

NCS D News Zone



VOLUME V

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LUNCH BUDDIES BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH STUDENTS

By Jenni Luckett

A group of kids stood at the entrance to Grant Elementary School earlier this month, anxiously watching the glass doors for the arrival of their new friends.

Grant is home to about seven “lunch buddies,” children who have signed up with their parents’ help to share lunch and games with adult volunteers through the Champions Mentoring Program.

The program launched as a pilot just last month, with the district’s Central Services Facility being the first workplace to collectively sponsor a school. Volunteers from CSF go to Grant on Thursdays for lunchtime activities with their student partners. Another group will start visiting Manor Heights on Tuesdays this month.

The program is planned to expand to businesses throughout the community in January. Any student is welcome to participate with their parents’ permission,



NCS D Gifted and Talented coordinator Jeanne Spawn shares a laugh and a meal with her lunch buddy, Justice, at Grant Elementary School on Nov. 5.

and volunteers are screened, trained and matched with kids with like interests.

The idea is that kids who have adult mentors or friends outside of their families are more likely to stay in school, to stay out of trouble, and to succeed.

On the recent Wednesday, the kids wait anxiously, twirling in circles, telling stories to the women who run the program, and sifting through the goodies they’ve received in a little Champions pouch this week.

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WE'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Continued support, continued work will be key to success



Wyoming legislators commended the Natrona County School District earlier this month for our use of state education funding and for our improvements in student achievement.

It's great to hear – and to pass on to all of you in recognition of your hard work.

At the same time, though, you and I know that we have more work to do.

On Nov. 4, some of our staff members and trustees joined me to meet with a group of Wyoming legislators. We talked about what we're doing here in Natrona County, what results we're seeing, and what the future will hold. This conversation was especially pertinent this year, because most experts are predicting that money is going to be tight in the upcoming legislative budget session.

We in K-12 education are walking a fine line. We have been tremendously lucky in the past decade, seeing unprecedented financial support from our state. We have to accept that financial support probably can't be sustained at the same level in these harder economic times. At the same time, though, we are asking our state leaders to continue making education a priority.

Here in NCSD, we chose to implement the pieces of the research behind the state's K-12 funding model with the greatest potential to raise student achievement. It was a decision made collaboratively by

classified and certified staff members, administrators, cabinet members and trustees. Not every district made the same choice; some opted to put their additional money into other priorities, without following the state's research.

I'm proud of our decision. We have followed best practices in reducing class sizes in early grade levels, in hiring and assigning certified teachers to work as instructional facilitators and tutors, and in offering support for students in the form of extended day and extended year programs.

It's early, but we're already seeing some positive results from this work. The number of third-graders who are reading at or above grade level has climbed 6 percent in the last year. Certified tutors are making particular progress at the upper elementary and middle school levels in closing gaps and helping struggling students catch up with their peers. Summer school and Winter Bridges offer hundreds of students the opportunity to regain – or get ahead on – their credits. And the number of students dropping out of our high schools has plummeted by more than 200 students – or 5 percent – in the last three years.

We shared these actions and results with our Natrona County legislators, as well as with the leadership of the Legislature's Joint Education Committee, in the hope that they would continue their support of the funding model and of our work.

Because we do have a lot more work to do, and it's only going to get harder as we get closer to our goals.

See TRACK, page 3

BUDDIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As Deborah Hudson, an HR specialist from the Central Services Facility, arrives, her buddy Leea jumps up and down clapping her hands. They go off together to get in line for lunch, then head to the library, where the entire group will sit together in relative peace to talk, eat and share.

Each pair has a card to help them get to know each other – siblings, nicknames, favorite things – and the conversation flows easily from school to

Halloween to families, interrupted by the occasional "milk race" to see who can chug their milk fastest.

That's all it really takes to make a difference: a little time and a little interest, say Champions leaders Helene Crouch and Jennifer Bays. Just one hour a week can help build a connection with a student. To learn more about Champions and the Lunch Buddies program, e-mail Champions@natronaschools.org.

CPR TRAINING SAVES STUDENT'S LIFE

By Jennifer Schultes

Oct. 21 is a day CY Junior High ninth-grader Jordan Wood never will forget.

"I couldn't breathe ... everything was starting to fade," she said.

Wood was enjoying Cinema Club during lunch in language arts teacher Melanie Boyes' room, as usual, when she began choking on a piece of food.

