

NCS D News Zone



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JUDGE: 'SCHOOL SAVES YOU' IN CIRCUIT COURT

By Jennifer Cousineau

"You know that school saves you here, right?" Judge H. Steven Brown asked a student who was caught with marijuana — and who has poor grades and school attendance — in a recent Natrona County Circuit Court hearing.

Going to school is one of the four rules Brown has for circuit court youth offenders. The other three are: 1) They must remain clean and sober, 2) They must see a counselor, and 3) They cannot have any legal violations.



Each Thursday, a group meets at a student court staffing meeting to discuss juvenile offenders. In this picture, the following entities are represented: NCS D, District Attorney's Office, Juvenile Detention Center, Department of Family Services, Youth Crisis Center, Department of Corrections, Department of Family Services, Casper Police Department, Natrona County Sheriff's Office and Central Wyoming Counseling Center.

The Natrona County District Attorney's Office had been playing with the idea of a circuit court probation program for more than 10 years, Assistant District Attorney Brian Christensen explained. In 2005, Sen. Charles Scott obtained money from the Legislature to hire two probation officers to represent minors in circuit court. Scott realized that the more juvenile offenses these kids had, the more likely they were to drop out of school. Eventually, the Legislature stopped funding the program, which is when the Natrona

County School District, in partnership with the DA's office, initially funded the program with money from the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant. Through the grant, NCS D was able to provide the funding for the two juvenile probation officers. (Grant funding for their positions has since expired; NCS D's Student Support Safe Schools Office has picked it up.)

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TAKE A RISK TO DO THE RIGHT THING



In the next month, our community will begin actively designing the future of our high schools.

We've talked about this process for a long time in the Natrona County School District, and in just a few short weeks, it will all be real. Architects and construction-managers-at-risk have been selected to design remodels of Kelly Walsh and Natrona County high schools, as well as to design a new high school campus that will feature Roosevelt High School, Transitions Learning Center and the new Center for Advanced and Professional Studies, or CAPS program.

In April, we will begin the charette process to start identifying features of the projects and begin the preliminary design. We will rely heavily on input from both our staff and our community members to help imagine that design.

Now, more than ever, is the time for our district and our community to embrace our organizational value of "responsible risk-taking." As a district, we value the courage and foresight that is required to step outside the comfortable and the routine, to take a chance, to try something new for our students.

Already, we have some great models for this value. Just this month, our new REACH High program was featured in the Casper Star-Tribune. This is a brand new program that takes a lot of risks. It serves students who have completed alcohol and drug recovery programs and provides them a safe, understanding community in which to re-enter the school system. It's unlike anything else in our state.

Starting a program that serves students who have already had problems is a risk. What are the chances that these students will re-engage? Will they be successful? If they are not, will we be blamed for failing? There are lots of reasons why an organization might shy away from a risky endeavor. There's one

great reason to proceed: It's the right thing to do for our students.

REACH High is in its first full semester, and it's already showing great success. Attendance rates are high, as is engagement. The students are clean and sober, and they are recovering credits. We are offering them a path back to success in our community, and it's working.

We have a number of such specialized programs for our high-schoolers. Through Transitions Learning Center, for example, students can take intense three-week courses in core subjects to regain credit. They also can take hands-on courses in culinary arts or construction to earn high school credit while also learning an important skill for the career world.

These individual programs are meeting real needs among our student populations. But, they serve small numbers.

With our high school remodels and the new campus, we have the opportunity to dream big, to build something that will help renew the rigor and relevance of high school for all of our students.

We can't do what we've always done. We need to think big, think of the future, and think of our students. How do they learn? How do they live? What kinds of experiences do they need to be prepared for? How do we engage them in a way that is meaningful for the 21st Century, rather than the 19th or 20th centuries.

A curriculum team already is working to try to figure out the kinds of career-linked pathways that we can offer. These pathways aren't designed to tie kids into a career path at age 14; they are designed to connect learning with the real world while offering a glimpse of the myriad opportunities out there.

