

# NCS D News Zone



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## DISTRICT HONORS MEDALLION WINNERS

By Jenni Luckett

Teachers and coaches. Office managers and custodians. Psychologists and athletic facilitators.

Earlier this month, 45 members of the Natrona County School District team were honored with Medallion of Excellence awards. Awards were given to 15 individuals and four teams.

The Medallion of Excellence program honors NCS D employees who are nominated by their peers for their exemplary service to students and the district. Each nomination requires an essay, as well as two letters of support. Winners are selected for their work in support of one of the district's five strategic goals.

This year's winners are:

### Goal 1: Literate Students

◆ The University Park Elementary School K-3 teaching team, including Kolleen Buckallew, Amy Bundy, Evony Charest, Jennifer Conley, Chimene Czellecz, Talea Doner, Diane Dressen, Laurie Gierke, Susan Handley, Cathie Hedlund, Allison Keller, Carol Leech, Brandy Martinez, Peggy Owens, Lori Palmer, Rita Pekuri, Susie Sowers and Schlee Weis



*The Natrona County School District celebrated winners of the annual Medallion of Excellence awards, along with excelling schools recognized through the district data review, on Feb. 15 at the Casper Events Center.*

### Goal 2: Excelling Schools

◆ Chris Henriksen, Willard Elementary School math teacher and coach  
◆ Annette Pace, Fort Caspar Academy sixth-grade teacher

*See MEDALLION, page 5*

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# SHARING THE GOOD NEWS IN NCSD

More students in the Natrona County School District are finding success and becoming champions!

That's the message I shared earlier this month with the NCSD Board of Trustees, and it's a message I hope you will share with your friends and neighbors when talking about our school district.



*"... it's important to take the time to celebrate the achievements along the way. And we have achieved. So pat yourselves on the back for your good work and help share some good news."*

Bad news travels fast, and it seems that good news doesn't travel much at all. But there is good news here in NCSD, and we need to celebrate it, build on it, and keep making more.

Here is some of the good news:

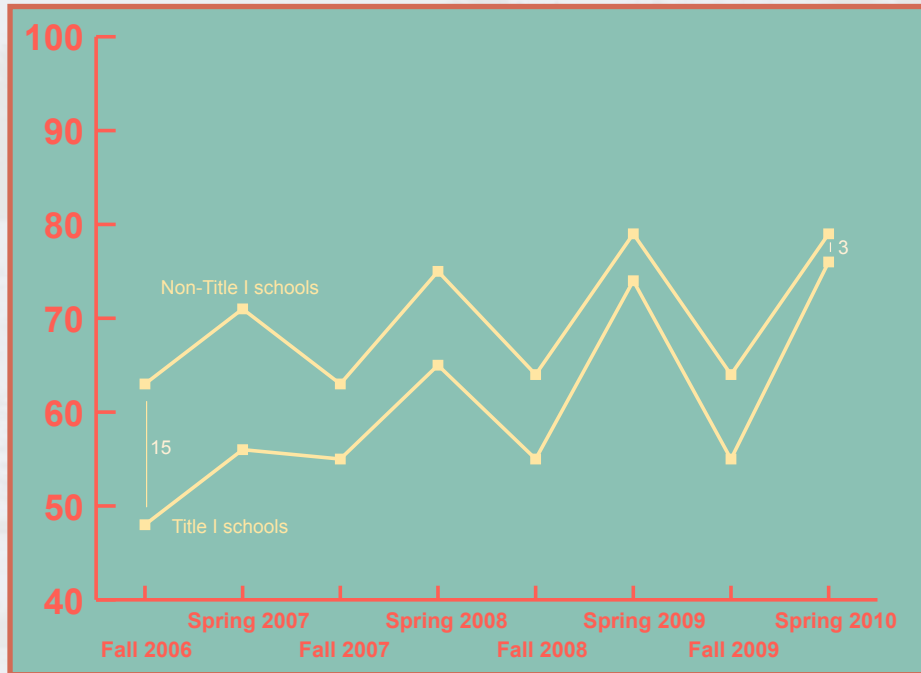
◆ More NCSD students are reading at grade level. Our percentage of students who are reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade has gone from 63 percent in 2007 up to 77 percent in 2010. Growth is happening at most grade levels, but we watch third grade closely, because research shows that students who are behind in third grade are more likely to struggle all

the way through school and ultimately more likely to drop out of high school. Our goal is to have 100 percent of students on target by the end of third grade, and I'd say a 14-point climb in four years is a great start.