"I stood up and everyone was staring at me. Someone yelled for Mrs. Boyes and I ran to her and she did the Heimlich maneuver."

Boyes recalls that day with a shutter.

"She was racing to me with an unforgettable, panicked look on her face," Boyes said.

Boyes immediately applied the Heimlich, which removed the

obstruction on the third try. She was afraid of pressing too hard, not wanting to break a rib, but after two attempts, realized there had to be more pressure.

"The panicked look on her face and the frightened looks on the several other students present led me to know that I was her only hope," Boyes said.

Boyes is extremely grateful to the NCSD Employee Compensation and Occupational Health Office (formerly Employee Relations and Employee Wellness), which puts on CPR/first aid certification trainings. Not all staff members are required to take the training but many choose to do so for their own personal benefit. Boyes originally was one of those people and she doesn't think the training should stop there – she also thinks students should become



"She's my guardian angel," CY Junior High ninth-grader Jordan Wood said of language arts teacher Melanie Boyes, who recently saved her life by administering the Heimlich maneuver.

trained, perhaps as part of their PE or health curricula.

See CPR, page 10

TRACK, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The gains we have made are positive and are heading in the right direction, but we can do better. We will need continued support, though.

It's important that our employees know what we are asking of our state lawmakers. We know that K-12 education may be affected as we enter leaner times, and we're preparing for that fact.

However, we have asked legislators to maintain consistency in the K-12 funding model. If cuts need to be made, we would prefer that they come as a percentage and that we decide locally how to manage fewer resources.

We also need to maintain a priority on school capital construction. Many projects have been completed across the state, and here in Natrona County, we still have much work to do to improve our educational facilities for students. Our high schools are at or above

capacity and are in need of major renovation. While money may be tight, the costs of construction are less than they were even a year ago. Now is the time to take a responsible chance and invest in infrastructure.

We know that times are hard, for everyone. Our children's education, however, must remain at the forefront of Wyoming's priorities. We are asking our Legislature to strike a healthy balance between day-to-day operations and appropriate investment in facilities, and to continue giving local boards the latitude to manage their own district budgets.

In exchange, you and I have to continue making good decisions and working to improve our students' achievement. We're on the right path, but we must meet and exceed our customers' expectations.

GOAL TEAMS MOVE FORWARD WITH DATA COLLECTION

The Natrona County School District has identified five goals as part of its 2009-2014 strategic plan. Measures and action items are being developed and implemented for each goal by a leadership team led by a cabinet member. Check this section of News Zone each month for periodic updates from the teams.

GOAL 2: EXCELLING SCHOOLS

“NCS D will perform in the top 10 percent among all districts on statewide assessments.”

The Goal 2 team, led by Dr. Mark Mathern, associate superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, reported to the NCS D Board of Trustees last month on progress to collect data and distribute tools for improvement to schools. The team has worked with the Wyoming Department of Education to collect district-level PAWS results, has reviewed data to compare NCS D to other districts in the state and has developed an internal survey of essential curriculum use. It also has developed and trained teachers in using reading rubrics for PAWS skills among high-schoolers and has developed reading rubrics for grades three through eight. At the time of its last report, the team was planning to develop interview questions for other high-performing districts, review its survey results, and begin work to communicate the importance of essential curriculum and the goal to employees and the community.

GOAL 3: PREPARED GRADUATES

“All NCS D students will graduate and be prepared for college and/or a high-skills career.”

The Goal 3 team, led by Dr. Julia Collier Earl, associate to the superintendent for special projects, also reported to the NCS D Board of Trustees last month. The team was working to develop an on-track indicator to determine whether students are on a path to high school completion. The system would be applied to incoming ninth-graders, then used throughout a student’s high school years. The team also was sorting through data currently available, as well as identifying additional data that needs to be collected, and working to understand how

its mission aligns with the district’s Path to 2025 work.

GOAL 4: SAFE, HEALTHY PEOPLE

“NCS D will maintain environments that are physically and mentally safe and healthy for everyone.”

The Goal 4 team, led by Dr. Crystal Mueller, associate superintendent of Human Resources, had a lengthy meeting in early November, during which it examined opportunities for collecting input through the educational research group Gallup, the district’s bullying policy, the Safe Schools Healthy Students grant and data related to the team’s mission.