To make these opportunities meaningful, though, we need to step outside our own comfort zones. We need to engage our business communities, our parents, our entrepreneurs to show our students the real world. We need to take some risks. It may be scary, but it's what's right for our kids.

NCS D, COMMUNITY PARTNER TO SUPPORT KIDS

By Jenni Luckett

The NCS D Community Partnerships Division is pleased to announce several community projects launching this spring to help support students. From food to books, our community is stepping up to provide resources, rewards and recognition for students. If you or someone you know would like to help with these projects, please call Community Partnerships at (307) 253-5380. Here are a few of the new projects:

Totes of Hope

About 9 percent of children in Wyoming experience "food insecurity," meaning they miss meals or eat too little because their families can't afford food. Many of these students depend on school breakfasts or lunches to keep them fed — and they go hungry over the weekend. Monday mornings, then, become a struggle at school, with more behavior issues, more nurse visits and less concentration from hungry kids.

Through Totes of Hope, students who are identified by school staff and who opt-in to the program will receive a nondescript canvas backpack stuffed with food each Friday afternoon. They return the empty backpack on Monday mornings to refill for the next week.

The food is bought at extremely low cost through the Wyoming Food Bank of the Rockies and is stored at the CSF-McKinley Annex. Each Wednesday, volunteers stuff the food into backpacks and, on Fridays, volunteers deliver boxes of food to the participating schools. Volunteers then pick up the empty bags on Monday mornings. Right now, volunteers are CSF staff members; in the fall, there will be a need for even more people to help.

The food bank helped with the start-up of the

program with leftover grant money from Town Square Media and matching funds from the John P. Ellbogen Foundation. That money pays for food and backpacks for five pilot schools (Mills, Mountain View and Willard elementary schools; Frontier Middle; and Transitions Learning Center). The Casper Area Education Foundation (see details on page 6) also has contributed funding to pay for another school to participate this spring, as well as for a few extra backpacks to be available for emergency situations.

NCS D Community Partnerships, in conjunction with the foundation, is working on fundraising to pay for the program to continue and expand in the 2011-12 school year. Feeding about 15 percent of NCS D students next year would cost approximately \$200,000. Providing a backpack for every student eligible for free or reduced lunch would be about \$500,000. If you would like to contribute, visit www.casperedfoundation.org or call (307) 253-5380.

Go To Bat For Kids

Go To Bat For Kids is a partnership between the Casper Ghosts, the Natrona County School District and the Casper Area Education Foundation. The program provides positive recognition and incentives for students who exhibit positive behaviors, academically and socially.

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“We knew it was successful,” Christensen said. “When the Legislative program ended, 18 out of the 35 kids in it dropped out of school.”

For the last three years, several key players have met weekly to review each offender’s case — usually 50-60 kids from eighth- through 12th-grade at any given time. The key players include: Christensen, Brown, student advocates Amy Dorman and Andy Ready, probation officers from the Department of Corrections and Department of Family Services, law enforcement officers from the Casper Police Department and Natrona County Sheriff’s Office, and representatives from the Youth Crisis Center (YCC), Juvenile Detention Center (JDC), Central Wyoming Counseling Center and the high schools. The advocates update the group on the students’ grades, attendance, drug test results, counseling progress and goings-on at home. Several of the students are dealing with parents’ divorce, medical injuries and, sadly, abandonment. Most kids have alcohol and substance abuse charges — namely, marijuana and “spice.”

Brown typically reserves detention for substance abuse and criminal violations, after pressure from the state to use JDC less. If he does send a juvenile to jail, it is in conjunction with the school district, where the student is released to school and then goes back to JDC to spend nights, weekends and even breaks. Several students were ordered to spend spring break at JDC.

“Jail-to-school is a great thing,” Shawna Trujillo, Roosevelt High School principal, said. “[The kids at Roosevelt] who are supported by this program are the most successful kids in my building. They have support, motivation and accountability.”

