Don't Brake, for COVID-19

the last 60 days, I have tried to inform readers of the direct impact of the COVID-19 health emergency. Graduation, it seemed, could have easily fallen to the spread of the novel coronavirus. Instead, D49 turned to its community to determine what to do next. Two plans emerged: Springs Studio for Academic Excellence and Pikes Peak Early College, along with Patriot High School laded on a drive-in style ceremony. The depth of the economic impact of coronavirus has now hit home with us in public education. In just a matter of weeks, the national unemployment rate increased 2.5 times – going from 3.8 percent in February 2020 to 13 percent just three months later. That means more than 14 million people had to apply for unemployment benefits from the "Coronavirus Recession." This recession, nationally and globally, will be twice as bad as the "Great Recession" from the "Coronavirus Recession." /This recession, nationally and globally, will be twice as bad as the 'Great Recession'.

Accordingly, the Board of Education adopted a resolution declaring such at their special meeting on June 24. What followed the declaration of a Fiscal Emergency for District 49. District 49 is the beneficiary of $6.3 million in Coronavirus Relief Fund money from the federal government - via the state government. This is one-time money, however, with many strings attached that require uses related to coronavirus. Therefore, it is not completely helpful in allaying the $4.9 million general fund deficit. It will help, especially with new costs necessary to reopen schools this fall, but it will soon be gone and we will have to carry on with regular state and local funding sources to support the educational program delivery.

D49 Grads Bend, but Don’t Brake, for COVID-19

A Season of Uncertainty

The Springs Studio for Academic Excellence Class of 2020 kicked off graduation season with a drive-in style ceremony May 22 at Vista Ridge High School. (District 49/David Nance) **See center spread for more Graduation 2020 photos**

By The D49 Communications Department Staff

The Springs Studio for Academic Excellence Class of 2020 kicked off graduation season with a drive-in style ceremony May 22 at Vista Ridge High School. (District 49/David Nance) **See center spread for more Graduation 2020 photos**

By The D49 Communications Department Staff

A Season of Uncertainty

At the start of the 2019 - 2020 school year the class of 2020 anticipated the week leading into Memorial Day would be their time to conclude their D49 academic journey and celebrate with a traditional graduation ceremony. As spring break approached, events and opportunities began to vanish in the shadow of the COVID-19 health emergency. Graduation, it seemed, could have easily fallen to the spread of the novel coronavirus. Instead, D49 turned to its community to determine what to do next. Two plans emerged: Springs Studio for Academic Excellence and Pikes Peak Early College, along with Patriot High School landed on a drive-in style ceremony. The results from multiple online feedback forums outlined the preference for D49's three larger campuses, opting for a more traditional ceremony, in an outdoor venue, with family members attending.

All plans met a list of guidelines and requirements from local and state health experts.

Three Schools Led the Way

Forty-five out of a total of 61 SSAE grads, and a few family members sat in their vehicles arranged in a wide semi-circle in the Vista Ridge High School parking lot for the first ceremony the morning of May 22. At the top of the semi-circle's arc, a long carpet, with marks every six feet, led to a podium where a small group of special guests and dignitaries shared their remarks, including SSAE Executive Principal Dave Knoche. Families tuned in to 104.7 FM to hear the speeches broadcast through their car stereos.

"It's not what I expected whatsoever in any way, form or fashion," said Jonathan Martens, a member of the SSAE class of 2020. "But I absolutely love what they've been able to do given the fact that we have to stay separated and all that stuff."

One by one, the grads wearing purple robes and facemasks paused at the podium where their name was read, and their photo taken.

"[The SSAE staff] have gone above and beyond to make these kids feel special, so it's almost more special than the traditional graduation," Jonathan's mother Lisa said with a chuckle. "He will never mix up this graduation with anybody else!"

To cap off the PPEC ceremony that followed SSAE's, PPEC Principal Rochelle Kroll dropped the class of 2020 into their vehicles to turn their tassels together. See Graduation 2020 page 2

By Brett Ridgway

D49 Chief Business Officer

The depth of the economic impact of coronavirus has now hit home with us in public education. In just a matter of weeks, the national unemployment rate increased 2.5 times – going from 3.8 percent in February 2020 to 13 percent just three months later. That means more than 14 million people had to apply for unemployment benefits from the 'Coronavirus Recession.' This recession, nationally and globally, will be twice as bad as the 'Great Recession.'

