



CHALLENGE DAY PROGRAMS IMPROVE SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY

By Jennifer Schultes

“Imagine a world where every child feels safe, loved and celebrated, where bullying, violence and other forms of oppression are things of the past. This is the work of Challenge Day” (www.challengeday.org).

Rich Dutra St. John and Yvonne St. John Dutra, who already were working in the community with people plagued by drugs and other at-risk behaviors, founded Challenge Day in California in 1987. They were parents who didn’t want their children to go through the troubles they did in school. Their idea has grown into an international program, helping establish thousands of adult-student mentor relationships.

Challenge Day has been embraced in the Natrona County School District for 11 years now, with Dutra St. John and St. John Dutra coming back year after year to incorporate the program at Dean Morgan Junior High, one of the program’s biggest

advocates.

“It’s one of the processes that can change a child’s world – and our school – for the better,” Walt Wilcox, Dean Morgan principal, said. “The kids and adults who participate feel a sense of purpose, love and emotional connection. When kids come back to visit, they say they’ve never felt more loved and appreciated than when they were at Morgan, which says a lot because we’re so big.”

See CHALLENGE, page 7



Photo courtesy of Zach Cordner, www.challengeday.org.

INSIDE:

COMPACT CAN
BREATHE LIFE INTO
NCS D

PAGE 2

EMPLOYEE
WELLNESS SURVEY
YIELDS HELPFUL
RESULTS

PAGES 4 & 5

A NEW YEAR ...
REFRESH YOUR
INSURANCE
KNOWLEDGE

PAGE 6

COMPACT CAN BREATHE LIFE INTO NCSD



Data-informed decision-making. Systemic goals. Strategic planning. Continuous improvement.

These may seem like buzz words in our district lately, but I assure you, they are not new. These concepts have, in fact, been at the heart of the Natrona County School District for nearly a decade now, as key principles and

philosophies within our Compact.

And after nearly 10 years, I believe it is time to embrace and advance each of these ideas.

The Compact was established in 2001, as a governing document for our district. It is, perhaps, best known for its role in laying out a collaborative decision-making process – the IBAP – that has been important to our work for quite some time now.

The Compact, however, is not just about IBAP. It's not even mostly about IBAP. It is about how we operate as a district, how we treat each other as professionals, and, more than anything, how we learn and grow to serve our primary customers: the students of Natrona County.

Now, there is a reason that the IBAP was at the forefront of the implementation of the Compact: We needed it. In the 1990s, this district was a very different place. There was little trust or respect between employees, leadership and the then-board of trustees. Contract negotiations were contentious to the point of near-strikes by employees. Our students suffered because we, as adults, didn't demonstrate how to work together collaboratively and productively.

The Compact changed that. For nine years, we have been committed to putting our students first in all we do. We have successfully worked through compensation issues every year without the strife of the past. We have grown, changed, and made decisions with students at the heart of our work.

See COMPACT, page 3

We live the Compact daily

By Carol Glasgow

In 2001, the Natrona County School District adopted a Compact of Trust. In this document, NCSD agreed to operate under five guiding principles:

- ◆ Commitment to success for each student
- ◆ Commitment to honoring the Interest Based Agreement Process (IBAP)
- ◆ Commitment to continual stakeholder training
- ◆ Commitment to a systems approach
- ◆ Commitment to stakeholder satisfaction

In continuing to move the Compact of Trust forward, and in making a commitment to a systems approach, NCSD has committed to a five-year strategic plan with goals and commitments to the students of the Natrona County School District.

NCSD continues to make decisions concerning students by a consensus decision-making process. It has become so embedded in our philosophy that it is just our way of doing "business." In an Interest Based Agreement Process, we discuss and evaluate story, interest and options. What we call "IBAP" really has many facets; any decision reached by consensus is an IBAP. This process is used annually in our governing committees, such as the Compact Issues Committee and Leader Group. Other decisions reached in 2009 by consensus were:

- ◆ Compact training format
- ◆ Certified staffing
- ◆ Compensation after Dec. 31
- ◆ Athletic/activities discussion for middle and secondary levels
- ◆ Instrumental music recommendation

Items began in 2009, which still are undergoing work:

- ◆ Classified staffing
- ◆ Principal evaluation tool

The Natrona County School District Compact has become so embedded in our everyday lives, we don't even realize that we live it on a daily basis.

For information about the Compact, contact Carol Glasgow at 3-5392 or Carol_Glasgow@natronaschools.org.