◆ We're closing the gap between our richest and poorest students' performance. Research is very clear that children in poverty are more likely to struggle in school. In the fall of 2006, our third-grade reading level at high-poverty schools was about 15 points below the rest of our schools. Last spring, the gap was 3 points. Closing that gap is an amazing achievement that means more of our kids have the opportunity to learn and excel.

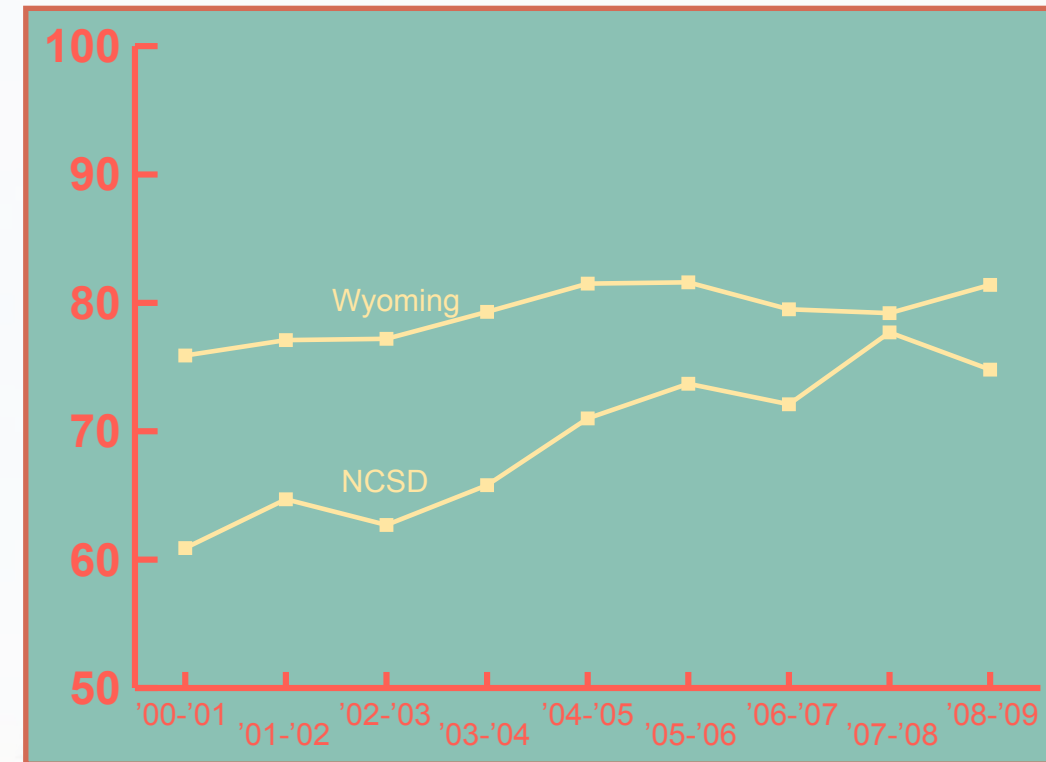
◆ Our district's graduation rate has been on a generally uphill trend in the past decade, and we're closing the gap between NCSD and the state average. In 2001, our graduation rate was about 15 points below the state average. In 2009, we were down by about 6 points. Our number of dropouts in any given year (at all grade levels) is down, too, from 433 in 2001 all the way to 226 in 2009. Graduation and dropout rates are notoriously complex statistics, and we expect some discrepancies as the state changes how such things are calculated and reported, but the bottom line is the same: More of our kids are staying in school and getting diplomas.