Now, More Than Ever, the only Constant is Change

The state of Colorado's budget lost $1 billion in 2019-20 and another $2 billion for 2020-21 – a 16 percent drop. State lawmakers had to make many hard decisions to balance the budget. While K-12 education took a big hit of 5.24 percent, lawmakers had to make many hard decisions to balance the General Fund budget. According to the Program Funding portion of the Colorado School Finance Act. Some growth in student count will help trim that overall loss in revenue down to 'only' 4.1 percent or $4.9 million. That kind of loss in revenue creates a Fiscal Emergency for District 49.

District 49 is the beneficiary of $6.3 million in Coronavirus Relief Fund money from the federal government – via the state government. This is one-time money, however, with many strings attached that require uses related to coronavirus. Therefore, it is not completely helpful in allaying the $4.9 million general fund deficit. It will help, especially with new costs necessary to reopen schools this fall, but it will soon be gone and we will have to carry on with regular state and local funding sources to support the educational program delivery.

Everything is changing; not toward a new destination, for 'a new normal', but onto an ever-changing, ever-evolving path. The changing path is the new normal. D49 strives to be agile to react promptly and effectively to new circumstances as they come. For example, a modification or repeal of the Gallagher Amendment would stop the erosion of our property tax base that puts District 49 at a disadvantage for funding against our neighbor and competitor districts. Tracking a repeal/redesign ballot initiative to the Gallagher Amendment this fall is a very important endeavor for District 49. So we encourage our entire community to learn more and stay informed on this and the many issues facing D49, our state and our country as we head into election season. Informed opinions support informed decisions.
D49 Grows New Teachers with Scholarship Program

From the right side to the left, symbolizing their transition from student to graduate. Family members honked horns, and cheers rang loud in support of the monumental moment.

D49 leaders applauded the PPEC graduates for showing grit and resilience during a unique time and for finishing the year with admirable accomplishments. Nearly half of the 55 graduates in the class earned an associate degree, industry certification or 60 credits toward a bachelor’s degree, along with completing high school.

A day later, May 23, cars lined up just beyond the fence line of the football field at the Falcon Legacy Campus to honor the graduating seniors of Patriot High School.

PEIS Principal Steve Gear announced the names of the class of 2020, sharing a few words written for each grad by a PHS staff member. The graduates’ families waited in their vehicles and listened to the remarks broadcast on an FM radio station, honking and cheering when their student walked from center field to the principal’s podium to receive their diploma. Twenty-six of 28 graduating PHS seniors completed the commencement circuit, jumping back into their vehicle with a diploma in hand, positioned to begin the next chapter of their lives.

In addition to pride, some graduates described the feeling of reaching the finish line as a mixture of excitement, nerves and novelty.

“I’ve gone through 18 years to graduate with my parents in a car,” Weston Pezzoldt said with a smile. “In 10 years we’ll be saying, like, ‘We graduated during corona. It’s gonna be crazy.’

Sometimes You Have to Throw a Hail Mary...
The chemotherapy camps delayed their ceremonies until the final week of June, scheduling first a student-only ceremony at UCHealth Park, home of Rocky Mountain Vibes Baseball.

Planners hoping holding the commencement events later would coincide with the slowing spread of COVID-19 to enough to allow families to attend.

“A lot of things had to come together, but we are catching a Hail Mary,” Peter Hills, D49 chief education officer reported during the June 11 board of education meeting. In early June experts at El Paso County Public Health and Environment eased restrictions on public gatherings including graduation ceremonies. By the June 11 board meeting, ceremony planners determined each graduate could invite up to six guests to attend the events.

On Thursday, June 25, the Vista Ridge High School class of 2020 sat six feet apart from each other in the green outfield ready to graduate and turn their tassels to signify their transition from students to graduates. During his address to the senior class, POWER Zone Leader Dr. Mike Pickering said, “What this abnormal graduation does not create, an abnormal graduate. All of your passions, dreams and accomplishments are still as important and relevant as they ever were. Perhaps even in more so on a social context.

The same characteristics that brought you to this very time and place today, are the same characteristics that will continue to help you preserve and get through the next chapters in your life.”

Jade Almacen, member of the VRHS class of 2020, said, “It’s reassuring to be here. Graduation was always up in the air, whether or not we’d be able to walk. I’m just glad it’s happening, that we can commence the ceremony like we’re supposed to do.”

Originally, the Sand Creek High School class of 2020 would have graduated in a May 23 ceremony. Despite the delay created by coronavirus health concerns and restrictions, families agreed waiting for the June 26 event was worth it. “This moment is amazing, and I am beyond excited,” said Johnnie Brumson, father of Graduate Isaiah Brumson.

“Staff have been working so hard to make this happen, and I know they love these kids,” said Shauna Walewski, mother of Graduate Rebecca Walewski. “I give props to D49 for trying to make it special for the kids.”