GOAL 1 TEAM PLANS, DOES, STUDIES, ACTS

*Goal 1 - Literate Students:
"All Natrona County School District students will read at grade level by the end of third grade."*

The Strategic Plan Goal 1 Team, led by Mike Bond, executive director of Curriculum & Instruction (C&I), has been busy the past several weeks working to improve our students' literacy rates:

- ◆ It has developed a Plan-

Do-Study-Act cycle focused on helping schools use NWEA reading data to increase the number of students who read at grade level. Class and student reports now are available to principals and teachers for kindergarten through third grade for fall, winter and spring testing. The goal team is working on strategies to support schools in using the data to identify reading skills needed by groups and individual students.

◆ The team is working in partnership with the Casper Star-Tribune, which is sponsoring the Ready to Read initiative, which sends newspapers to the homes of K-3 families who don't already receive a subscription.

- ◆ It has begun work with the Parent Education Network to

investigate research-based parent involvement that supports literacy. ◆ Finally, the team will begin cooperative work with Goal Team 2 – Excelling Schools – on the development of and support for high-performing classrooms. Bond and Dr. Mark Mathern, associate superintendent of C&I and lead of Goal 2, are seeking schools at the elementary, middle and high school levels to become demonstration sites. Please contact them if you are interested.

The Goal 1 team meets from 4 to 5:30 p.m. the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at the Central Services Facility. E-mail Bond at Mike_Bond@natronaschools.org with any questions or ideas for the success of promoting literacy.

COMPACT, continued from page 2

But this first decade of our Compact has been just that: a first step.

I believe that our organization has reached a maturity point where we are ready to move forward and begin to embrace the other aspects of our Compact, to make it a living document that has the power to radically transform who we are and help us become a world-class school district.

In addition to collaboration and shared decision-making, the Compact also talks about the district's need to be a strategic organization committed to continuous improvement. It talks about using data to improve, focus on the future, and to create positive results for all customers.

In short, our Compact directly aligns with our district's more recent efforts to establish values, a mission, a strategic plan, and long-term goals. It should, since both the Compact and the strategic planning process were directly built on the Baldrige model,

which identifies key criteria for successful organizations in business and education worldwide.

It's time to take the next step forward. Our Compact has made a positive difference in shaping who we are as a district, but it's not done. If we embrace it, the Compact will be a living, growing document that defines how we do continuous improvement in this school district.

We took the first steps a decade ago. Let's keep moving forward. I encourage you to pick up your copy of the Compact, or find it on our district Web site at www.natronaschools.org. Remind yourself what it's really about. Let's understand and embrace who we can be and how, together, we can make the Natrona County School District even better for our employees, community and, most importantly, our students.

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS SURVEY YIELDS HELPFUL RESULTS

By Rachel Trujillo-Myers

Thanks to all 848 of you who completed the Employee Wellness interest survey! The survey was conducted as a way to assess current wellness activities and to plan for future events.

Eight \$25 Olive Garden gift cards were drawn for the employees that completed the survey. Winners were: Cheryl Anderson, Theresa Boomer, Mary Ann Chavez, Terri Ellis, Brant Jungck, Jean Molyneaux, Jillian Peel and Esther Scofield! Congratulations!

Based on the results, the 25/25 incentive (yearly physical and online health assessment through CIGNA) is the most popular wellness offering and will continue to be offered. The WeightWatchers incentive will continue, as well as the yoga class offered at Central Services. The Mayo Clinic will continue to be sent to eligible employees -- one per household to cut down on cost.

We also found that the majority of you prefer to receive wellness-related information via e-mail (59.6%).

The survey included 21 questions and a comment section. View the responses at www.natronaschools.org. Click on Departments>Human Resources>Employee Compensation & Occupational Health>Media>December 2009 Employee Wellness Survey.

There is a wellness folder on First Class with all current wellness offerings. Go to District Resources>Human Resources>Wellness. Wellness offerings are also listed on the district Web site under Employee Compensation & Occupational Health.

WELLNESS PROGRAM FUNDING

The district makes funding possible for wellness activities and incentive programs. Each year in the spring, the Compact Issues

Committee meets and discusses the forthcoming fiscal year's budget. The district budget includes monies specifically earmarked for the wellness activities and incentive programs. Many of the incentives are used in conjunction with programs offered by

the Employee Group Insurance plan to help keep costs down and to encourage healthy lifestyles. Therefore, some wellness activities do require employees not covered by the district insurance plan to pay a small fee to participate. **The monies spent on wellness activities are not funded from classroom budgets.**

Thank you again for your feedback and to all of our wonderful wellness representatives that make wellness a priority in your worksites. If you have ideas or suggestions regarding hosting a class or wellness event in your school, please contact the ECOH Department for information on requesting funding.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Great American Fitness Adventure

The Great American Fitness Adventure (GAFA) Program will begin Feb. 1, and run through May 11. The goal of the program is to achieve 30 or more minutes of physical activity for 100 days. Participants choose their activities, but are recommended to get outside, breathing fresh air and trying something new. Each day you log 30 minutes of exercise you will earn a virtual park entrance sticker. The goal is to get all 100 stickers. On occasions you can't exercise, you will have 20 "free passes" to use. Online registration will begin Jan. 25 at greatamericanfitnessadventure.com.