*See DVORAK, page 3*



NCSD is closing the gap between Title I and non-Title I schools in terms of third-grade reading, as measured on the NWEA tests. This means that our poorest schools are making tremendous gains in their reading skills.

## DVORAK, continued from page 2



NCSD's graduation rate has been on an upward trend for about a decade and is closing the gap with the state average. Changes in the way graduation rates are calculated challenge measuring this data, but the results are generally positive.

◆ Our students self-report that they are generally engaged in school and thriving. On a recent survey of NCSD fifth- through 12th-graders conducted by the Gallup Organization, 63 percent of our students were considered "thriving" on a measure of wellbeing; 54 percent were deemed "hopeful," and 62 percent were considered "engaged."

◆ In cooperation with the Wyoming School Facilities Commission, we recently selected architects to launch our work to build a new high school campus and remodel Kelly Walsh and Natrona County high schools. This will be the largest capital construction project our community has seen in more than a decade and will pump millions of dollars into the local architecture, design and construction industries.

Now, I don't think that any of that is "good enough," and you certainly won't see our district resting on our laurels any time soon. We want every student to read at or above grade level by the end of third grade — and to stay on course throughout their academic careers,

graduating from high school prepared for college or a high-skills career. We want every student to be engaged, healthy and safe. We want every student to have access to inspiring, educational facilities. We want our community to be a place where all families, businesses and community members support formal and informal education and enrichment for young people. And, we want all of that to translate into top scores on our statewide assessment tests.

We know there is more work to do. That's why the Natrona County School District is committed to a process of systemic continuous improvement, where we are constantly looking at data, re-evaluating our work, and striving to improve.

But in our efforts to improve, it's important to take the time to celebrate the achievements along the way. And we have achieved. So pat yourselves on the back for your good work and help share some good news.

## NCS D high school projects will benefit community

By Jenni Luckett

The Natrona County School District, in partnership with the Wyoming School Facilities Commission, is starting design work to remodel Kelly Walsh and Natrona County high schools and to build a new high school campus that will house Roosevelt High School, Transitions Learning Center and the new Center for Advanced and Professional Studies (CAPS) program.

The design and construction work is poised to be the biggest capital construction project Natrona County has seen in more than a decade, pumping millions of dollars into the local architecture, engineering and construction industries.

Representatives from the three schools, along with the NCS D Board of Trustees, joined members of the WSFC in the state-governed architect and construction-manager-at-risk selection process earlier this year. This month, the top-choice lead firms for the projects were announced, and contracts are pending through the WSFC.

At Kelly Walsh High School, RB+B Architects out of Colorado will be the lead architect, with Sampson Construction, a Nebraska firm with Wyoming offices, acting as the construction manager at risk. At Natrona County High School, Bassetti Architects of Washington state will be the lead architect, with Adolfson & Peterson, a Wyoming firm, serving as construction manager at risk. And, the new high school campus will be designed by the Cuningham Group of Minnesota in partnership with MOA, a Denver firm with offices in Casper.

Each of these primary firms will partner with other designers and engineers to complete the plans for the projects. Already, six Casper companies and one Cheyenne company have been identified to provide professional architecture and engineering support for the projects.

“It’s going to be a boom for local companies and workers,” said Superintendent Joel Dvorak. “We are spending millions of dollars on construction projects when the industry most needs work.”

The district followed the state’s competitive bid process, and the ultimate decision and contracts were in the control of the WSFC, he said.

“We have a responsibility to follow state rules and regulations and to be responsible stewards of public money,” said Dr. Audrey Cotherman, NCS D Board Chairwoman. “All of our construction projects adhere to a state-regulated, fair, competitive bid process that ensures these dollars are spent efficiently and appropriately.”

Ultimately, he said, millions of dollars will be spent on local industry, and past projects bear out that projection.

CY middle School, for example, cost \$31.9 million to build. Of that, \$24.9 million went to Wyoming contractors, most based in Casper. Construction of Summit Elementary School cost about \$14.6 million, with about \$6.9 million spent on local contractors. And, in the past five years, all of the district’s \$24 million in major maintenance projects have been overseen by Caspar-Pope, a Casper company.

