

NCS D

News Zone



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NCS D WILL GO GREEN

By Jennifer Cousineau

Natrona County collects about 20 tons of paper each year, which, contrary to what you may think, is not that much compared to the amount of paper we use — and throw away. According to www.earth911.com, every ton of paper recycled saves more than 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space. Now that is a lot of paper!

It shouldn't come as much of a surprise that as a school district, our biggest recycling contribution would be paper. So, that is the focus, at this time, as the Community Partnerships Division works to put in place a districtwide, cohesive recycling program. (Plastic bottles also are a priority.) While most schools currently have their own recycling efforts, graciously conducted by volunteers and/or school groups, the city of Casper has expressed the desire that every school and office recycle the same products, the same ways. Principals have been asked to delegate one person from their schools to meet with Community Relations to help determine their respective school's needs. Community Relations' hope is to have the districtwide effort in place to kick off the new school year this fall.

If you are interested in helping or have questions about what can/cannot be recycled, contact Jennifer Cousineau at 253-5382 or via FirstClass e-mail.



April 22, is Earth Day. Do your part to preserve our environment: reduce, reuse, recycle!



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CELEBRATE, SEEK EXCELLENCE



This month, we celebrate the 2011 Academic Awards Banquet.

As in years past, the top 10 percent of graduating seniors at each of our high schools will be recognized for their outstanding academic achievement. In turn, those same students will have the opportunity to recognize the amazing, inspiring teachers who

helped them succeed along the way.

The banquet will honor students who achieve top grades, along with their teachers. But that's only one slice of the excellence — and opportunity for excellence — in our schools and community.

We have excellent teachers who provide rigorous, relevant and caring instruction to our young people, inspire them to learn and grow, and incite them to create and dream for the future.

And, we have a myriad of other people who support those same children in every step of their journey: Bus drivers and custodians who offer friendly greetings and make children feel nurtured; secretaries who deliver lost lunches and connect with parents; tutors, counselors and others who provide guidance and support targeted to each child's needs.

Most importantly, we have students who strive to be their best.

Some do so in the classroom, making top marks on tests and assignments. Some do so in career and technical education, starting early on promising careers. Some are musicians and artists. Some are simply the most caring people you will ever meet.

Particularly at this season, as we get ready to close the book on another academic year, we celebrate excellence in all its forms.

And, I hope that we take this time to look for ways that we can exhibit excellence — in our work, our relationships, or our service to one another.

Goal 4 Team, DTF promote respectful district environment

Submitted by Goal 4 Team

As part of the strategy to establish a model for bullying and alcohol/drug prevention in schools, discussion and direction continues in Goal 4 Team meetings. Diversity Task Force members, who are working to promote respect and tolerance district- and community-wide, report on their progress in these meetings.

The goal team has identified five areas of focus:

* **Policy** — Student Bullying Policy 5440 became effective Dec. 31, 2009. Human Resources and Student Support Services have conducted numerous investigations into complaints of bullying. NCSD takes appropriate action when allegations are substantiated. The book, "No More Bullying," by Andre A. Lewis, explains the policy in a child-friendly manner and was provided to students free of charge.

* **Curriculum** — With funding from the Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SSHS) grant, curricula have been adopted in schools and additional elementary counselors have been hired. There also are additional, grade-appropriate programs in place. During No Name Calling Week (Jan. 24-28), the Diversity Task Force provided lesson plans, videos, activities, and other national resources for teachers to share with their students. Some teachers posted commitments signed by students, vowing that they would not call others names.

* **Data** — Several surveys have been — and will continue to be — conducted to gauge student and staff health and safety, and will help the district quantitatively assess its progress and areas where more work is needed.

* **Communication** — Bullying and disrespecting others are a much larger issue than the school district alone can tackle. Therefore, NCSD has partnered with agencies such as the Casper Police Department, District Attorney's Office, Mercer House and Central Wyoming Counseling Center to involve the community in doing its part to promote respect.

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EVALUATION TOOL WORK BEING DONE

Submitted by Crystal Mueller

During the 2010–11 school year, 53 classroom teachers at 24 schools participated in the initial implementation of the new classroom teacher evaluation tool and process. Trainings were provided to all potential volunteers prior to the teachers agreeing to participate. Feedback was collected from principals and volunteer classroom teachers along the way. The tools and process are the result of the year-long initial implementation. The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) will review NCSD's classroom teacher evaluation tool by June 12, 2011.

