

Distinguished Educator

Steven LaVallee

Many children might feel challenged attending school in a district where their father holds an administrative position. Steve LaVallee's children, however, have managed differently. Their father's contribution to the school district is notable, as evidenced by their nomination of him as a distinguished educator in the Adams-Friendship Academic Hall of Fame. He and his wife, Sandra, established their home and raised their two children, Collin and Ariana, within this community.

Steve received a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Cardinal Stritch College in May 1978 and earned his masters degree from UW-Milwaukee in 1980. He obtained school psychology certification a year later. In January 2001, he attended Edgewood College to obtain principal certification and graduated with an Educational Administrative Doctorate and superintendence certification in December 2004.

Steve worked as a psychometrist for Milwaukee public schools from 1981 to 1984. He then served as a school psychologist for the Adams-Friendship School District from 1984 to 1986. From 1986 to June 1996, he was the Director of Pupil Services and became Assistant Superintendent. In July 2000, he was named District Administrator for the Adams-Friendship School District.

His children describe him as a tireless advocate for all stakeholders in education, supporting every student and emphasizing the stability of the whole child. He implemented initiatives to develop teachers and staff, and always addressed family concerns, showing care for everyone he encountered.

Steve consistently focused on enhancing the district and implementing improvements to aid students in their lifelong achievements. He took pride in showcasing the accomplishments of both students and staff, ensuring that he represented the strengths of the Adams-Friendship community in every interaction. At the state level and through various organizations, Steve highlighted the district's successes and facilitated the establishment of the Adams-Friendship Education Foundation.

Steve held a number of leadership positions in several state organizations. As President of the state pupil services organization, he led the merger with the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Education to form the Wisconsin Council of Administrators of Special Services (WCASS) that continues to exist to this day.

While many educational leaders are invisible to those they serve, Steve was often seen walking the halls, visiting classrooms, and chatting with staff and students. All students from prekindergarten to high school knew him and his values. Whether he was visiting classrooms as "Zero the Hero," playing the accordion for a captive audience, or instituting reforms, Steve's leadership and passion for education were always clear. One of his many awards includes "Administrator of the Year" in 2013 presented by the Wisconsin Association of School Councils.

The motto, *"Preparing Students to Perform for Life"*, has been adopted as a guiding principle for the Adams-Friendship Area School District. When asked about its importance, Steve provided an explanation regarding its historical significance.

"Each summer, all members of our administrative team met for a two-day retreat to review progress from the previous year and plan for the upcoming year. This included an on-going analysis of our progress toward the directions identified during the creation of the district's first strategic plan. In the opening activity, teams were directed to create a visual representation of what it would look like if the district was meeting its mission."

"All of the groups worked diligently to visually represent the district's mission. When asked to share, the creation of one group stood out from others in its simplicity but effectiveness. The picture consisted of children on a stage with the words "Prepare to Perform" written below. The members of the group explained that if we were meeting our mission, students would be prepared for whatever was next in their lives. Further brainstorming led to an expansion of the idea and resulted in "Preparing Students to Perform for Life". Meaning, students were prepared for the next steps in their lives but also to be lifelong learners and contributing citizens. It is still amazing to me that this simple activity lives as a statement of commitment that has been part of the Adams-Friendship Area School District's values and history for over 20 years."

The A-F Academic Hall of Fame honors not only alumni who embody this principle, but also educators who inspire excellence within the school district and the broader community.

During his service in the Adams-Friendship School District, Steve was more than just an employee. He was the voice of Green Devil basketball and football, a referee, and a coach. He was also actively involved in the community, volunteering for organizations such as the Knights of Columbus and Adams County Chamber of Commerce. He helped organize and promote the Friendship Lake District. Grants he wrote resulted in over \$96,000 presented by the DNR Lake Management Board to the lake district for a new harvester and trailer. This man of many talents can occasionally be spotted in a performance with other members of the Sand County Players.

Steve is known for his steady support during difficult times, comforting families, collaborating with the community, and supporting students. One defining example occurred early one Saturday morning when Steve and a colleague were on their way to a graduate class in Madison. Their normal conversation came to an abrupt halt as they witnessed a car-just two vehicles ahead-T boned at an intersection. Steve immediately joined attempts to help the victims as others called for help. Two young girls traveling in the vehicle directly behind the district car were distraught as they observed an obviously fatal accident. One of the girls asked, "Is that Mr. LaVallee? She was assured that it was, indeed, Mr. LaVallee. The girl looked at her friend and said, "It'll be okay. Mr. LaVallee is here."

That says it all.