

District Accountability Advisory Committee, Feb. 12

# Committee learns about Special Education Advisory Committee, Safe Routes to School, social emotional learning

By Harriet Halbig

The Lewis-Palmer D-38 District Accountability Advisory Committee received reports on activities in the exceptional students department, the Safe Routes to School trail, and social emotional learning initiatives in the district.

Lewis-Palmer Elementary School Principal Jenny Day offered an introduction to her school, consisting of 470 students in 18 class sections and two preschool classes.

Day said that art, music, and physical education are offered each day with enrichment opportunities before and after school.

The school received the John Irwin Award in 2018 for its academic achievement and the Inez Lewis Award in 2017 and 2018 for improvement exceeding 10 percentage points in math or language arts.

A foundation of the school's philosophy is to take care of the emotional needs of the students, teachers and families. The school is creating a community garden.

A modular with two classrooms will be added to the south of the main building for the coming school year. Day said that it is not yet known which two classes will use the modular.

Board of Education liaison Tiffiney Upchurch reported to the committee on the progress of the superintendent search. The deadline for application was Feb. 14, and four applications have been confirmed with an additional 14 pending.

Upchurch said that although the board had decided in January to postpone putting a bond issue on the 2019 ballot, it voted the previous night to proceed with one. The bond will include an elementary school on the same site with a middle school on the Bear Creek campus. No ballot language or financing details were available.

When asked about staffing for the new school and middle school, Assistant Superintendent Cheryl Wangeman said teachers will follow the students from the elementary to the middle school, and the district will need to hire nurses, janitors, and others.

Wangeman also reported on the Safe Routes to School trail planned to go from Palmer Ridge High School and Lewis-Palmer Middle School to Lewis-Palmer Elementary school.

The district applied for federal funding in 2015, and the process was completed in 2017. It is a federal grant administered by the state with some matching funds from the district. The Woodmoor Improvement Association also contributed. Completion is estimated to be in 2022.

Director of Exceptional Student Services Rick Frampton updated the committee on his department's activities, including the Special Education Advisory Committee composed of parents and staff and the Transitions program that serves students ages 18 to 21 who have Individual Education Plans. These students are learning life skills to serve them as they enter the community. Some also attend classes at Pikes Peak Community College.

The number of students in the district who qualify for special education services is 661, of whom 80 are severely disabled and need to be transported to receive specialized services elsewhere.

Frampton said that, due to the district's reputation for offering effective services, a number of families "choice into" the district to take advantage of these services.

Day and Prairie Winds Principal Aileen Finnegan reported on social emotional learning initiatives. They said that it is important to begin teaching social emotional learning at an early age so students are able to control their behavior later. This allows for more effective learning, especially in middle school.

Each school uses its own program such as Path 2 Empathy and Responsive Classroom, where students and teachers greet each other daily.

At the high school level, the preferred approach is Sources of Strength, using peer groups to understand gratitude and a general atmosphere of caring.

Finnegan said that several students at Prairie Winds were adopted from foreign orphanages, prompting the school to learn about problems of students coming from a traumatic situation. Traumas could also include divorce and illness within the family. Counselors and social workers are available in the schools as well.

Day said that another aspect of this program is to minimize the use of suspension as a punishment and instead make it a learning experience when a student is sent to the principal's office.

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The Lewis-Palmer D-38 District Accountability Advisory Committee meets six times a year. Locations vary. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, March 12 at Lewis-Palmer Middle School, 1776 Woodmoor Drive.

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