There are six standards to the evaluation model:

* **Collaborative leadership** — The teacher establishes and maintains leadership through collaborative relationships with students, parents and colleagues

* **Facilitating learning** — The teacher guides learning through a partnership with students to ensure continuous improvement for student learning

* **Reflective practice on the learning process** — The teacher focuses on student needs, best practices and available resources to improve student learning that is aligned to state/district standards

* **Classroom culture and environment** — The teacher establishes a collaborative classroom culture and environment

* **Student data analysis** — The teacher uses assessment data to improve individual student and class performance

See EVALUATIONS, page 6



Non-classroom teacher evaluation work session took place in early this month. Director and principal evaluation work sessions will be conducted the end of this month.

RESPECT,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The Diversity Task Force offers programs and emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting differences. The task force also brings in guest speakers and presenters to talk to the community about the importance of respecting differences. Finally, a new diversity brochure is in the works and will be distributed to students.

* **Professional development** — Certified staff members have received training in the district's bullying prevention and diversity awareness curricula. Additional training is provided through the SSHS office. The Diversity Task Force has provided training to administrators regarding cultural proficiency.

DTF seeking members

The Diversity Task Force is growing to include community members, and welcomes all district members to join, too. If you are interested, or if you would like to sign a resolution of respect, pledging to accept people and embrace differences, contact Kathi Hawley via FirstClass e-mail or 253-5231. You also may contact Dr. Crystal Mueller via e-mail.

The task force meets from 4 to 6 p.m. the third Thursday of every month.



UNDERSTAND HOW INSURANCE COVERAGE WORKS WITH LEAVE TYPES

The state of Wyoming insurance benefit is offered to employees who work at least 80 hours per calendar month. Employees who are enrolled in health, dental and/or life coverage receive the state contribution toward those benefits for each month that they are paid for (i.e. worked) 80 calendar hours or more. (Premiums deducted from the current payroll pay the next month's premium.) Therefore, obtaining 80 hours make an employee eligible for the state contribution; however, you must also have worked at least the first work day into the next month to be eligible to pay for that next month. Eligible school district employees will be covered according to their work agreement.

An eligible school district employee will be covered continuously until which time the employee is off work and is not receiving paid benefit time (i.e. annual leave, professional development leave, sick leave, etc.), the employee leaves the district or the employee chooses to discontinue coverage. Benefited employees working less than 260 days and who receive approved district breaks (summer, November-December-January, spring break and holidays), are considered to be in compliance with state eligibility requirements. Once an employee is out on leave and falls below the required 80 hours per calendar month, the following policies apply:

FMLA leave (paid or non-paid time, 12 weeks of protection)

When an employee is out due to Family and Medical Leave Act eligibility, the employee will pay premiums according to their insurance enrollment and the district will contribute its portion as if the employee were actively working. NCSD will require payment by check for the employee's portion

of the insurance premium if the employee is taking unpaid leave. If the employee does not return to work after the FMLA leave time, the employee will be responsible for reimbursing the district 100 percent of the district's premium contribution during the employee's leave. Also, upon exhaustion of FMLA, depending on the employee's eligibility status, the employee will be offered COBRA insurance and/or retiree insurance (if eligible).

Example: Employee was on FMLA in June. He used an FMLA day July 1. Therefore he is protected and received the state contribution toward July coverage.

Worker's comp leave (paid time, six months of protection)

When an employee is out due to worker's compensation, for the first two months, from the date of the original injury, the employee will pay insurance premiums according to their enrollment, and the district will contribute its portion as if the employee were actively working. The district will be responsible for 100 percent of the employee's premium (with the exception of the voluntary benefits and dependent life insurance) during the next four months. If the employee does not return to work, depending on the employee's eligibility status, the employee will be offered COBRA insurance and/or retiree insurance (if eligible).

Example: Employee is injured on Jan. 7 of the current year. January's payment for February's premium is counted as month No. 1. June's payment for July's coverage counts as month No. 6. If the employee is not back to working 80 hours in July to pay for August's premium, then she must pay it at 100 percent. If she is not back to work in August to pay for September's premium, she will be

offered COBRA for coverage in September and beyond.

Unpaid leave

If an employee does not have enough sick leave time (personal leave, sick bank or borrowed time) to meet the required 80 hours per month to be eligible for insurance benefits, the employee will be responsible for paying 100 percent of the insurance premiums due for that next month. If the employee has a second consecutive month of unpaid leave, the employee will then be offered COBRA for the next month, up to a maximum of 18 months. If the employee terminates employment and is eligible, the employee may be offered retiree insurance.

If employment does not end and the employee is able to work the required 80 hours in a calendar month, they can re-enroll in the insurance plan to be covered as an actively working employee.

Example: In October, employee is not at work and does not have paid time or has returned to work and worked less than 80 hours so far that month. He will be responsible for paying 100 percent of the premium due for November. In November, he still does not have 80 hours worked and will be offered COBRA for December coverage. The employee returns to work in December and works at least 80 hours. He will now have to re-enroll for insurance coverage as an insurance eligible employee, with coverage becoming effective Jan. 1.