Team members heard a brief overview of how Gallup may be able to help the district collect reliable information from students, community members and employees. A deeper follow-up is scheduled for Dec. 2. In addition, the team reviewed the district’s bullying policy, changes needed to make the policy align with current realities, and changes in documenting that are coming soon. Finally, the team heard an update on the SSHS grant, overseen by Kim Ibach, and the comprehensive data already being collected through that grant program.

At its next meeting, the team will continue to assess existing data from the SSHS grant, as well as work on ways to collect additional data from buildings.

GOAL 1: LITERATE STUDENTS

4 to 5:30 p.m.

second and fourth Wednesday of the month

GOAL 2: EXCELLING SCHOOLS

3:45 p.m., third Monday of the month

GOAL 3: PREPARED GRADUATES

Please check the calendar at www.natronaschools.org for more information

GOAL 4: SAFE, HEALTHY PEOPLE

3 to 5 p.m., first Monday of the month

GOAL 5: EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS

3 p.m., first Monday of the month

CYMS, Summit Elementary on schedule

CY Middle School, right, the second largest school project currently being done in the state, is approximately 66 percent complete. Cabinets are being placed in classrooms and carpet will be installed shortly, according to Jason Gutierrez, NCS D facilities planning and construction manager. Painting and interior construction are being done in the administrative and gymnasium areas. Athletic fields are planted and growing, and some parking lot construction has begun. The total construction cost for the school will be \$33,929,094, funded by the Wyoming School Facilities Commission.



Summit Elementary School, left, the district’s first brand new project in 25 years, is approximately 26 percent complete, as exterior sheeting (the bright green siding in the picture) is going up. Interior framing is an ongoing project, Gutierrez said. Road paving has been completed and some parking lot work has begun. The total construction cost for the project will be \$18,360,816, funded by the Wyoming School Facilities Commission.

Be sure to watch the district’s Web site, www.natronaschools.org, for the latest progress reports and pictures from all of NCS D’s facilities projects!

'NEWS ZONE' SURVEY RESULTS TALLIED, NEWSLETTER WILL CONTINUE

By Jennifer Schultes

Thanks to all 146 of you who completed the *NCS D News Zone* survey throughout the month of October! For a detailed look at the findings, please visit www.natronaschools.org> Departments>Superintendent>Community Relations>Media and click on the 2009 *NCS D News Zone* survey results PDF.

Although there were some comments about worry of cost, waste of time and irrelevance of information, generally speaking the results were positive enough for Community

Relations to continue producing the newsletter:

- ◆ 59.6% of you prefer to read the paper version of the newsletter
- ◆ 63.7% find the articles useful and interesting
- ◆ 87.7% think *News Zone* is well written
- ◆ 84.2% feel the newsletter appears professional and gives a good impression of the district
- ◆ 80.8% enjoy the photographs
- ◆ 76.7% enjoy the new design, and
- ◆ 80.8% are satisfied with the distribution frequency

The survey results showed that

you most enjoy reading about events (69.2%), and least enjoy reading about board of trustee news (21.9%).

As stated last month, one of the most common comments made is the concern of the cost of *News Zone*.

Each month, Multi-Media Services prints 2,500 copies of the 12-page newsletter. When printed on coated (shiny) paper, the total cost is \$910.20, or just under 37 cents per copy. When printed on uncoated ("flat" or non-shiny) paper, the cost goes down to 31 cents per copy, or a total of \$775. (Four years ago, the cost of the four-page, two-color employee newsletter *News*

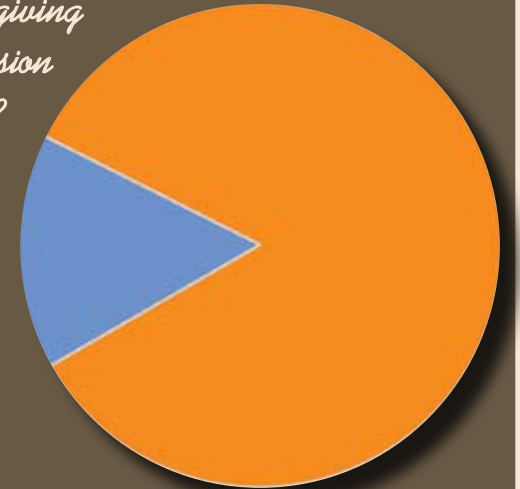
About Us was \$500.)

Therefore, taking into consideration your concerns and the need to cut costs for the district, we're "going green" and the newsletter will be printed on the uncoated paper. This paper also is much easier to recycle, and we encourage you to please recycle the newsletters, as well as all other paper waste.

