

September 15, 2004

Arkansas City Public Schools one of five districts in nation invited by U.S. Department of Education to attend two-day event in Washington, D.C.

What do the Arkansas City and New York City Public School Districts have in common? They were both recently invited by the U.S. Department of Education to join three other school districts in the nation to provide input regarding comprehensive school reform. Attaining achievement in core areas of reading, writing and math and high expectations for all students was the primary topic of the roundtable discussions, which took place in Washington, D.C., Aug. 29-30. The Department of Education paid for Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Jan Voss to attend the meetings.

The districts represented were Ark City, New York City, Portland, Oregon County, Baltimore and Arlington School Districts. The size of the districts ranged from Ark City, with approximately 3,000 students, to NYC, with 1.2 million students. Only five states in the nation were selected to participate, and Ark City was the only school district representing the state of Kansas at the two-day event.

Dr. Voss said the five districts discussed similar strategies that are helping their students be successful, no matter what the size of the district.

“There are things you get to do in your career that you will always remember,” she said. “This is one of those events. It was a great experience. It’s wonderful to know that the (Kansas) State Department (of Education) has been watching our movement from good to great and what that has done for our district.”

Board member Daren Reese said this is a great honor. USD 470 “is being recognized not only statewide, but nationally,” he said.

The assistant superintendents who attended the event discussed translating research into action, how school systems work and the importance of educators learning and practicing. She said the work involved discovering connections that actions of the school community, districts and building leadership and governing board’s policies and the relationships of these “connections” to “actions” at the school level, classroom teacher level and individual student level ensures dramatic gains not only in the student’s learning but also in the adult’s learning regardless of background.

The participants shared what works and what doesn’t work. They discussed utilizing research-based teaching and learning because it sustains student’s success; identifying strengths and weaknesses through data collection and analysis; exploring ways educators prioritize options and develop solutions that must take place but can be successful with different approaches; and that schools and districts must fully develop and implement strategic plans focusing on student success within reading, writing and math.

Dr. Voss said the issue of providing meaningful content and engaging process with accountability for teaching and learning as measured by aligned assessment data requires a focus on-going professional development. Barriers to successful achievement can be minimized, removed or eliminated. One way USD 470 will do this is through the Students Assistance Program.

Student Assistance Program will offer alternative for students

The direct result of the USD 470 Drug Task Force, the Student Assistance Program has been established to help ALL students deal with the ways they can be affected by their own alcohol and other drug use or someone

else's, and any other factors that put them at risk. The program was presented by ACHS Dean of Student Services Angela Harding.

Whenever factors arise which interfere with a student's school performance, the Arkansas City School District will strive to cooperate with all segments of the community in making a means of assistance available to ALL students.

Each district school will have a "Core Team" in operation, whose membership will consist of at least an administrator, counselor and teacher. Angela Harding said many buildings already have a core team in place; it might be named something else, such as a Student Improvement Team. She said the program is completely voluntary and confidential. Parents will also be highly involved in the program.

Board President Gary Wilson said the Drug Task Force wanted to give students who had been involved with drugs and alcohol more options than just suspension and expulsion.

"This is the wonderful result of the Drug Task Force," Harding said. "We all realize that (drug and alcohol use by students) is not just a school district problem; it's a community problem."

Harding said the SAP will help students remove barriers to student achievement and help students be focused on what they need to be focused on.

The composition of the SAP advisory committee will include active participation from all aspects of the community, including the board of education and its attorney, the school district, Cowley County Court Services, the Rec Commission, Chamber of Commerce, Cowley College, Mental Health, the Health Department, Social Rehabilitation Services, Ministerial Alliance, Police Department, 12-Step Fellowship, Parents as Teachers program and teachers.

The board unanimously approved the SAP program. It should be noted that the program would not come with any additional costs to the district.

Board invited to attend district inservice

Dr. Voss invited the board to attend the district professional development inservice on Sept. 27, at ACHS. Dr. Marcus Nelson will be the guest speaker. Dr. Nelson is considered one of the most dynamic educators in the country. He engages audiences and individuals through the power of his life perspective and the energy of his presentations. He has three graduate degrees, including two master's and a doctoral degree. Dr. Nelson's message is one of personal and organizational change, growth and an appreciation for hard work.

Refreshments will be served at the ACHS cafeteria from 8 to 8:30 a.m. The inservice will take place in the auditorium from 8:30-11. All certified staff members are required to attend the inservice.

Athletic program focuses on goal setting, character building

ACHS Activities Tom Hollingsworth told the board that new this year, each coach must submit, in writing, two to three goals for the year to him. Another new item for activities is a character-building program, Champions of Character, which is an initiative of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. This program stresses character teaching through activities.

Hollingsworth said the five core character values are respect, responsibility, integrity, servant leadership and sportsmanship. He said this program will just reinforce what values parents already teach their children.

Hollingsworth said he “strongly believes in these two components” (goal-setting and character building).

“I am so happy and elated about the program,” he said. “There are great opportunities for what we can do with this. I would like to involve more of the community as well.”

In other business the board:

- Accepted resignations from Cheryl Ghram, food service; Carol Misora, Title VII Native American tutor at Adams; and Mandi Stultz, aide in four-year-old program at Frances Willard.
- Approved the hiring of Trina Berry, aide at ACES; Jessie Bradley, Title VII Native American tutor at Adams and Jefferson; Mary Hoopes, ESL tutor at Adams; Tammy Hutchinson, noon aide at Adams; Kyle Kendrick, Title VII Native American tutor at C-4 and IXL; Sarena Mantz, noon aide at Frances Willard; and Stacy Pike; Title VII Native American tutor at the middle school.
- Approved the professional dues for administrators. The budget includes allocations for these dues.
- Accepted the \$1,400 contribution to the choir travel fund from the Colt Beane Memorial Fund and approved the trip to New York City in March 2005. ACHS Choir Instructor Tim Harmon told the board that 44 students have registered for the trip. Beane, a 2004 ACHS graduate and participant in the 2002 New York City trip, died this summer in an automobile accident. His family said they considered his experiences during that trip to be of such significance in his life that they established a memorial fund in his name to assist members of the ACHS choir groups who wish to participate in future trips of a similar nature. Board President Gary Wilson asked Harmon to convey the board’s thanks to the Beane family for their generosity.
- Approved an elementary scheduling study, which will include recess. Principals at Adams and C-4 Elementary Schools have begun assembling their study teams according to the guidelines established by the superintendent. Their final, written reports are due to the superintendent by May 1, which gives the teams time to do their work and research and also allows time to plan for 2005-2006.
- Heard a first reading of board of education policy updates, suggested by the administrative council and the Kansas Association of School Boards. Most of the updates are editing issues or fairly minor updates.
- Had an executive session to discuss non-elected personnel.

The next regular meeting of the board will be Sept. 27, at 7 p.m., at Roosevelt Elementary School. All meetings of the board are open to the public.