The cooperation with the court is a fantastic partnership, said Marty Wood, director of Student Support Safe Schools.

“If I know [Brown] is going to send a kid to JDC for a couple weekends, I might hold off on suspending or even expelling him,” Wood said. “That’s the



Judge H. Steven Brown made one juvenile offender “pinky promise” that he would go to school and stay off drugs. He said it’s an ancient method of ensuring a promise.

2010 student court statistics

- ◆ 1,300 juvenile citations were reviewed by circuit court
 - ◆ 40-50 juveniles were arrested
 - ◆ 10.4% were charged with marijuana possession
 - ◆ 21.0% were charged with alcohol possession
 - ◆ 11.54% were charged with tobacco possession
- ◆ 24.7% of students successfully completed the program (nearly 57% of the cases are still active)
- ◆ More than 50 of these students graduated high school

power of this program: The courts and district are looking at things concurrently instead of separately. We’re meshing together two complicated, different systems to help kids who haven’t been successful in either.”

Another option for the kids is in-patient drug treatment, which two young men asked for in the court hearing before spring break. Brown commended them for their courage and maturity.

So far in 2011, six students from this program have graduated high school. They needed significant credits, and now are going into the military, college or trade school. District Attorney Mike Blonigen said that one of the biggest indicators of whether a person will be a productive member of society is whether he or she has a high school diploma.

Brown said there is always hope and reason for optimism as he cited that between 36 and 38 kids are on track to graduate high school in May.

“Yes, I ruin a lot of weekends,” Brown said, “but we’re getting some good stuff done.”

Brown, Christensen, the probation officers and student advocates are doing their part in helping these kids turn their young lives around, and the community can help, too. The program is lacking positive incentives, such as movie/event passes, gas or other gift cards, etc., which are given to the kids who are following Brown’s four rules.

“We’ve known since [behavioral scientist] B.F. Skinner that positive reinforcement works,” Brown said. “I can put them in jail, fine them or put them on probation, but that’s all negative. We need positives. Putting them in jail and fining them won’t stop them. It’s insane to keep doing something we know doesn’t work. We need to try something else.”

Funding also is needed for drug testing, which should be performed on substance-abusing kids twice a week; currently, it is done once a week. (The court-negotiated rates for eight-panel drug tests, spice tests and 80-hour alcohol tests are \$18 each.)

Wood said his office has some money to allocate, though a steadier stream of funding is needed. If you are interested in donating incentives or money for incentives or drug testing, please contact Mercer Family Resource Center at 265-7366.

READ INSURANCE, WELLNESS REMINDERS

By Arlene Steward

Medical Management Program

The Medical Management (MM) Program determines the medical necessity of care, appropriate location for care to be provided and appropriate length of hospital stay if a patient is admitted to a hospital. Network providers are responsible for contacting the MM Program for pretreatment authorization. If the provider is non-network, the member must make sure that treatment is approved by the MM Program.

Services requiring pretreatment authorization include, but are not limited to, inpatient hospital care, outpatient surgery, and prescription drugs that exceed the recommended dosage or need to be reviewed for medical necessity based on medical experts and the FDA recommendations.

Care in an emergency room does not require pretreatment authorization. However, if the hospitalization or surgery is required because of an emergency, the member’s doctor must call MM within 48 hours after care is given. Urgent care requests have special requirements also.

Non-compliance results in ineligible expense penalties. Please review the MM Program section beginning on page 19 of the EGI January 2011 plan booklet. You may contact CIGNA member services (1-800-685-1060) for details regarding pretreatment authorization.

Coverage for employees resigning or retiring

Under the state’s plan, when employees leave the district, they are covered for the month they worked (whether they worked one or 31 days that month); however, the following month they will be responsible for their own coverage, either through COBRA (102 percent of premium) or retiree insurance coverage (100 percent of premium). Example: If the employee’s last day worked is May 27, coverage as an active employee will continue through the end of May. If the employee works until June 1, due to snow days, coverage will continue through June.