Thank you again for your feedback. Community Relations is always interested to hear what's on your mind. Please e-mail your thoughts and suggestions to NCS D_ideas@natronaschools.org.

Do you feel NCS D News Zone appears professional, giving a good impression of the district?

Yes
No



By Jennifer Schultes

Seventy-two. That's how many eggs Mark Antrim, associate superintendent of Facilities & Technology, scrambled for a recent Grant Elementary School teacher appreciation breakfast put on by members of the Natrona County School District Cabinet.

Debbie Salvador, instructional facilitator at the school, arranged for the breakfast as a way to say "Wahoo!" about no longer being a focus school.

"I tried to think of something to wow the staff," Salvador said. "We serve breakfast for fourth- and fifth-graders, and I thought that maybe [cabinet members] could come and cook for us and congratulate us on our

hard work."

Cook and congratulate, they did!

Four members of cabinet and Superintendent Joel Dvorak all donned aprons and went to work in different areas of the school's kitchen: Antrim cracked the eggs; Dr. Crystal Mueller, associate superintendent of Human Resources, scrambled them; Dvorak cooked sausage links; Dr. Mark Mathern, associate superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction (C&I), cooked bacon; and Mike Bond, executive director of C&I, flipped pancakes.

Cabinet members were thrilled Grant no longer is a focus school. Mathern explained being a focus school means that there is a need for additional support on achievement on both state and district growth

assessments.

"We still have a lot of work ahead," Salvador admitted, "but we're moving in the right direction. We want to be excelling!"

Principal Tom Mesecher said that Grant's designation as a focus school two years ago prompted a lot of tears and hand-wringing.

"We were doing a lot of work and had a no-results feeling," he said.

"[Becoming a focus school] actually helped us to focus on what we were doing to not get results, and we realized we were not where we wanted to be."

The district's administrators also were thrilled to give kudos in a different, fun environment.

"It's a great opportunity to meet the staff and express our appreciation,"

ORDER UP!

Cabinet members cook, celebrate success

Mathern said. "And it sure beats meeting at a meeting ... it's good to be in another environment."

"We don't do this enough," Bond said of celebrating schools.

Antrim agreed.

"We want to celebrate!" he said. "This is the real work ... increasing academic achievement and it's happening here at Grant! We want to celebrate that with all schools."

Mesecher and Salvador were both very thankful cabinet members shared the celebration with the staff this way.

"Thank you," Salvador said. "As a district, we are a team and we need to encourage one another."

ON THE WEB: READ ABOUT CABINET MAKING ANOTHER BREAKFAST AT SAGEWOOD!



"Enjoy!" Dr. Joel Dvorak said to Grant Elementary staff as cabinet members served them breakfast in celebration of no longer being a focus school. "We appreciate your hard work!"

STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT CANDY, CHOCOLATE, WELLNESS

By Katrina Lorenzen

Four hundred Natrona County School District students participated in an educational opportunity provided by the Nicolaysen Art Museum the week of Nov. 2. Students from Crest Hill, Manor Heights, Mills and Oregon Trail elementary schools, Centennial Junior High and Kelly Walsh High School participated in three stations on the field trip.

The first station was the art exhibit "I Want Candy: The Sweet Stuff in American Art," which displayed a challenge for the mind and described the visual consumption of the sweet stuff in American art. The idea was that candy allures, but it also can represent a danger when transformed into rampant consumerism and gluttony.

The second station was on nutrition education, sponsored by Cent\$ible Nutrition. The students

were able to see the amount of sugar in many unhealthy foods, a variety of nutrient-rich foods and learn about portion sizes.

The third station was in the Discovery Center, where kids were able to use watercolor pencils to create their very own works of art! One of the students, Katie Bays, who also is a docent at the Nic, had an opportunity to lead the students in a description of the art.

The Nic also hosted the lecture, "How to Eat Chocolate: A Dietician's Real-Life Secrets for Combining Nutrition and Pleasure," with award-winning author, educator and nutrition coach Dayle Hayes. Following the presentation, a panel discussed diabetes education, the obesity epidemic, the balance of healthy eating and physical activity and what NCS D is doing to promote health.

In other Student Wellness news, the next wellness walk is scheduled for 4 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 2 behind Old Town. Also, watch for more details coming soon about how to win prizes while being healthy!