Contracts with the primary architecture and construction manager at risk firms are being negotiated through the WSFC, and design charettes are expected to begin on the projects in early April. These charettes will be an opportunity to integrate the program planning work that is currently ongoing with community input.

In other facilities news, asbestos abatement is being conducted in the old Southridge building in preparation for demolition, which expected to begin in April. Jason Gutierrez, NCS D facilities planning and construction manager, said that 35 percent of the new school’s design is complete, and district staff members are working with the WSFC for the next round of drawings.

The district also is reviewing its process of identifying priorities and funding potential enhancements — building features that aren’t covered by the WSFC funding program — at all new schools. During a recent board retreat, NCS D trustees identified pools as a top priority for renovation at the existing high schools. They also said they were interested in exploring funding for the Eastside Athletic Complex, a visual/performing arts center, historical preservation of NCHS, and technology upgrades for all schools.

## MEDALLION, continued from page 1

- ◆ Nicole Rapp, Fort Caspar Academy third-grade teacher
- ◆ Eric Reish, Dean Morgan Junior High School math teacher
- ◆ Mari Stoll, Cottonwood Elementary School principal

### Goal 3: Prepared Graduates

- ◆ Dr. Dean Braughton, CY Middle School principal
- ◆ Mark Cimburek, Dean Morgan Junior High School social studies teacher and coach
- ◆ MaryBeth Peden, Natrona County High School instructional facilitator
- ◆ Schlee Weis, University Park Elementary School resource room teacher
- ◆ Shawn Weis, Natrona County High School music teacher and band director
- ◆ Natrona County High School JROTC teachers Pete Schmotzer and Mack Riggs

### Goal 4: Safe, Healthy People

- ◆ Erik Holden, elementary P.E. teacher at Evansville and Summit elementary schools
- ◆ Terry Hooker, Dean Morgan Junior High School athletic/activities facilitator
- ◆ CY Middle School custodial team, including Michael Feyhl, Larry Higgins, Bobbie Hill, Helen Kuhl, Dixie Meadows and Anita Ross
- ◆ Summit Teaching Leadership Team, including DeLaine Britt, John Foy, Karen Higginson and Wayne Tuttle

### Goal 5: Efficient, Effective Operations

- ◆ Debbie Bovie, CY Middle School office manager
- ◆ Vernita Marton, office manager at Alcova, Red Creek and Powder River elementary schools, and librarian at Alcova Elementary School
- ◆ Carla Schumacher, Natrona County High School educational psychologist

All awards recipients were recognized in a ceremony Feb. 15, where they received engraved bronze medallions and portraits.

## CELEBRATED STUDENTS HONOR TEACHERS

By Jennifer Cousineau

Being in the top 10 percent of anything is an outstanding accomplishment. Being in the top 10 percent of your graduating class is priceless and an honor that 75 NCS D students are eligible for as we celebrate this year’s Academic Awards Banquet honorees.

For the last 13 years, the banquet has recognized the top 10 percent of each high school’s graduating seniors (based on class rank at the end of the first semester of their senior year) and one educator each from the elementary, middle and high school level who they deem as having had a significant impact on their educational career. At a banquet dinner (this year, Sunday, April 17), each student walks with one of their nominated educators to accept an award and gift, presented by Superintendent Joel Dvorak and members of the Academic Awards Banquet Committee.

Eligible students have been identified by the four high schools, and the students have until March 1 to submit their significant educator and biographical information. Educator names will be publicized after all student data has been turned in. In the meantime, peruse over the names of this year’s honored students. Perhaps you know some of them. Perhaps you inspired some of them to achieve greatness.

