

Hitting the ground running

New CHS Principal Ward wants students to see more options

By Jessica Garcia

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Smith Valley native Gavin Ward developed an appreciation for trade skills as he watched his father and uncle run a plumbing business and his mother work as a school secretary. His father built three houses, and Ward would assist him each summer during middle and high school years, enjoying his free time playing basketball.

When it came time to put in some serious thought about what he'd do in life, though, Ward said he felt his calling was to be a teacher.

"I felt like working with kids was a real strength of mine," he said.

He hones that passion now as he strives to make sure all kids set their sights on college or career. Ward is Carson



JESSICA GARCIA/NEVADA APPEAL

New Carson High School Principal Gavin Ward in front of the school earlier this week.

High School's new principal and kicks off the 2019-20 this year with an inclusive mindset — making sure his students know their skills won't have

to just come from inside the classroom.

"One of the great things

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that I love about Carson High School is that we have a lot of options for kids ... because I think there's a lot of things that you can get from Carson High School that you can't even get from the classroom, but you get from groups like band," he said.

When he introduces himself to the incoming students at orientation Tuesday and particularly the freshman class, he'll emphasize where they can get involved because the opportunities to learn aren't strictly academic, he said.

"You look at sports, you look at the different clubs, the skills you get like collaboration, hard work, being able to communicate and getting things done ... it makes your high school experience that much better."

Ward has been well-connected with the Carson City School District for about 20 years. After earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Idaho, he returned to Northern Nevada and became a social studies teacher at Carson High, moving into administrative roles later at Carson Middle School, serving as dean of students and vice principal between 2007 and 2013. He enjoyed the opportunity to work at the younger students there, he said, with the transition.

"It's tough to be middle school kids," he said. "I feel like when they've made a mistake, they don't always know why."

But high school was his passion and went back to Carson High as vice principal in 2014. He eventually would work with Tasha Fuson, who recently has been named associate superintendent of educational services.

Carson High has welcomed 15 new teachers this year. Fall sports also will be starting soon, along with a new drama program, and Ward said he has a team full of people ready to build many of the school's offerings.

Inside the classroom, though, he'll

have to ensure the school's staff and students are on track to success, and Ward said it's not enough to be satisfied with its performance.

"You want to have guaranteed and viable improvement, and we have all sorts of standards," he said, as well as ensuring the proper assessments are done to meet expectations and make the targets.

He has a focus on promoting the ACT to help students become college- and career-ready. For the SAT, he said, the school has been struggling in certain areas and wants to figure out where there might be areas of disconnect in getting more students to take the test.

"We haven't, as a staff, been trying to promote why the ACT is important," he said, "and it has a lot of value. ... I would argue that the skills for college are similar to the ones in career. Kids need to be able to read, comprehend, they need to be able to write, they need to be able to think critically and they need to be able to solve math problems and they need to be able to think"

Carson High also will continue its Career and Technical Education offerings, work-based learning courses and Ward said his staff will seek to get more students to explore opportunities with classes in these areas.

Ward said looking ahead, shifts in per-pupil funding and watching class size counts are concerns.

"The way I understand funding is instead of just cutting us off, they're (the Nevada Legislature) doing it slowly so that we're not going to receive more funding," he said. "We're projected to grow in the next couple of years, and we're not going to receive additional allocations."

But he said he appreciates Carson City's response to the school in whatever circumstances that impact its students and staff.

"I love how Carson City is a special place ... it's a huge responsibility, and I feel like we have a community that is super supportive. ... We have people who will jump in. I'm super excited to be in Carson High School."