Board tackles major issues in NCS D

By Jenni Luckett

The Natrona County School District Board of Trustees has established an informal process for evaluating requests for locally funded improvements (or enhancements) outside the state's School Facilities Commission capital construction funding process. The guidelines identify a set of questions for the board to ask to help evaluate each potential project. Among the questions are fiscal considerations, such as the lifespan of the project and the funding options; program considerations, such as impact on educational goals and student

achievement; and alignment considerations, such as whether the project fits into the strategic plan or complements existing programs.

Locally funded improvements have been a frequent source of conversation for the board. In June, the board voted to fund \$400,000 worth of new locker rooms at Natrona County High School, and this month, it added \$522,000 to that total to complete the project. In October, the board also allocated \$220,000 to design a new Eastside Activity Complex.

Meanwhile, elements of the design for the new Summit Elementary School are still up in the air, after the board tabled in

September a discussion on funding those items outside the state's funding model for the school.

Such discussions have, in part, led the board to authorize NCS D staff members to begin investigating the possibility of a bond issue, which would potentially ask the community to support funding of enhancements and other needs in the district. NCS D has not sponsored a bond issue since 1994, though, and needed more research into the process. A follow-up discussion on that research was scheduled to occur during board retreats this month.

See *BOARD*, page 9

SIGN UP FOR FUN, HEALTHY ACTIVITIES

By Rachel Trujillo-Myers

HEALTH 4 THE HOLIDAYS

Do you need something fun to help ease you through the holiday bustle? Then join the upcoming Health 4 the Holidays wellness program! This will be a short, fun program to help keep you aware of the many healthy choices you can make during the upcoming holiday season!

This simple 28-day program will help motivate and support four common health areas that are sometimes overlooked during the holiday season. The goal is to practice at least one health habit a day in any of the four areas: physical activity, weight control, healthy eating and

stress management. Obtain a registration form from Employee Compensation and Occupational Health (formerly Employee Wellness), fill it out and return it to Rachel by Dec. 1. Materials needed for the program will be sent via e-mail. Participants will receive a Health 4 the Holidays T-shirt or sweatshirt if they complete the program!



WALKTOBER

Walktober flew by!

Throughout October and November, 433 employees, spouses

and retirees participated in the Walktober walking program. The average exercise steps per day were 8,000, and the average minutes were 54. This is well above the recommended weekly average ... awesome job!

There were 172 participants who completed the fitness screening at the Wyoming Athletic Club, with 66 employees taking advantage of the club's free membership during the program. The initiation fee will be waived for those who decide to join full time.

Weekly incentives were awarded to top teams, average leaves earned, most steps, most minutes and random winners, among others.

See *ACTIVITIES*, page 10

BOARD, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

The board also recently authorized the Path to 2025 project to move forward by approving the findings and directions for the project and allowing the project to take the next steps in collecting community input and working to establish specific steps for implementing or advancing the findings and directions at each school.

Closely related to the Path to 2025 project, the board earlier this month spent a work session discussing the high school configuration it would like to see in the district. The board heard three options recommended by the Path to 2025 Visioning Committee, and it will continue gathering community input and discussing those options until January.

The district has been planning significant renovations at Kelly Walsh and Natrona County high schools to improve the learning environments and create more space for students, in addition to the construction

of another major high school in Casper. The district already has design money for renovations at both existing schools and for the new high school, though state funding is uncertain at this point for construction of the facilities.

Board members also have been closely following legislative work leading up to the Wyoming Legislature's 2010 budget session. Board members and NCS D staff met with local legislators, as well as leaders of the Joint Education Committee, earlier this month to discuss the K-12 funding model, NCS D needs in the coming years, and the outlook for the state's financial future. For more details, please read Dr. Dvorak's column on page 2.

Finally, the district's Compact Issues Committee met late last month, when it heard an update on research on employee insurance plans and approved minor changes to the district's three employee work agreements.

READ MORE ONLINE!



CPR, continued from page 3

"It saddens me to think that if I had not been there at that time, circumstances would not be as joyous as they turned out to be," Boyes said. "Twenty-plus students in my classroom and not a single one knew what to do ... no one called 911 although they all had cell phones, no one ran to the office, and no one began the Heimlich.

"I had never before had to administer the Heimlich maneuver, but I update my training every two years, and I am and will continue to be a loud advocate for simple lifesaving training for all. One just never knows when one must have the presence of mind to actually use it, but

having the training to know what to do is truly life saving!"