There will be a \$20 per-participant fee to help cover online fees and incentives. If you are on track towards the goal, halfway through the program you will earn a GAFA T-shirt or gift card. Finish the program and you can earn a GAFA backpack or gift card. The program is online and requires computer access. If you do not have computer access, a paper kit will be provided.

New Years Gym Specials

◆ Join Curves for Women (2612 E. 3rd St., 472-2878) with \$100 off the enrollment fee, plus one free month! Each month thereafter is \$34.

◆ The Flex Complex (523 S. Center, 237-1793). Only \$13.99/individual or \$24.99/family with a one-year commitment. Month-to-month rates of \$23/individual and \$33/family are available.

◆ Snap Fitness (2135 E. 12th St., 237-6878). Join through January and receive a welcome gift (\$50 value)! Memberships are \$24.95/individual, \$44.95 joint, and \$54.95 family. Other costs include a start-up fee of \$20, and a \$15 access card (additional cards cost \$10). Tanning is available at an extra charge per month.

Yoga

Start your New Years resolutions out right and relieve that stress ... join an NCSd yoga class! Class is offered Wednesday evenings from 4:30-5:30 p.m. at Central Services with Lorraine Reed. This class is fully funded by the ECOH Department. No participant fee required.

WeightWatchers

A New WeightWatchers sessions starts soon! An open house meeting is Friday, Jan. 22 at 6 a.m. The regular meeting begins Feb. 5 at 6 a.m., with a weigh-in at 6:30 a.m. at the Kelly Walsh High School library.

Hearing screenings

Employees are encouraged to get their hearing tested for no charge through a grant funded by the ECOH Department. They are administered by Tom Rowley, certified NCSd Audiologist. Times available for appointments are Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 7 and 7:30. Please contact Rachel (Rachel_Trujillo-Myers@natronaschools.org, 3-5228) to schedule an appointment.

Students design district's holiday card

Madison Hartnett (right), fifth-grader at Paradise Valley Elementary School, designed one of the two holiday cards chosen by the district's Community Relations Office to send to the community this holiday season.

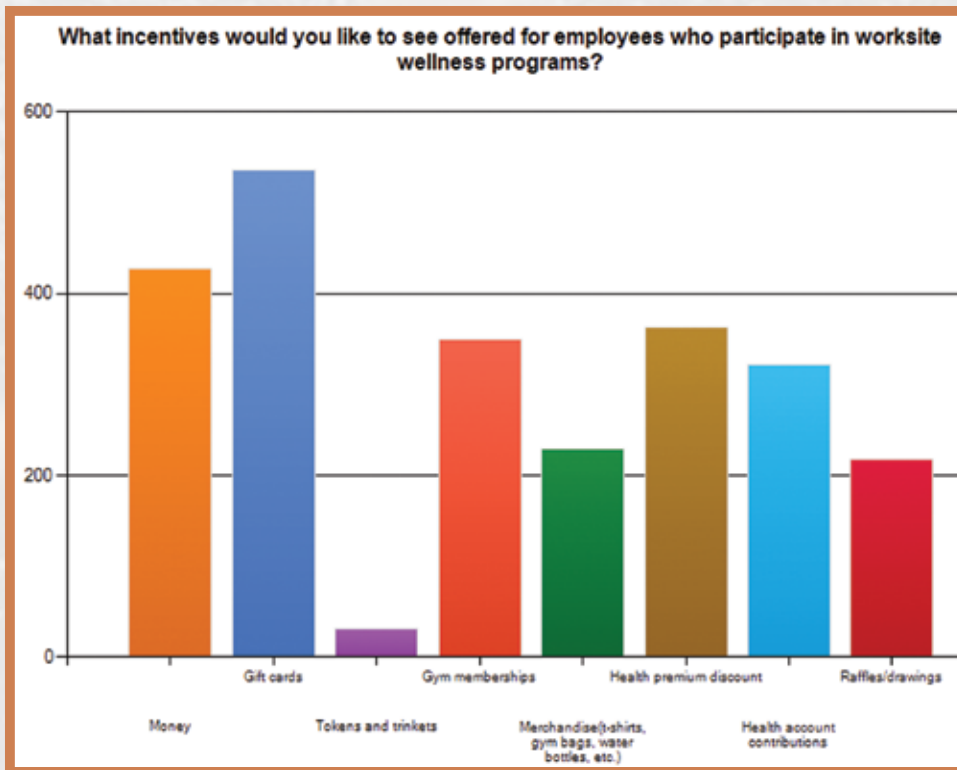
CY Junior High ninth-grader Tori Pike (left) designed the second holiday card that was chosen to be sent to the community.