District 49 closed out the 2019-2020 academic year with a graduation ceremony to honor the Falcon High School Class of 2020, Saturday, June 27.

“Throughout 2020 we have endured serious turmoil,” Salutaritorian Kalyn Ohlrich told her class. “But out of this we have learned that kindness, empathy and equality should always prevail...Life doesn’t go as planned. We have to roll with the punches no matter how unfair it seems.”

“It’s a blessing to be here. Seeing our prom, senior breakfast and other events go away, I’m very thankful the district was able to put something together for us to celebrate with each other and our families,” said FHS grad Shannon Graham.

“It’s a good send off for her, and great closure for us as she is our oldest child,” said her father, Eric Graham. “It’s a day that we’ve been looking forward to for 18 years. It’s 13 years of academic work with all her success culminating into one event before she goes off to college.”

By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications/Manager

For three teaching assistants in District 49, fitting college into their demanding schedule is a dream come true and a chance to cultivate their life’s mission. D49 recently partnered with Western Governors University to help staff members in support roles achieve their goal of becoming a teacher by presenting them with full ride scholarships.

“I wish I had known all along that teaching was my calling. Instead, I spent years in the corporate world selling weddings,” shared Nicole Croney, paraprofessional at Woodmen Hills Elementary. “This scholarship is the opportunity for me to teach education and career goals, while making a difference in students’ lives – my ultimate goal.”

Each of the recipients will complete their bachelor’s degree and earn a teaching license with the Summit Scholarship. Staff receiving the scholarships are:

• Nicole Croney from Woodmen Hills Elementary School
• Michelle Graves from Horizon Middle School
• Natasha Trapp from Vista Ridge High School

D49 offered the scholarships through an open application process to all staff in support roles across the district. A completed application included an essay about the staff member’s desire to become a teacher, along with a letter of recommendation from a building leader and current resume.

“Are we incredibly excited about the opportunity to support several of our wonderful educational support staff in the pursuit of their teaching degree through this partnership with WGU,” shared Dr. Kathy Pickering, coordinator of professional learning. “This is an incredible opportunity for our district to ‘grow our own’ and support exceptional educators.”

A family member encouraged scholarship recipient Michelle Graves to reveal her love for helping students learn.

“My little sister is the one who enticed me to enter the educational field,” she explained. “My students firmly believe they’ll never succeed in school. After building a rapport with them, it is so satisfying to help students figure out a problem or complete a project.”

The Summit Scholarship program is made possible through a partnership with WGU. The university’s mission is to create pathways to opportunity for more people, making it easier for individuals to further their education. Headquartered in Salt Lake City, Western Governors University is an online university that offers more than 60 degree programs.

Thanks to rewarding past experiences, all of the scholarship recipients have chosen to focus on teaching students with special needs. “Being a special education paraprofessional led me to find my true passion,” shared recipient Natasha Trapp. “I can’t wait to one day have my own classroom and make an impact on the everyday lives of students. Thank you D49 and WGU for making my dreams come true.”

Congratulations to these D49 staff members!

• Nicole Croney from Woodmen Hills Elementary School
• Michelle Graves from Horizon Middle School
• Natasha Trapp from Vista Ridge High School

District 49 Dispatch
July 13, 2020

Nicole Croney, paraprofessional from Woodmen Hills Elementary School, received a Summit Scholarship, allowing her to complete a bachelor’s degree and earn a teaching license. (District 49/Courtesy: Michelle Graves)

Nicole Croney, paraprofessional from Woodmen Hills Elementary School, was selected for a Summit Scholarship to cultivate her mission of working as a special education teacher. (District 49/Courtesy: Natasha Trapp)

Michelle Graves, paraprofessional from Horizon Middle School, received a Summit Scholarship, allowing her to complete a bachelor’s degree and earn a teaching license. (District 49/Courtesy: Michelle Graves)

Nicole Trapp, paraprofessional from Vista Ridge High School, received a Summit Scholarship to cultivate her mission of working as a special education teacher. (District 49/Courtesy: Natasha Trapp)
By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications Manager

It started with an assignment in Julie Butterworth’s biology class at Pikes Peak Early College earlier this year. Butterworth asked her students to select a nonprofit and assist them with an awareness and fundraising campaign. “It’s about connecting biology to the real world,” she shared.

Jordyn Maisano, freshman in the class, considered different charities, but ultimately chose the Colorado Springs Therapeutic Riding Center, an organization that provides high-quality, specialized equine therapy for people of all ages with physical, cognitive and behavioral disabilities.

Jordyn’s plans initially included organizing a fundraising dinner hosted in cooperation with John Suthers, the mayor of Colorado Springs. Jordyn herself pitched the idea to the mayor, and he quickly came on board to support her event that was originally scheduled to take place in April.