CPR/first aid classes are offered every other Tuesday at the University of Wyoming Outreach Building, 951 N. Poplar St. Many NCS D job positions require this certification, so please check your card and register for a class if needed. Only one three-hour class is needed for the certification, which is good for two years. Training dates are Dec. 1 and 15, and you may choose from two times: 8:30 – 11:30 a.m. OR 6:30 – 9:30 p.m. For more information or to register for a class, contact Rachel Trujillo-Myers at 253-5228.

CPR TRAINING SAVES ANOTHER LIFE

NCS D Employee Compensation & Occupational Health Manager Syd Webb also recently saved a life. One morning, he heard an urgent knocking and yelling at his front door and opened it to find his neighbor screaming that his wife wasn't breathing. Webb hurried to his neighbor's house, found the woman unconscious on the floor,

and began administering CPR. His son brought over an Automated External Defibrillator (AED, which can be found in all schools), and the woman was shocked two times, while Webb continued to alternate with CPR. Paramedics arrived, and they administered three additional shocks. She began breathing, and [the last Webb knew] she went to the hospital. She had suffered a

heart attack, but will be just fine.

"It's so important," Webb said.

"You never know when you're going to need these life-saving skills. It was probably the early compressions and defibrillation that kept vital oxygen going to the brain and heart.

"Everyone should take CPR, whether it's required for your job or not."

ACTIVITIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Incentives included Walktober T-shirts, sweatshirts, Subway gift cards, walking socks, fleece sets and Walktober soup mugs.

A post-screen is set tentatively for Nov. 23 and 24 from 4 - 6 p.m. at the eastside Wyoming Athletic Club. Samples of the final incentive will be available to view. Depending on activity level completed, participants will earn a fleece vest, windbreaker, cookbook or pedometer/walking kit! Pre- and post-screening must be complete to earn the final incentive.

HEARING SCREENINGS

Are you concerned about potential hearing loss or have you been encouraged to get a hearing screening? Then take advantage of a FREE screening!

Hearing screenings are offered on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 7 to 8 a.m. at the Special Education Service Center. Tom Rowley, NCS D certified audiologist, along with the Employee Compensation and Occupational Health Office,

is helping make this service available to NCS D employees. Please contact Rachel to schedule an appointment.

YOGA

Is the upcoming holiday season already stressing you out? Come try a FREE yoga class on Wednesday evenings from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Class is taught by Lorraine Reed and is a great way to de-stress from a busy work week. Class meets at Central Services. Please check the NCS D calendar for room location, as they vary. Drop-ins are welcome, especially throughout December!

EMPLOYEE WELLNESS INTEREST SURVEY

Be on the lookout for an upcoming employee wellness interest survey. Your input is needed regarding the wellness program! Employees who complete the survey will have a chance to win one of eight \$25 gift cards to The Olive Garden, slated to open in January!

YOU HAVE CHOICES - BE A WISE HEALTH CARE CONSUMER

By Arlene Steward

What does it mean to use health care wisely? Think about the money you spend each year on insurance premiums, deductibles, prescription copays, office visit copayments and other health care expenses. That's a significant investment, and using your health care wisely means getting the most bang for your buck by practicing prevention, managing costs and taking good care of yourself.

Shop around for the best outcomes and for the best fees for service. Please review the schedule of benefits in your medical insurance booklet. Every covered employee should have a medical insurance booklet that explains your medical plan benefits (an updated version will be issued this winter). The District's Employee Group Insurance Office personnel are available to assist you with your health care benefit concerns.

As of Aug. 1, the NCS D medical insurance program added network providers known as a Preferred Provider Organization, or PPO. You will receive discounts for medical visits and procedures by choosing a preferred provider (CIGNA PPO and First Choice of the Midwest). The PPO provider program provides quality, convenience and no referrals. You will have access to a national network of more than 600,000 primary and specialty care physicians and facilities. To locate a PPO provider, you may go online to www.mycigna.com and

www.1choicem.com. The Multi-Plan Savings Program offered by CIGNA for some non-network providers will continue to offer discount fees for services.

Within this geographical region, most providers' fees for services are over the "reasonable and customary" allowance, according to the NCS D's medical plan document. The district's medical plan pays at the 90th percentile of non-PPO provider charges for the same procedure performed within this geographical region. When a non-PPO provider charges over the 90th percentile, the individual is responsible for the difference. The difference is the amount outside of the deductible and the co-insurance.

