



Above: Young authors: Prairie Winds Elementary School student writers and their supervisors are, from left, Luke Weir, Blake Marchetti, Lotez Scarbrough, Principal Aileen Finnegan, Michael Biesterfeld, Cruz Snyder, Joey Brandon, Sydney Stewart, Andrew Bonneau, Bennett Patrick, Josh Cox, Zoe Johnson, Sofie Palonen, Kaitlyn Ketchell, Wesley Harness, third-grade teacher Kim Cona, Grogan Blach, and Erik Jonasson. *Photo by Harriet Halbig*

parents seem comfortable with the present situation. Wangeman said that 10 applications have been received for membership on the new Safety and Security Council, with three more expected. Staff members in the custodial and grounds areas are increasing their vigilance as well. Wangeman said that security will now be a consideration when capital investments are discussed.

Prairie Winds Elementary School writing program

Members of Kim Cona’s third-grade writing class presented their original stories, titled A Day with a Dragon. The class was divided into four groups, each of which wrote and illustrated a story with the same title. The groups presented their work to the board. Board members commented on their professionalism and the quality of their creations. The board approved a list of routine matters such as minutes of previous meetings, appointments and resignations of staff, list of substitutes, contracts and other items requiring board signatures.

The board went into executive session at 8:15 to discuss personnel matters.

The Board of Education of the Lewis Palmer D-38 School District meets at 6 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month in the district’s Learning Center, 146 Jefferson St., Monument. The next meeting will be on Feb. 21. *Harriet Halbig can be reached at harriethalbig@ocn.me.*

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District Accountability Advisory Committee, Jan. 15

Committee to assist personnel evaluation

By Harriet Halbig

School District 38 Director of Personnel and Student Services Bob Foster presented a new charge to the District Accountability Advisory Committee (DAAC) at its Jan. 15 meeting.

In compliance with Senate Bill 191, each district is required to have a Performance Evaluation Council to monitor the district’s compliance with the new performance evaluation system. This council must consist of one teacher, one administrator, one principal, one parent with a child in district schools, and one resident who is not a parent with a child in district schools.

The council is charged with consulting with the Board of Education as to the fairness, effectiveness, and professional quality of the licensed personnel performance evaluation system.

Because DAAC already consults with the board regarding school performance plans and other matters and includes representatives of all schools, staff, parents, and administration, Foster said it seemed logical to suggest that DAAC also serve in this role.

Under SB191, 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation is based on professional practices and 50 percent on student growth. The state has provided the means to evaluate professional practice through a lengthy form to be completed by principals each year for each employee.

The growth aspect is more difficult because it involves teachers of subjects not assessed by the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program and other standardized tests. Teachers of subjects such as physical education, band, fine arts, and other disciplines must also be evaluated, and the measurement of growth in these disciplines is much more difficult to determine.

Foster said that districts may adopt the state’s proposed system of evaluation or create their own, subject to state approval. He said that the districts that have attempted to create their own have found the process to be cumbersome and often have not received state approval. For this reason, District 38 has chosen to follow the state prototype.

The district is required to present a functioning model of its system by July 1.

The 2013-14 school year will be the first in which the new system is tested, and results of evaluation will not result in any disciplinary action. The following year, 2014-15, will be the first in which a teacher can get an “ineffective” rating. Teachers in the nonprobationary category (those with tenure) can lose that distinction after two years of ineffective ratings.

During the first few years, only teachers of probationary status will be evaluated regarding their professional practices.

Foster said that the district’s evaluation system was last upgraded in 2005. In response to a question regarding declining performance scores (although the district retains its accreditation with distinction), Foster said that budget cuts have eliminated many support services in reading and math over the past several years.

Unified Improvement Plans

The committee split into two sections to review the Unified Improvement Plans for Prairie Winds Elementary and Ray Kilmer Elementary Schools.

Principals Aileen Finnegan of Prairie Winds and Chuck Stovall of Kilmer answered questions posed by committee members. Both reported that in the area of academic achievement (proficiency) and academic growth they received an “exceeds or meets” rating. In the area of academic growth gaps, weaknesses appeared in the categories of disabled students, those in the free/reduced-cost lunch program, and those needing to catch up (those requiring three years or more to reach proficiency).

Prairie Winds houses a center-based program involving students on the autism spectrum and a dual diagnosis program for students who would otherwise need to be treated outside of the district.

Finnegan said that due to the small number of students in each of these categories, their performance was not detailed in the Unified Improvement Plan. However, she took the opportunity to analyze the small number of students whose weakness was in math and concentrated on improving their performance in this area by sending teachers to undergo special training in this area.

Finnegan said that test results showed a weakness in writing among sixth-graders during their first year at Prairie Winds. They responded well to concentration in this area, and as a result their reading performance suffered. Reading is now a focus area.

DAAC member Suzanne Faber, reporting on the Kilmer plan, said that the school houses a center-based program for students with significant special needs. The areas of challenge at Kilmer are math performance for those on free/reduced-cost lunch and those needing to catch up.

The cause of this challenge is a continuing increase in the number receiving free/reduced-cost lunches, larger classes, and lack of resources for individual intervention.

Referring back to the new evaluation system, the principals were asked how the center-based programs and the test scores of these students would affect performance scores of the instructors. When a student attends one of these schools specifically to participate in one of these programs, his or her test scores are applied to their home school, they said.

Board liaison John Magerko reported that the Colorado Association of School Boards has assigned representatives of various districts to attend legislative sessions and hearings to increase the visibility of the school boards.

The District Accountability Advisory Committee meets at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month. The next meeting will be held on Feb. 12 in the Distance Learning Lab at Lewis-Palmer High School, 1300 Higby Rd., Monument.

Harriet Halbig may be reached at harriethalbig@ocn.me.

Special Education Advisory Committee, Jan. 16

More suggestions on transition practices

By Harriet Halbig

The Special Education Advisory Committee continued its discussion of transition practices at its Jan. 16 meeting. Members addressed transitions from one grade to the next and from one school to the next.

Members of the group had developed a list of suggestions during their December meeting. In January, they were provided with a set of tips from the high school and middle school teachers addressing such matters as setting realistic expectations, familiarity with the Infinite Campus, use of lockers, changing classes, planning, and use of textbooks.

Committee members commented that the wording of the tips was very impersonal and approached from the

perspective of the school rather than the individual family and student.

Some members of the committee expressed dissatisfaction with the limitations placed on special education students, such as the inability to ride the regular school bus and excessive assistance from paraprofessionals, or “para.” They felt that fellow students were more likely to engage with a special education student without the continual presence of a para.

Other concerns included the fact that, at the high school level, classes may change from one semester to the next and students were not offered assistance in choosing electives. In some cases they would choose an elective only to be told that they could not participate.