

New Teachers 2019-2020



Vicky Avendano
Jr. High Math Teacher

Vicky Avendano

Vicky Avendano just graduated from Idaho State University. She completed her student teaching pre-internship at Skyline High School and completed her student teaching internship at Taylorview Middle School. She has been working at the Museum of Idaho since March of 2018 as an education assistant to the Director of Education. Her parents emigrated from Mexico, so her family is bilingual. She is the middle child and has two brothers. Her father works as a forklift operator at a potato company and her mother sorts potatoes. She says, “my parents have always been supportive of their children and encouraged us to earn degrees in fields that interest us.” She enjoys reading and drawing on rainy days. When the weather is nice out, she likes to go hiking and fishing. She also enjoys cooking. When she feels inspired, she like to create whimsical Makey Makey projects.

Ms. Avendano hopes to grow with her students this coming year and be a better educator at the end of the year. She would also like to give her students the skills they will need to continue learning math and maybe even enjoy the subject. She hopes that her students will learn there is always a solution to any problem. She would also like her students to leave her class with some critical thinking skills they can apply to their lives outside of school.



Leslie Gardner
5th Grade Teacher

Lesley Gardner

Lesley Gardner will be teaching 5th grade at Snake River Middle School. She has been teaching 5th grade in Havre, Montana for the last 5 years. When asked to tell us a little about herself and family, Mrs. Gardner said, “After being out of Idaho for 22 years, our family is finally able to move back!” She has been married to Craig Gardner for 23 years and the they have four amazing children. They are looking forward to living near extended family and starting a new chapter in their lives. In her spare time, Mrs. Gardner enjoys camping, riding four-wheelers, and playing the piano.

Mrs. Gardner hopes that students will remember that learning is fun! She thinks communication between the teacher, student, and parents is a key component of a successful year. She loves to hear from families and work with them to meet student needs. Her goal this year is to love teaching! She will try to find the positives each day.



Brandon Whitby
Jr. High English Teacher

Brandon Whitby

Snake River Junior High welcomes Brandon Whitby as an 8th grade English teacher. He has taught for the past three years at an early college high school. Mr. Whitby is getting married in November and he has two dogs. He really enjoys tabletop games.

The most important thing to Mr. Whitby is that students develop skills that will follow them throughout their lives. He would also like to help his students improve their writing skills. He believes that positive environments and support for students at home is the most helpful thing.



Jennifer Lambert
4th Grade Teacher

Jennifer Lambert

Hello, my name is Jennifer Lambert, and I will be teaching Special Education at Snake River Junior High. I am so excited to be a part of this amazing district! My husband and I are moving to the Blackfoot area from Logan, Utah. We love to travel (especially to anywhere with an ocean view), hike, spend time with our extended family, play board games, and of course go out to eat and try new foods! I graduated from Utah State University, and taught Special Education for 5 years in Cache County. In my classroom I strive to plan lessons that engage all students and allow for high opportunities to respond. Also, I use an "I do, we do, you do" model while teaching new content to ensure students have the keys they need to master the curriculum. I love my job, and have a firm belief that all students can be successful across all content areas, with the right accommodations, scaffolding, and support. I firmly believe in open collaboration with parents and other teachers and believe that as we work together to support individual students, we can help them to grow and be successful in their education. I look forward to meeting each of you!



Angie Martin
2nd Grade Teacher

Angie Martin

Angie Martin will be teaching 2nd grade this year. She is excited to be a part of the Riverside Elementary staff. Angie graduated from Western Governors University in June. For the past twelve years she has worked as a paraprofessional at Moreland Elementary in Kindergarten, the last five years in a shared teaching classroom.

Angie has lived most of her life in the Blackfoot area. She is married to Kay Martin. They have five adult children who have all graduated from Snake River High School. Angie likes to spend her free time with her family.

Angie's goal is to help students be successful and enjoy learning. She wants to create an environment of safety and wellbeing where students have the confidence to share what they know with their fellow students. She also wants to help students develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills as they learn. Angie is dedicated to helping students be their best selves, assets to their school and their community. She is looking forward to new opportunities, and is super excited about her new class.