### Kelly Walsh High School

Kaitlyn Bertoglio	Alexandra Gobble
Matthew Binder	Madison Graham
Katelyn Birkett	Tara Hensley
Briana Black	Carly Hooker
Spencer Bradley	Jayne Jacobs
Kevin Buffington	Carly Kadlick
Jentry Campbell	Halea McAteer
Allison Cetak	Casidy Mittelstadt
Megan Chambers	Warren Morton
Lyla Coto	Emma Narotzky
Vikki Doherty	Taylor Padilla
Paige Dvorak	Julia Popish
Bethany Elliott	Kathryn Smith
Teresa Fuller	Bridget Weiner
Sky Gabel	Hannah Wille
Jordan Giese	Logan Wren

See AAB, page 8

# MEET YOUR IT SUPPORT TECHS

By Jennifer Cousineau

Last month, you met the CSF IT team staff members who digitally touch our lives every day. There is another group of computer gurus who often save the day and deserve an introduction.

Listed below are your IT support technicians, whose main job is to support the district's hardware, software and the buildings they serve. Please note that although each IT support tech is assigned to a specific location(s), it still is necessary to submit work requests via the SchoolDude work request system, no matter the issue. SchoolDude is a tool repair staff use to comply with Goal 5: Efficient, Effective Operations. If you have an emergency, you can call the help desk (253-5215) during normal school hours, though you still will be required to complete a work request.

- ◆ Chris Campbell — KWHS
- ◆ Rick Embury — Special Education Service Center, Assistive Technologies, Wyoming Behavioral Institute
- ◆ Mary Gangl — Evansville, Manor Heights, Verda



*Meet the people we can count on to help with our computer problems. From left to right, back row: Chris Campbell, Jeremy Sherin, Eric Tewes, Chris Patterson, John Turner, Rick Embury, Doug Slotsve. Middle row: Katherine Jimenez, Guido Roth, Karma Glause, Kathy Reynolds, Lynda Paulson, Kip Marchant, Justin Lane. Front row: Jade McKenzie, Mary Gangl.*

- James, Woods
- ◆ Karma Glause — Centennial
  - ◆ Katherine Jimenez — CY
  - ◆ Justin Lane — CSF campus
  - ◆ Kip Marchant — Roosevelt, Star Lane, Juvenile Detention Center, Reach, ProStart
  - ◆ Jade McKenzie — Crest Hill, Cottonwood, Poison Spider, Southridge
  - ◆ Chris Patterson — NCHS
  - ◆ Lynda Paulson — Paradise Valley, Oregon Trail, Mountain View, Mills
  - ◆ Kathy Reynolds — Dean Morgan
  - ◆ Guido Roth — Frontier, Casper Classical Academy
  - ◆ Jeremy Sherin — Bar Nunn, Pineview, Fort Caspar Academy, Summit
  - ◆ Doug Slotsve — IT support manager
  - ◆ Eric Tewes — North Casper, University Park, Willard, ABLE, Fairgrounds Center, Casper Planetarium, Alcova, Red Creek, Willow Creek, Powder River, St. Anthony Tri-Parish School
  - ◆ John Turner — Grant, Midwest, Park, Sagewood

We'll take a short detour next month as we meet the Community Partnerships team; we'll meet our repair technicians in April.

# INSURANCE REMINDER: FEBRUARY IS LAST CHANCE TO ENROLL DEPENDENTS

By Arlene Steward

February is the last month to enroll a dependent, age 19 to 26, in the state of Wyoming employee group insurance plan. Coverage is effective March 1. **This is the last chance to enroll a dependent without a qualifying event or open enrollment opportunity.**

Under the health and dental coverage, dependent eligibility for children has changed to make coverage available until the child turns 26, regardless of student or marital status. Dependent children eligible for group health insurance through an employer are not eligible for coverage under the state's plan. The state will not provide coverage for a married child's spouse or their children. If you missed the special open enrollment period in November 2010 (effective for Jan. 1, 2011, coverage), or the enrollment period for a Feb. 1, 2011, effective date of coverage, **you may enroll your eligible children this month with a coverage date to begin March 1, 2011.** The new eligibility rules for dependent children will not apply to dependent life insurance. Dependent life insurance will continue to be available for children to age 19 and full-time students to age 25.

If you miss this enrollment period to add your dependent children, there must be a qualifying event (such as loss of other coverage) to allow your dependents to be covered. At that time, the enrollment must take place within 60 days of the qualifying event. Another opportunity to add dependent coverage is during open enrollment, which is every odd year by Nov. 30, with an even-year effective date of Jan. 1.

