New Combs’ principal likes small district, big-city feel
By Andy Luberda

On Feb. 10, the J.O. Combs Unified School District governing board approved the hiring of Brooke Davis as the new principal at Combs High School, beginning with the 2016-17 school year.

Davis, whose educational career spans 26 years, has spent the past nine years in Englewood, Colorado, including the last three as a high school principal.

During a recent phone interview, Davis compared favorably her current position with the one she’s about to embark. She called her professional experience in Englewood “the best” she’s had and enjoys working in a small district, finding similarities between her current district and the J.O. Combs USD.

A self-described small-district person with a big-city feel, Davis received input from college friends who live in the area and suggested she research the district, the high school, and the local community.

“The appeal to me of what Combs had is the family orientation,” Davis answered when asked what attracted her to the position. “That is very important to me. I’m very much a relationship-centered person and I’m looking forward to the community aspect that Combs has.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree in Broadcast Journalism, Davis worked in advertising where she felt unfulfilled with many extra hours on her hands. A former collegiate basketball student-athlete at New Mexico State University, she applied at an Albuquerque area high school to coach the freshmen girls’ basketball team to minimize her abundance of free time. It was then she realized her love for working with students and decided to earn her certification at the University of New Mexico. She continued coaching, moving up the ranks to head JV coach and then assistant varsity coach.

She eventually moved to Colorado where she was an English teacher and the girls’ volleyball, basketball, and soccer coach.
During her 26-year career she’s gone from being a high school freshman basketball coach to a high school principal and “everything in-between.”

“I think it’s very important for a principal to have comprehensive knowledge of all systems within the high school,” Davis said. “Not only to support student achievement, but (also) the social-emotional piece that comes with high school students.”

Davis is a self-proclaimed “do-it-all” principal who is known to mop floors, clean, and get students to the bus in addition to her more traditional responsibilities of providing leadership and supervising.

One of Davis’ “in-between” jobs included a stint as an athletic director. What level of importance do athletics, the arts, or other extra-curricular activities have in lives of students in her view?

“They’re all incredibly important,” she responded. “I want a home away from home for every student. School is that place where (students) get to find, try, test, and learn all those soft skills that we want students to have that practically apply to their learning, such as time management, organization, and collaboration.”

“All of those are 21st-century skills learned through sports, clubs, band, choir, or whatever it is,” she added. “They are all incredibly important because it teaches students how to work with others.”

Davis says she learned time management as a student-athlete at New Mexico State and those skills carried over to her job in advertising, allowing her time to also coach the freshmen girls’ basketball team.

“The things we are going to do at school need to practically apply to life,” Davis said. “That comes in the classroom as much as in the sports arena, the concert hall, or the theater.”

The new Combs High School principal will be on campus approximately once per month until the end of the school year in Colorado, which precisely coincides with Combs’ school year. She will move to the area permanently after that.

Davis was asked what she’s most looking forward to at Combs and responded by recalling the day of her interview, when she was sitting the school’s front office and nearly 25 students came through – unaware of who she was or what she would eventually be – and almost all of them smiled at her and said, “hello.”

“Those students took the time to welcome a stranger,” she said. “And I said to myself, ‘I want this job.’ So let’s meet each other at the door, and let’s grow and go together.”