If you choose a non-network provider, you may wish to encourage your provider to participate with CIGNA's PPO program. By using a preferred provider, you will benefit from lower out-of-pocket expenses. NCS D will benefit overall with lower costs associated with claims, which impacts premiums.

The PPO provider's (in-network) fees are discounted (within reasonable and customary allowance). When an individual elects to have a procedure performed by a non-PPO provider (out-of-network) and wishes to know whether the fees are within the reasonable and customary allowance, the individual must request a "pre-determination" from CIGNA. The individual must ask the provider for the diagnosis code(s), procedure code(s) and the itemized fees for services. This process may

take from four to six weeks to receive the results from CIGNA. So plan ahead when having elective procedures performed by a non-network provider.

A pre-determination is not the same as a pre-certification. A pre-determination is an estimate for services being considered. A pre-certification is an approval for a hospital stay. The individual must call CIGNA prior to any hospital stay.

By adding a PPO plan, we negotiated with medical providers to guarantee lower costs. The lower costs benefit NCS D, which has seen drastic increases in insurance expenses in the past several years. The lower costs also benefit you, by providing lower out-of-pocket expenses. If you use a provider other than a PPO provider, you will be responsible for paying anything over the reasonable and customary allowable expenses.

Another reminder is that your individual CIGNA identification card is important. Please present it at the time of your medical visit.

Who to contact if you have insurance questions

**Employee Group Health Insurance Office
Natrona County School District
970 N. Glenn Rd.
Casper, WY 82601**

**Arlene Steward,
employee group insurance manager,
253-5208**

**Victoria Nolte,
insurance specialist,
253-5207**

**Monica Sayles,
insurance specialist,
253-5328**

UPDATE CONTACT INFORMATION!

In accordance with the Natrona County School District Board of Trustees' goal of maintaining an environment that is physically and mentally safe and healthy for everyone, the district's Student Support/Safe Schools Office uses the AlertNow rapid communication service to enhance communication between school faculty and families of students. It is imperative that NCSD staff and student/family contact information is up to date!

Staff members, to update your contact information, please e-mail Cheryl Caster at cheryl_caster@natronaschools.org. Please encourage your students' families to make sure their information is current with their school office manager, as well.

Any questions about AlertNow should be directed to the Student Support/Safe Schools Office at 253-5325.

**BEWARE OF HOAX
AMBER ALERT MESSAGES!**

Already this school year, the community has received three text message Amber Alert notices, all of which have proven to be hoaxes, according to the Casper Police Department (CPD) and NCSD Student Support/Safe Schools Office (SS/SS).

Up to this point, the local police department never has used text messages as a way to publicize Amber Alerts, however, citizens are able to contact and pay private companies to send out the alert, according to Marty Wood, SS/SS director.

Wood said an official Amber Alert would disseminate from the CPD to local media.

If you receive an Amber Alert via any method other than local media (TV, radio, etc.), call the non-emergency CPD number, 235-8278, to verify. Please do not forward texts, e-mails, etc., without confirming. Questions or concerns about hoax alerts also may be directed to Wood at 253-5271.

STAFF: READY, SET, WRITE!

Do you miss having your written word heard?

The Community Relations Office would like your help in adding content to the district's employee newsletter, *NCSD News Zone!*

Each month, we will feature a guest column written by an NCSD staff member. The writing should focus on any of the district's five goals: Literate Students; Excelling Schools; Prepared Graduates; Safe, Healthy People; and/or Efficient and Effective Operations. This is a fun way to hear about all the good going

on in our district!

Stories should be submitted in Microsoft Word format and should include a title, your name, position and location. Pictures also are encouraged to be submitted with your piece, and should be in JPEG, TIFF or EPS formats.

Community Relations staff reserve the right to edit, approve and/or deny any stories submitted. If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Schultes at 253-5382. Please submit stories to communication_team@natronaschools.org.

NCSD HELPS UNITED WAY

As we wrap up the first part of the United Way campaign, the Community Relations Office would like to thank you for donations made so far to United Way:

- ◆ NCSD staff and retiree pledges: \$61,723.19
- ◆ CSF Fall Festival silent auction: \$1,357
- ◆ CSF Fall Festival pumpkin decoration contest: \$71
- ◆ Grand total: \$63,151.19

Thanks to all of you who have donated money, prizes, crafts, and pumpkins, as well as your time and effort. Your willingness to give to this campaign will impact many members of our community, including the children we serve every day.