While COVID-19 restrictions didn’t allow the event to happen, Jordyn still made an impact for a nonprofit she grew to love. Together, on May 7, Jordyn and Mayor Suthers presented $5,700 raised in corporate sponsorships to the Riding Center.

“I am proud that I pulled this together,” shared Jordyn. “The riding center needs money because there are many disabled individuals in Colorado Springs who need their help.”

Mrs. Butterworth was in attendance for the special check presentation. “It takes ambition and motivation for a student to do this,” she commented. “Jordyn took this assignment to the community in every sense of the word.”

PPEC Freshman Gets Boost from City Hall for Community Assignment

By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications Manager

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Graduation 2020

FHS grads took center stage in the outfield at UCHealth Park for their commencement ceremony June 27. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Walking with heads held high and diplomas in hand, SCHS grads stroll to their next chapter after their graduation ceremony June 26. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Members of the Class of 2020 of Sand Creek High School commemorate their resilience as quarantine graduates at their June 26 ceremony at UCHealth Park. (District 49/Amy Matisek)

FHS grads stand for the National Anthem at UCHealth Park for their commencement ceremony June 27. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

A little flair goes a long way for SCHS grad during their graduation ceremony June 26. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Evans International Elementary School kindergarten and fifth grade students were recognized for moving on to their new grade-level drive-through style at EIES May 19. (District 49/Amy Bremser)

The VRHS class of 2020 celebrated commencement at UCHealth Park June 25. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Evans International Elementary School kindergarten and fifth grade students were recognized for moving on to their new grade-level drive-through style at EIES May 19. (District 49/Amy Bremser)
Pikes Peak Early College graduates celebrate their milestone at a drive-in style, socially-distanced ceremony in the parking lot of Vista Ridge High School May 22. (District 49/Amy Matisek)

“Yeah! I have pretty big nerves. I didn’t think I was gonna make it,” shared PHS grad Cody Witt, who walked with more than 25 other PHS grads on May 23. “I’m glad I’m here and graduating,” Witt added. “I’m glad they’re doing a ceremony.” (District 49/David Nancarrow)
D49 Elementary School Earns National Distinction Third Year in a Row

By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications Manager

For a third, consecutive year, D49’s Ridgeview Elementary School earned top recognition among schools across our state and country as a Capturing Kids’ Hearts National Showcase School. Ridgeview is one of 17 schools in the state of Colorado selected for the honor for the 2019-20 school year.

The Capturing Kids’ Hearts program promotes socio-emotional techniques to foster student engagement. Ultimately, the belief is once you have a child’s heart, you have a child’s mind.

“Capturing Kids’ Hearts focuses on building strong relationships, which aligns with the district’s cultural compass, directing how staff and students treat each other,” shared Kim Moore, principal. “These relationships are key to everything we do at Ridgeview and help ensure we always stay focused on what is best for students.”

Warm welcomes remain the standard at Ridgeview, and begin at the front entrance and continue at every classroom where students find their teachers waiting at the door to offer a personal greeting each day. Classes start with sharing “good things.” During this time, teachers invite students to share something good in their life. Classrooms also have social contracts in place to hold both students and staff accountable.

The school began its journey to meeting, or surpassing, the Capturing Kids’ Hearts benchmarks in 2015, and is among 285 schools nationwide to earn the Showcase School distinction for the most recent school year.

The program was created by the Flippen Group, a management consultant company in Texas. The nomination included a rigorous application process, and a site visit from the Flippen Group to gather data and talk with members of the school community.

PAFB Recognizes Military Affiliated Students

By Amy Bremser
Video and Broadcast Specialist

Peterson Air Force Base hosted a “Drive By” graduation celebration to honor military affiliated students, May 21. Eleven District 49 students were recognized at the event.

The base released the following information about the celebration, “This event celebrates all of the hard work, dedication and accomplishments your scholars have achieved in school. This event also serves to honor the family spirit and unity within our military and school community as we come together to send our youth into the world.”

District 49 students recognized included: Hannah Elizabeth Goodwin, FHS, Calvin Kirkham, FHS, Aubrey Thomas, FHS, Katie Tompkins, FHS, Zachary Wilson, FHS, Krystina Haygood, SCHS, Emma K. Scheitzach, SCHS, Shirley Victory, SCHS, Maey Van Vleck, SSAE, Miranda Apodaca, VRHS, and Hope Lancaster, VRHS.

District 49 Board of Education president John Graham, Chief Education Officer Peter Hilts, Director of Culture and Services Dr. Lesi Fletcher and Military Student Transition Consultant Melissa Dashner all drove in the parade as they cheered on graduates.