### Coverage for employees resigning or retiring

Under the state's plan, when an employee leaves the district, they are covered for the month they worked (whether they worked one day or 31 days in that month); however, the following month they will be responsible for their coverage, either through COBRA (102 percent of the premium) or retiree insurance

coverage (100 percent of the premium).

In past years, under the district's self-insured plan, certified personnel were covered through Aug. 31, if they worked the last day of school and classified personnel were covered through June 30. This is no longer under the state's plan. Coverage ends at the end of the month the employee leaves the district. Insurance coverage is not connected to contract months.

Example: The last day of school this year is scheduled for May 27. Employees are covered through May. On June 1, the resigned or retired employee is responsible for his or her own insurance premium (102 percent for COBRA; 100 percent as a retiree). If the employee works at least one day in June due to snow days, coverage as an active employee will continue through June 30.

### State's retiree insurance eligibility information

If an employee meets the following qualifications, he/she may continue with the state of Wyoming group insurance plan at retirement or termination of active employment:

- 1) The retiring employee must have had coverage in effect under the school district plan continuously for at least one year just prior to termination, AND
- 2) The retiring employee must have at least 20 years of service with the school district, AND
- 3) The retiring employee must be eligible for state of Wyoming retirement benefits or TIAA-CREF, OR
  - 1) The terminating employee must be 50 years of age or over, AND
  - 2) The terminating employee must have completed at least four years of service for the school district and be eligible for the state of Wyoming retirement benefits or TIAA-CREF, AND
  - 3) The terminating employee must have had single and/or dependent coverage in effect continuously for one year just prior to termination.

**CELEBRATE AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH**

February is African American History Month. To celebrate diversity, the Natrona County School District Diversity Task Force encourages you to read the following books:

- ◆ “Finding My Place,” by Traci L. Jones
- ◆ “Roots and Blues,” by Arnold Adoff
- ◆ “Ruth and the Green Book,” by Calvin Ramsey
- ◆ “We Could Be Brothers,” by Derrick Barnes
- ◆ “Ninth Ward,” by Jewell Parker Rhodes

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR RETIREMENT, LONGEVITY CELEBRATION**

Mark your calendars for May 17, when the district will honor 2011 retirees and 25-year employees. The event will be held at the Best Western Ramkota Hotel. More information will be forthcoming.

If you are retiring this year or are celebrating 25 years of service with the district and haven't been contacted regarding the celebration, please contact your principal or supervisor.

**AAB**, continued from page 5

**Natrona County High School**

Tessa Angelo  
Kathleen Backman  
Paige Bailey  
Christine Bessert  
Christopher Brehm  
Kaitlin Bressler  
Kristine Carmen  
Chase Cimburek  
Jordan Colman  
Corey Cronin  
Kip DeCastro  
Jordan Dick  
Christopher Ellbogen  
David Finch  
Luke Gilbert  
Jordan Hendricks  
Steven Hippe  
Andrew Hudson

Theodore Huss  
Brian Jackson  
Morgan Jones  
Jeremiah Larson  
Stephanie Lee  
Kacie McCleary  
Erin Menardi  
Kyle Murphy  
Brittany Myler  
Jacob Powell  
Brandon Rosty  
Lucas Rowley  
Mark Schenfisch  
Trevor Scherlin  
Jariek Schuler  
James Shellenberger  
Trace White  
Neil Williams

**Midwest High School**

Sage Armstrong

Ronda Bean

**Roosevelt High School**

Amanda Drake  
Rene Flores  
Nicole Rilett

Cindee Shepherd  
Jaqueline Tracy

Tickets can be purchased at the high schools' main offices for \$17.50. (Student tickets and the tickets of the educators they will walk with are free.) The deadline for ticket purchases is 3 p.m. Thursday, April 7. After that, a limited number of tickets will be available for \$25. No tickets will be sold at the door.

For more information, call Jennifer Cousineau at 253-5382.