DO YOU NEED WEB SITE TRAINING?

In the fall of 2008, the district switched to a new, fully interactive Web site with the hopes of providing the ultimate customer service to our public. In order to be able to continue this level of service, we must ensure that all staff, department and school information is up-to-date.

It has been asked that at least one person from each department and school go through an administrator training provided by the Community Relations Office. If you haven't been trained, or if you would like a refresher, please contact Jillian Dike at 3-5297 or Jillian_Dike@natronaschools.org.



A NEW YEAR ... REFRESH YOUR INSURANCE KNOWLEDGE

By Arlene Steward

The calendar deductible year for medical and dental claims runs from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31. All claims must be received by CIGNA and/or Delta Dental within one year of service dates. The deductible applies to each year. There is no carryover from one year to the next, even if the same illness continues in the next year.

The plan year for Tax Savings Accounts runs from July 1 through June 30. Tax Savings Accounts are as follows:

HEALTH CARE FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS (HEALTH CARE FSAs)

The Health Care FSA runs from July 1 through June 30, plus a two-and-a-half month extension (through Sept. 15).

An employee may utilize all or part of his/her funds at once. For example, an employee has Lasik eye surgery on July 1. The total amount due for this procedure is \$3,000. The employee files the claim and is reimbursed for the total amount, even though the Health Care FSA will not fully be funded until June of the following year.

All eligible claims for the previous plan year, including the extension, must be received by CIGNA no later than Dec. 14. If there is a balance in the account at the end of the extended period, it will be forfeited to the District's claims account ("use it or lose it," a federal regulation). If the employee terminates employment with the District, the employee could choose to spend down the balance by setting up after-tax deposits through COBRA.

DEPENDENT CARE FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS (DEPENDENT CARE FSAs)

Dependent Care FSAs run from

July 1 through June 30. The extension does not apply in this case.

Unlike the Health Care FSA, these funds must be in the Dependent Care Account before the employee is reimbursed for any services. For example, a \$400 claim is filed for July 1- 30 service dates. There is a \$300 balance in that account. The FSA system will reimburse \$300. Once the next month's deposit is entered into the FSA system, the \$100 balance will be reimbursed.

All eligible claims for the previous plan year (July 1 – June 30) must be received by CIGNA no later than Sept. 28. If there is a balance in the account by June 30, it will be forfeited to the District's claims account ("use it or lose it," a federal regulation). If the employee terminates employment with the District, the employee could choose to spend down the balance by setting up after-tax deposits through COBRA.

PREMIUM FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS (PREMIUM FSAs)

Premium FSAs run July 1 through June 30. An employee may elect to have health and/or dental premiums deducted on a before-tax basis.

HEALTH REIMBURSEMENT ACCOUNTS (HRAs)

HRAs run from July 1 through June 30. An employee may utilize all or part of his/her funds at once. Claims are filed and reimbursed the same way as Health Care FSAs.

As long as the employee remains in the HRA plan from year to year, all unused funds will roll over from year to year. If the employee chooses another plan or terminates employment, all claims must be filed within 30 days after the plan ends for reimbursement. The balance

in the account will be forfeited to the District's claims account (per federal regulation). The employee may elect COBRA after termination of employment and pay the high-deductible plan premium plus an additional 10 percent premium to continue the HRA option. If the employee retires from the District and remains on the medical plan, and if there is a balance in the HRA, the balance will be applied toward the retiree's premiums.

HEALTH SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (HSAs)

An HSA essentially is a personal bank and is funded with monthly deposits. It runs July 1 through June 30. On the initial enrollment bank form, the employee may elect the automated claims processing method, write a check for services or purchases and/or use a debit card for services or purchases. The employee is the holder of the account, which is portable when the employee terminates employment with the District. The employee will be totally responsible for the management of his/her account. The employee may elect to deposit up to the maximum amount allowed by law for that calendar year at any time during the plan year.