Please contact Arlene Steward (307-253-5208) or Victoria Nolte (307-253-5207) the district's Insurance Benefit Office if you have questions.

Information provided by the state of Wyoming Employee Group Insurance Office

DISTRICT WEBSITE A FINALIST FOR DESIGN AWARD

The Natrona County School District's website has qualified as a finalist for the SchoolE Award. Finalists are based on the number of nominations received in their respective categories, which are based on student enrollment. The award is the most significant award for school district websites, not just in terms of the quality of the site, but to recognize districts where all district members, students and community members decide which districts are selected.

To vote, visit www.natronaschools.org and click on the following graphic on the middle-right side of the page:



GET READY FOR BOOK DISCARD

The district's book discard is just around the corner. Books will be picked up in the schools May 31 through June 3. Please remember to have them in boxes weighing no more than 50 pounds. Please place the boxes in a central location, easily accessible for the crews to pick up.

Call Kerri Hawthorne at 253-5238 with questions. More information will be forthcoming.

PV CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Join the celebration of Paradise Valley Elementary School's 50th anniversary on May 18.

An all-school assembly will begin at 2:30 p.m. Guest speakers will include a former principal, teacher and student. A time capsule from 1980 will be opened and a new time capsule, developed by current students, will be put in its place. An open house will follow from 3 to 6 p.m. Reconnect with old friends in the celebration of this milestone of education in Casper!

For more information, contact Donna Shepherd at 253-1200.

CHINESE IMMERSION CAMP AVAILABLE FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Students currently enrolled in a Natrona County School District kindergarten through fourth-grade class are invited to apply for STARTALK, a Chinese language and culture immersion program. Brochures describing the location, dates and times will be sent home with students this week. Parents can register by visiting www.natronaschools.org or calling 253-5238 from April 25 through May 6. Participants will be chosen through a random lottery; those admitted will be contacted by phone.

IC ENHANCEMENTS COMING IN FALL

By Mary Holt

Infinite Campus (IC) has announced enhancements to the instructional area of the program. This includes new assignments and daily planner and grade book improvements. These enhancements will not go into effect until mid-July.

IC is offering opportunities for districts and teachers to learn about the changes now.

Free online demonstrations are available at www.infinitecampus.com/demo. Anyone can sign up for these sessions. Or, you can visit the following URL to see a pre-recorded session, which lasts approximately one hour: <https://infinitecampus.webex.com/infinitecampus/ldr.php?AT=pb&SP=MC&rID=20408872&rKey=c9cf1fc1baef287b>

Free training sessions also are

available online through Infinite Campus University. We have reserved a conference room with a speaker phone so that more teachers can attend, along with the IC U Need Help staff. Upcoming sessions are:

* Friday, May 6 from 9 to 11 a.m. in the East Room at CSF

* Thursday, May 12 from 3 to 5 p.m. in the Westwood Room at CSF

If you would like to attend one of these sessions, please call the IC U Need Help line at 253-5306 to sign up. Each session will be limited to 20 people, in an effort to reduce noise and distractions. These sessions are on your own time; subs will not be paid for.

Our "staging" database also will be

updated soon for teachers who want to go in and "play" with the changes. If you would like more information on how to access the staging site, contact the IC U Need Help line.

All teachers will need training on these changes before they can begin setting up their grade books in the fall. Plans are in place to develop online, self-paced training.

The enhancements to the live database will be available mid-July.



EVALUATIONS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

* **Professional responsibilities** — There are four tracks: directed growth, guided growth, independent growth and collaborative growth. Directed growth is for the initial contract track. The other three tracks are for continuing contract classroom teachers.

Five designations appear on the rubric: "needs improvement," "developing," "proficient," "accomplished" and "distinguished." If an employee is designated as "needs improvement" in one goal area or has a "no" on the Standard 6 Professional Responsibility, the employee will be placed on an Employee Needs Improvement Plan. An employee needs to be designated as "developing" for two years before moving to "needs improvement." On

the other end of the spectrum, after being labeled "accomplished" for two years, an employee can move to the "distinguished" designation, in which there are four levels: "commendable," "excelling," "master" and "exemplary."

An additional group is working on a non-classroom evaluation tool. The initial implementation period will begin in the fall of 2011. The principal evaluation tool has been developed and will be submitted to WDE next month. In the spring of 2012, NCSd will begin work on a classified evaluation tool and a director evaluation tool.

If you have questions about the certified evaluation tool, contact Dr. Crystal Mueller, associate superintendent of Human Resources (HR). Questions about the administrator evaluation tool can be directed to Kelly Hornby, executive director of HR.