Wyoming Retirement System seminar

There will be a Wyoming Retirement System seminar, Retirement Strategies, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Thursday, March 24, at CSF.

Wellness premium discount program 2012

Employees hired after Oct. 1, 2010, but prior to August 2011, are still eligible to participate in the state of Wyoming’s Wellness Program to receive a wellness premium discount (\$480) for 2012. All requirements must be completed by Sept. 30, 2011. Please request detailed information from the district’s Benefits Office, or you may access this information on the state’s website, www.personnel.state.wy.us/egi. Under Wellness, select “2012 Wellness Discount Brochure.”

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Schools will receive vouchers to give to students in recognition of their achievements. Students can be nominated for exemplifying any of the district's five goals (Literate Students; Excelling Schools; Prepared Graduates; Safe, Healthy People; and Efficient, Effective Operations). Schools will be able to distribute the vouchers to nominated students as they choose.

Vouchers will be good for two free tickets to any 2011 Casper Ghosts home baseball game, where students will be recognized on the field, have the opportunity to meet players, and participate in other literacy activities sponsored by the NCSD Library and Technology Resource Center (LTRC).

The program is paid for by community sponsorships and matching funds from the Casper Ghosts. Administrative support is provided by NCSD Community Partnerships. Look for more details at your school in conjunction with the April 1 launch date.

Stuff The Bus

Stuff The Bus is a community-wide school supply drive launching June 1. In the past, several community organization or businesses have hosted small supply drives. By linking all community efforts together, Stuff The Bus is designed to maximize community giving and establish a mechanism for getting the supplies to the students who need them.

Look for more information in the coming weeks about how you can help and how you can get supplies for a student in need this fall. To provide financial support now, visit www.casperedfoundation.org.

We Read

We Read is a partnership between the Casper Star-Tribune and the Natrona County School District. Through We Read, all NCSD students in kindergarten through third grade will receive a free book each month. Their families also will receive a free subscription to the Casper Star-Tribune. Family

activities based on the book will be printed weekly in the newspaper.

The goal of the program is to increase students' access to books and to encourage families to read together — both key components of building literacy in young children.

The program launches April 1, with the first books being distributed to students in early April. Students will receive a book in early May, then three books in late May to cover the summer months.



Casper Area Education Foundation

The Casper Area Education Foundation — a key partner on all of these projects — is the newly re-branded nonprofit partner of the Natrona County School District. The foundation, which was established in 1973 as the Education Foundation of Natrona, exists as an avenue for fundraising and investing of community resources to support Natrona County students.

The foundation recently adopted three funding priorities — Student Support, School Enrichment, and Scholarships — and is working on specific projects under each priority. For example, the foundation has long been an investor of memorial trusts that provide student scholarships. Today, the foundation also holds accounts to support Totes of Hope, Stuff the Bus, efforts to serve homeless students, capital construction projects, and enrichment opportunities, such as scholarships for students to attend camps.

To learn more about the foundation or to get involved, visit www.casperedfoundation.org. You also can follow the foundation's programs on Facebook, Twitter and Jumo.

If you have questions about any of these programs, please call Jenni Luckett in NCSD Community Partnerships at (307) 253-5380.

Meet your Community Partnerships team

Meet the members of the Community Partnerships Department, which falls under the Superintendent Division, and includes staff from the Superintendent's Office, Community Relations, Discover and MultiMedia Services. The members of this team have been servicing your communication needs over the last several years, though it remains one of the only central administration departments to not grow in number; in fact, it has decreased in size over the past couple of years.