Return to Learn!

Monday, August 3
D49 Staff Prep Week Begins
Friday, August 7
POWER Zone Elementary Schools Orientation
(By appointment only, info will come from your PZ school)

Friday, August 7
First Day for All Other D49 K, 6th & 9th

Monday, August 10
All D49 Students Return to Learn

D49 Charter schedules may vary - Stay plugged in @ d49.org/iconnect

Kindergartners at Ridgeview Elementary School share “good things” to kick off each day as part of the school’s Capturing Kids’ Hearts program. The program promotes socio-emotional techniques to foster student engagement. (District 49/Amy Bremser)

Vista Ridge High School graduate Hope Lancaster waves to friends and family. (District 49/Amy Bremser)

D49 Board of Education president John Graham drives in PAFB parade. (District 49/Amy Bremser)

The registration application for 2020-21 is now available

AND CAN BE COMPLETED FROM THE COMFORT OF HOME
TO REGISTER A NEW STUDENT
Visit www.D49.org/enrollment

TO NOTIFY D49 OF A RETURNING STUDENT
Please use Parent Portal within Powerschool to access the form!

HAVE QUESTIONS? NEED HELP?
• Send an email to registration@d49.org
• Talk to us through the LiveChat chat button on d49.org
• Call us at 719-213-0335 (Spanish or English)

D49.org/enrollment
Helpful Links on D49.org
Services & Information

49 Pathways  D49.org/49Pathways
Before and After School Care  D49.org/Base49
Board of Education  D49.org/BOE
Bus Service Fees  D49.org/BusFees
Enrollment  D49.org/Enrollment
Financial Information  D49.org/FinancialTransparency
Gifted Education  D49.org/Gifted
Human Resources  D49.org/HR
Map  D49.org/Map
Meal Fees  D49.org/MealFees
Mill Levy Oversight Committee  D49.org/SELO-Oversight
Nutrition Services  D49.org/Nutrition
School Calendar  D49.org/Schedule
School Nurses  D49.org/Nursing
Special Education  D49.org/SPED
Transportation  D49.org/Transportation

Direct to the Schools

Falcon Zone:
Falcon High School  D49.org/FHS
Falcon Middle School  D49.org/FMS
Bennett Ranch Elementary School  D49.org/BRES
Falcon Elementary School of Technology  D49.org/FESET
Meridian Ranch Elementary School  D49.org/MRES
Woodmen Hills Elementary School  D49.org/WHES

POWER Zone:
Vista Ridge High School  D49.org/VRH
Skyview Middle School  D49.org/SMS
Academy for Literacy, Learning & Innovation Excellence  D49.org/ALLIES
Innovation View Elementary School  D49.org/IVES
Odyssey Elementary School  D49.org/ODES
Ridgeview Elementary School  D49.org/RVES
Stetson Elementary School  D49.org/SES

Sand Creek Zone:
Sand Creek High School  D49.org/SCHS
Horizon Middle School  D49.org/HMS
Evans Elementary School  D49.org/ES
Remington Elementary School  D49.org/RES
Springs Ranch Elementary School  D49.org/SRES

iConnect Zone:
Banning Lewis Academy  D49.org/BLA

Mountain View Academy  D49.org/MVA
GOAL Academy  D49.org/GOAL
Grand Peak Academy  D49.org/GPA
Liberty Tree Academy  D49.org/LTA
Pikes Peak Early College  D49.org/PPEC
Pikes Peak School of Expeditionary Learning  D49.org/PPSEL

Power Technical  D49.org/TEC
Rocky Mountain Classical Academy  D49.org/RMCA
Springs Studio for Academic Excellence  D49.org/SSAE

COVID-19 Recovery Schedule

July 2020

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Check school websites for campus-specific events at D49.org
Falcon Zone Mascot Lunch Party

By D49 Communications Department

Recognize these faces? The Falcon Zone mascots teamed up to lend a hand with meal distribution at Falcon Elementary School of Technology Thursday, May 14. The district nutrition services team supported students and families by providing grab-and-go meals at three campuses throughout the season of E49. It was a big job, and a real treat to have a few extra hands to show some care for the D49 Family while spreading some school spirit!

Falcon Elementary School of Technology Assistant Principal Paula Kavalec (left) and D49 Chief Operations Officer Pedro Almeida (right) grab a photo with the Falcon Zone mascots at FESoT May 14. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Falcon Zone mascots wave to families during the meal distribution May 14. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Falcon Elementary School of Technology staff pose with Falcon Zone mascots who helped with meal distribution May 14. (District 49/Aaron Villescas)