Sarah Wheeler
2nd Grade Teacher

Sarah Wheeler

Sarah Wheeler graduated from BYU-I with a degree in Elementary Education and has been teaching 1st grade for the last 5 years. She is excited to be teaching 2nd grade at Riverside and looks forward to building relationships with her students and their families. Her goal is for every child to love learning and school. She enjoys reading and spending time outdoors. She is married to Caleb and they have 3 children- Kate, Carter and Jack.



Chelsea Sorensen
3rd Grade Teacher

Chelsea Sorensen

Riverside Elementary welcomes Chelsea Sorensen as a 3rd grade teacher. After teaching at Riverside for 7 years, she took a five-year break and is excited to be back working there.

Ms. Sorensen is looking forward to continue to grow and develop as an educator. We asked her what she hoped her students will most remember about her classroom. She said, "I hope my students find my classroom to be an engaging, learning environment where they continue to develop their love of learning." She also hopes parents feel welcome in her classroom as she always enjoys family volunteers and helpers.

Mrs. Sorensen and her husband, Daniel, are both from the Blackfoot area. They have five wonderful children. After four years in Northern Montana, they are looking forward to enjoying the mild winters of South East Idaho again.



Daniel Leavitt
District Orchestra Teacher

Daniel Leavitt

Daniel Leavitt is the District Orchestra teacher and will be teaching grades 5 through 12. He has 17 years of experience teaching music in the public schools and 17 years coaching. Mr. Leavitt hopes to make a smooth transition by maintaining tradition as much as possible and build on the existing successful strings program.

Mr. Leavitt would like to be remembered for being valued, challenged, and inspired. Parents and patrons can help him best do his job by supporting their kids and the program events, arrange for out of class support, and volunteer to attend classroom instruction.

Mr. Leavitt has been married to Johanna for 24 years and has four children. He enjoys music (of course), time with family, outdoor activities like deer-hunting and four-wheelers.



Gerald Nunn
School Psychologist

Gerald Nunn

Gerald Nunn is the new School Psychologist in our district. He holds a PhD in Educational Psychology; Ed.S. in Counseling; M.S. in Counseling; BS in Psychology. He is an NCSP (Nationally Certified School Psychologist, NASP). His recent experience includes: a K-12 School Psychologist 6 years in Iowa (Primarily working with incarcerated youth ages 12-21 in state institutions) K-12 School Psychologist in Iowa 14 years; Clinical Psychologist (Mental Health) Iowa for 3 years; and for 15 years, was Director of School Psychology Program Graduate Faculty at Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho.

Mr. Nunn hopes students remember him as being a positive person in their lives. When asked about his expectations and goals while at Snake River, he said that he wants to support parents, teachers, and students to the best of his ability. He also would like to maintain a friendly and professional demeanor in his work, and hopefully be a positive element in the school district promoting student success.

Mr. Nunn is originally a Kansas farm boy and attended a one room country school grades 1-8th. He is also a Vietnam Era Veteran serving 3 years in the military. His immediate family consists of a wonderful wife, 2 great sons, and 2 fantastic grandchildren. My family is my greatest joy and responsibility.



Basil Morris
Jr. High Principal

Basil Morris

Basil Morris is the Principal of Snake River Junior High. Prior to coming to Snake River Junior High Mr. Morris spent 15 years in Texas serving as a high school assistant principal, English teacher and coaching football, basketball, golf and track.

Mr. Morris has a Bachelor's of Science from Utah Valley University and a Master of Education from Lamar University. Mr. Morris is a native of Idaho. He was born and raised in Nampa, Idaho.

Mr. Morris has had the fortune to be married to his wonderful wife, Eden, for 20 years and been blessed with 4 great children.

Mr. Morris has a passion for hunting, fishing, cooking and any sport you can think of. He looks forward to serving the students, staff, parents and community of Snake River Junior High.

New this year but not pictured:

Jessica Hammond, 3rd Grade Teacher

Rebekah Zorrilla, Spanish Language Kindergarten Teacher