DISTRICT LOOKS AHEAD TO BALANCED BUDGET

By Jenni Luckett

The Natrona County School District is looking at a balanced budget for 2011-12. Though the final budget won't be approved until July, the Board Budget Development Committee earlier this month gave overall approval of a conceptual budget plan. That plan will provide for employee compensation, a few pilot programs and staffing increases; planning for the future; and a budget reserve.

"I cannot tell you how lucky we are to live in Wyoming," said Superintendent Joel Dvorak. "We're talking about balancing a budget. In Colorado, there's an 8 percent cut in education across the board. Nowhere around us is as lucky as us."

The following are some highlights of the conceptual budget plan:

Employee compensation

* Employees would receive their "step" increases for education and experience on all salary schedules.

* Insurance-eligible employees would receive a \$600 "insurance assistance payment," funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's Education Jobs Fund, to offset increases they may have seen when the district moved to the state's Employee Group Insurance program. Partially-benefited employees would get a \$300 payment. The payment is tentatively scheduled for October 2011, and specific eligibility details — such as dates of employment — will be determined to meet requirements of the federal grant.

Staffing

* Due to changes in enrollment, as well as the move of sixth grade to middle schools and ninth grade to high schools, the district would add 4.5 full-time teaching positions.

* There would be a one-year-only extension of funding to staff Refocus Rooms at elementary schools. These positions were set to expire at the end of grant funding this year, but the Education Jobs Fund will allow the positions to continue one more year.

* The district would launch a pilot program to put

art, music and PE teachers in four elementary schools full time. These teachers, who currently split their time among multiple locations, would be assigned to one school only to provide specials and would be trained to serve as tutors during the rest of the workday. Several proposals were on the table to place specials teachers in schools full time, but this was the only one that was deemed affordable in the current year. Officials hope the move would increase collaboration time for teachers and scheduling flexibility at mid-size elementary schools.

* The budget also would include a tutor mentor position to help the art, music and PE teachers become highly-skilled tutors.

High school planning

* Three years worth of funding would be set aside for curriculum planning for the Center for Advanced and Professional Studies (CAPS), which is slated to open with four academies in 2014. The funding would pay for a "champion" to oversee curriculum development of all four academies, as well as educators to work on developing the programming in each academy.

* The budget also would set aside almost \$1.9 million for lease purchases of educational upgrades that may be identified through the design of the new high school campus, remodels of Kelly Walsh and Natrona County high schools and several elementary school re-builds.

Fiscal responsibilities

* The budget also sets aside \$125,000 for supplemental education services as required by law. These are usually released back into the general fund if they go unused.

* It provides an allocation for run-out of the former NCSd insurance program (all claims against the old insurance program must have been for services provided before Oct. 1, 2010, and must be filed by Sept. 30, 2011).

* It also adds \$500,000 to the district's budget reserve, making the emergency fund about 4.1 percent of the general fund (the district has been working incrementally toward a 5 percent reserve).

MEET YOUR IT REPAIR TECHS

Five gentlemen are responsible for the repairs of the district's technology, including 11,000 computers, 400-plus fax machines and copiers (those without Xerox maintenance contracts), office calculators, laminators and yes, even typewriters.

"If it's technology, we can fix it," Jake Greenup, computer repair tech, said. "And there's only two of us with hair left!"

Although you now know the names behind the faces of our IT repair techs, please note that **you must still use SchoolDude work request system!** Work requests must be submitted in order for any repair

work to be done!

To fill out the electronic form, go to www.natronaschools.org. Go to Departments>Facilities & Technology>Information Technology. At the very bottom of the page, you'll see a link for "SchoolDude Work Requests." Remember, the password is "he1pme" (minus the quotes).

Below, meet the repair techs who fix 'anything you can plug in.' From left to right Jake Greenup (computer repair technician), Wayne Harris (computer repair technician), Stark Wilson (A/V repair technician), Irv Corkill (senior computer repair technician) and Doug Slotsve (IT support manager).



RETIREES, 25-YEAR EMPLOYEES HONORED

The Retirement & Longevity Celebration will be held May 17, at the Best Western Ramkota. It is a pleasure to honor these outstanding individuals for their dedication to the district and for their years of service. The event will begin at 5

p.m. with a cash bar, dinner will start at 5:30 p.m., and the program will begin at 6 p.m.

Tickets are by reservation only. Retirees and 25-year employees will be allowed four free tickets, one for themselves and three for guests of

their choice. Additional tickets can be purchased for \$25 until May 6. Please keep in mind that seating is limited.

Contact Kathi Hawley in Human Resources at 253-5231 or Kathi_Hawley@natronaschools.org, with questions and concerns or to purchase a ticket.