Superintendent's Office

- ◆ Dr. Joel Dvorak, superintendent. Favorite fiction book: the Harry Potter series
- ◆ Michelle Wallace-Frank, executive assistant. Assists superintendent and Board of Trustees. Favorite fiction book: "Where the Sidewalk Ends," by Shel Silverstein

Community Relations

- ◆ Kelly Eastes, chief public relations officer. Favorite fictional character: Winnie the Pooh. Favorite fictional book: "Star Maker," by Olaf Stapledon
- ◆ Jennifer Cousineau, communications specialist. Tells the district's stories through words and design. Also plans events such as Back to School Bash. Favorite fictional character: Nancy Drew
- ◆ Jenni Luckett, communications specialist. Communicates the messages of the district through



Members of the Community Partnerships Division are: Back row, left to right: Lori Burns, Geoellen Stretesky, Mary Baldwin, Carl Laiche, Kelly Eastes, Mike Rodell. Front row, left to right: Judy O'Brien, Jenni Luckett, Chrystle Booth, Michelle Wallace-Frank, Jennifer Cousineau. Not pictured: Joel Dvorak and Stephanie McBeath-VanDamme.

print and digital media; builds community partnerships. Favorite fictional book: "A Ring of Endless Light," by Madeleine L'Engle

Discover

◆ Lori Burns, program facilitator. Coordinates the Discover Program and special events, including enrichment activities for students, guest speakers, the Back to School Bash and Stuff the Bus campaign. Favorite fictional book: "Grandfather Twilight," by Barbara Berger

MultiMedia Services

◆ Mike Rodell, manager. Oversees MMS and performs pre-press operations. Also serves as liaison for copiers between vendor and schools. Favorite fictional character: Tim "the Toolman" Taylor

- ◆ Mary Baldwin, interschool mail delivery. Favorite fictional book: "To Kill A Mockingbird"
- ◆ Chrystle Booth, accounts receivable/payable, estimates and typesetting. Favorite fictional character: Karana from "Island of the Blue Dolphins," by Scott O'Dell
- ◆ Carl Laiche, pressman. Favorite fictional author: Clive Cussler
- ◆ Stephanie McBeath-VanDamme, multimedia technician (U.S. mail). Favorite fictional book: "The Thorn Birds" (also likes 1999 version of Titanic)
- ◆ Judy O'Brien, copier key operator
- ◆ Geoellen Stretesky, duplicates CDs/DVDs, prints posters, provides audiovisual equipment loans, laminates. Favorite fictional book: "The Notebook," by Nicholas Sparks

LAST WORKS OF WELSH ON SALE IN APRIL

The Casper Artists' Guild will offer a limited-time sale of the last works of John F. Welsh. Proceeds of the sale will go into the John F. Welsh Memorial Fund, which will support the arts in Casper and Natrona County.

The sale will be open through the month of April, with works on display from April 3-29 at the West Wind Gallery. The sale kicks off from 2 to 5 p.m. Sunday, April 3, with a reception and advance sale at The West Wind Gallery. Admission will be \$25 and will include the opportunity to purchase the works, as well as a silent auction of paintings.

Welsh died in April 2010 after three decades teaching drama at Natrona County High School. He was a well-known fixture of the Casper drama and music scene, as well as a respected painter.



This John Welsh painting, along with several others, will be available for sale in the month of April.



The Science Depot recently moved to accommodate the more than 1,400 boxes that need stored and refurbished each semester.

EDUCATORS: YOU'RE INVITED TO SCIENCE DEPOT OPEN HOUSE

See how Jessica Cousineau, program specialist, fits more than 600 science kits into the old Fairdale gym (next to Star Lane Center, 1400 S. Fairdale) at the Science Depot open house from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday, April 14. Come enjoy refreshments, see the remodeled facility, meet Cousineau and talk with her about the current process of receiving and returning kits and give suggestions on how to improve customer service.

In the meantime, if you have questions about the depot's offerings, contact Cousineau via FirstClass e-mail or at the Depot's new phone number, 253-3149. The new fax number is 253-3148.

Note: Please do not send any kit materials to Fairgrounds Center.