To learn more about Tax Savings Accounts, you may go online to www.mycigna.com, or contact the Employee Group Insurance Office.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE INSURANCE QUESTIONS

- ◆ Arlene Steward, employee group insurance manager, 3-5208
- ◆ Victoria Nolte, insurance specialist, 3-5207
- ◆ Monica Sayles, insurance specialist, 3-5328

CHALLENGE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The most recent Challenge Day held in Natrona County was early in December. The program included about 150 Dean Morgan students, administrators, teachers and community members. Two additional Challenge Days will be held the first week of March, and will be opened up to students and staff from across the district.

"Teachers and principals have the power to create the schools of their dreams," St. John Dutra said.

Dutra St. John agreed.

"The program shows them that love, acceptance and support are possible," he said, "and it leaves them hungry for more."

One of the drawbacks some see with Challenge Day is that it changes attitudes and social constructs for a day or maybe a week, but then quickly gets forgotten. The founders, along with Wilcox, stress it takes work to keep the initiative alive.

"You have to be very intentional with following up," Wilcox said, "and you must have adult buy-in. Adults have to make themselves vulnerable to the needs of the kids ... it's why we all went into education so long ago, but a lot of us forget that. Challenge Day reconnects them to their original purpose."

Challenge Day even has gone a step further in promoting being the "change you want to see." The founders have created the Next Step to Being the Change Workshop, which also was conducted in Casper last month. This program is for adults and teenage leaders and gives them tools, practices and philosophies to address issues such as separation, isolation and loneliness.

"Next Step takes Challenge Day to the next level," St. John Dutra said. "It teaches what we do and why it works, and encourages attendees to take the lessons back to their families and community."

It sure seemed to make an impact on a vital member of our school district and community, Greta

Hinderliter, and the homeless students she supports. Several homeless students attended the three-day workshop, and Hinderliter said you literally could see them change each day.

"One girl," Hinderliter said, "turned from an ugly duckling into a swan. It was amazing how much she grew. This is a kid that hears she's bad every day of her life."

Hinderliter said this experience was so important, because if staff members could only see what these kids go through, and how important forming close, mentoring relationships is for them, it could make for one of the biggest differences and most positive changes in their lives.

"You can't be their best friend," Hinderliter acknowledged, "but you can be their mentor and welcome them into your classroom. It takes just a few moments to make a connection. Forming these close relationships can help create that school of your dreams. Every school would benefit from participating in Challenge Day in huge ways."

The Champions Mentor Program funds the Challenge Day and Next Step programs, and Jennifer Bays, student mentor liaison, also is a huge advocate.

"I never really understood the effect that this training has until I went through it," Bays said.

Referencing some people's negative views of Challenge Day, she also admitted that in years past, follow-through has lacked, but assured that her team will be working to collect solid data to prove the difference the programs do make in our district and community.

If you are interested in bringing a Challenge Day event to your school or would like to participate in March's trainings, please contact the Champions Office at 3-5270. Wilcox also said any staff member who has questions about the effectiveness of the program is welcome to call or e-mail him (3-2500 or Walt_Wilcox@natronaschools.org).

PARTICIPATE IN THE PASSPORT TO FAMILY FITNESS

Event runs Feb. 5 - March 19

By Katrina Lorenzen

HOW IT WORKS

Join in with family and friends to celebrate all the great places we have in the community for opportunities to be active. Just take your passport with you when going to one of the participating businesses from Feb. 5 - March 19. After participating in your activity, take the passport to the front counter to get stamped. You get one stamp for yourself and one for additional friends/family members who join the fun! You can only receive stamps for up to two visits per establishment.

Prizes will be awarded at each grade level, along with a great grand prize! Please contact Katrina (3-5389, Katrina_Lorenzen@natronaschools.org) to get signed up!

Employee and Student wellness want you to keep on walking! Join us for the Healthy Heart Walk on Feb. 3 at 4 p.m. behind Old Town. Wear red and you are eligible to win a prize!

SPECIAL RESPONSE TEAM HOLDS BUS HOSTAGE DRILLS

By Jennifer Schultes

Members of Casper's Special Response Team conducted bus hostage drills on a recent Tuesday morning. This is going on the third year the Transportation Department has conducted such training exercises with the SWAT team, bus driver Kent Kimble said.

"The Transportation Office's Crisis Management Team has worked in conjunction with the [Natrona County] Sheriff's Office to be prepared in the event a bus hostage situation might happen in Casper," Kimble said. "We're trying to be prepared and make for easy entry for them into a bus."

Kimble said there are 10 different styles of doors on the 100 different buses, and each has different methods in which it can be opened. Emergency responders have a guide listing the tips and tricks of getting into the various doors in their squad vehicles.

