expectations for the new program. “We will hire educated, experienced staff members who are positive role models for our students,” said Greenwald. “Our most important goal is for the students enrolled to enjoy a secure environment that provides them with a fun and enriching experience.”

Greenwald has a wealth of experience in the child care industry. A Big Lake High School graduate, Greenwald has been in the industry since earning her Human Resources Management degree from Minnesota State Mankato. She worked for three years as a site supervisor in the Mankato Area Public Schools child care program before taking over the role of program coordinator. Greenwald spent six years as the program coordinator, where she was responsible for overseeing child care programs at 11 schools and managing more than 150 employees.

The opportunity to make an impact with a new program, as well as be closer to home, drew her to the Magic Adventures opportunity. “I love being back in this community,” said Greenwald. “And I can’t wait for our first day when we can meet all of the students and families.”

Community Education Director Jeremiah Mack is excited to have Greenwald at the helm of the new program. “She’s a very knowledgeable practitioner of school age child care,” he said. “She has a passion for how kids spend their
time out of school and wants to create as many positive experiences for them as possible.”

Mack also noted that by bringing child care services under the Magic umbrella, Monticello will be able to provide a continuum of care within the district.

“We will be able to better serve students who have special needs, and who may need additional help in academics,” said Mack. “We will also be able to provide additional opportunities for children to participate in enrichment activities, and to continue to develop social emotional learning.”

Programming for students will be choice-based, with a variety of available activities. There will be opportunities including, but not limited to: art projects, STEM projects, large motor play time, and more. Magic Adventures staff members will also be able to assist students with homework.

Developing those relationships between students and staff members, as well as acquainting students to the Monticello school buildings is another highlight of Magic Adventures. Monticello School District Superintendent Eric Olson said that is one of the aspects of the new program that he’s most excited about, as building connections and strengthening relationships is one of his top priorities.

“This will allow us more opportunities for our staff members to reach these kids at a younger age, and to put them in the positive, enriching environments that our schools provide,” said Olson. “I think Magic Adventures will be a wonderful addition for us as a district, but, more importantly, for our Monticello School Community.”

For more information on Magic Adventures School Age Child Care, visit www.monticello.k12.mn.us/magicadventures.
For a two and a half week stretch from June 23 through July 10, the world found itself captivated by the story of a young soccer team trapped deep in the Tham Luang Nang Non cave system in Thailand. The harrowing ordeal grabbed front page headline from Minneapolis to Myanmar, as 12 boys and their coach were stranded by rising waters while the world's brightest minds engineered ideas to bring them out safely before monsoon season fully kicked in. While most of us, especially from this part of the world, were merely spectators in the ordeal - one of Monticello's own found himself smack dab in the middle of all of it, charged with commanding one of many teams that helped orchestrate the daring rescue.

Mitch Torrel, a former Monticello student in the Class of 2008 who left the district to pursue a hockey career at the age of 16, is a Captain in the United States Air Force as a Special Tactics Officer. He currently serves as a Troop Commander at the mighty 320 STS, US Pacific Command's sole Air Force Special Operations ground maneuver element and air integration force. The 320 STS, based in Japan, trains and employs highly trained Special Tactics Teams (STTs) for rapid global employment to enable airpower success through global access, precision strike, and personnel recovery as directed by the 353rd Special Operations Group in support of Theater Special Operations Command objectives.

Torrel's unit was assigned to the Thailand cave rescue, and when his fellow commander on duty had surgery and was ruled out, Torrel was left as the man in charge.

Recently, Torrel talked to the Air Force Academy, where he went to college and had a standout hockey career, for a "Where Are They Now" video that was released earlier this month. He also answered additional questions via email for the Monticello School District.

His pursuit of hockey is what pushed him to the Air Force Academy, and his passion for a team atmosphere and camaraderie helped lead him to specialize in special tactics, after spending two years in a grueling Combat Control Training Pipeline.

“It's a two year grind in which more than 90 percent of candidates fail out,” said Torrel. “Once it's complete, you are trained and qualified in light and heavy weapons, demolitions, open and closed circuit diving, static line and military free fall parachuting, small unit tactics, and air traffic control.”

Torrel also has advanced qualification as a Joint Terminal Attack Controller.

His assignment in Japan has largely been spent traveling the Pacific region to train partner nation forces and enable them to counter violent extremist organizations, as well as provide humanitarian and disaster relief when called upon.

When the dire reality of the cave situation in Thailand was fully realized, Torrel's group was one of several operations from around the world to be called in. Torrel said there wasn't a real need for their equipment, or any physical tools they had that no one else had - rather it was the unit's ability to problem solve that was most desired. “They had everything that we had, but we have a very unique way of looking at problem sets, and we do military decision making very well,” said Torrel.

As a leader, Torrel said one of his main jobs in Thailand was to communicate and work together with the bevy of other organizations there. He credits his ability to do that back to his sports background, which was fostered in Monticello before continuing to blossom at Air Force.

Communication was certainly key, as during the rescue process the group worked with teams from Britain, Australia, China, and Thailand.
“You need to be able to work in those team settings. It’s extremely important that you understand how that team aspect works,” he said. “A lot of what I was responsible for doing out there in Thailand was just maintaining those relationships, because we weren’t doing anything unless they approved it.”

The Air Force Special Ops group provided physical help as well. Torrel said that prior to the rescue the group hauled 270 oxygen tanks forward to chamber three in the cave.

“We were just pack mules for a little bit,” he said. “You know, that’s not the sexy part of the mission, but it was something that enabled it to go.”

When the rescue mission got underway, Torrel’s team was responsible for receiving a number of the kids as they made their way out of the cave, performing a quick medical check, and moving them forward to the next stage.

Torrel remarked in the video about just how amazing each of his teammates performed under pressure, and told ISD 882 that’s one of the things he’ll remember most about the operation.

“What I will always remember will be the amazing group of talented individuals who came from all corners of the world and combined their various skill sets in order to accomplish one of the most difficult rescue missions ever,” said Torrel. “They risked their lives and that experience will always drive a close bond.”

Torrel said that without question his upbringing in Monticello has played a major factor in preparing him to be the leader that he is today.

“I remember Mr. [Jason] Telecky had been in the Marines, and he had a lasting impression on me. Monticello had a lot of fantastic teachers when I was going through, all of which were positive influences,” said Torrel. “The biggest influence, however, was my group of friends. Monticello was an amazing place to grow up and it’s one of the main reasons I am who I am today.”

Torrel added that while he hasn’t had a lot of time to reflect on the cave rescue mission, he realizes how special of an opportunity it all was.

“We continue to find ourselves busy, and I continue to look forward towards the next task,” he told ISD 882. “But I am very blessed to have been involved in the rescue operation, and humbled that I was able to play a central part.”

To watch the eight-minute video, which includes a lot of additional fascinating insight and information from Torrel, as well as video highlights of his standout hockey career, visit www.goairforcefalcons.com and scroll down to “Falcon Vision On Demand.” Then select the “Where Are They Now? - Mitch Torrel” video.