

NCS D News Zone



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NCS D SEEKS DISTRICT ACCREDITATION

By Jennifer Cousineau

Starting next week, the Natrona County School District will engage in the state-mandated accreditation process. Unlike in years past, when individual schools have achieved accreditation, NCS D is going for the gold and fully expects to achieve *district* accreditation status, according to Dr. Mark Mathern, associate superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction.

The week of Oct. 23, 37 people from AdvancED, the accrediting agency used by the state of Wyoming, will visit each school and conduct interviews with all stakeholders, including principals, leadership members, teachers, students, parents and support staff. Trustees, cabinet members and the superintendent will be interviewed, as well. The visitors also will conduct classroom observations



District staff have been gearing up for next week's accreditation visit.

and review artifacts and documents to verify that schools are meeting the state's seven accreditation standards, which are: vision and purpose, governance and leadership, teaching and learning, documenting and using results, resources and support systems, stakeholder communication and relationships and commitment to

continuous improvement. These standards align with the district's approach to continuous improvement, Mike Bond, executive director of Human Resources, said.

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ACCREDITATION WILL SHOW WE LIVE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT EVERY DAY



Very soon, 37 folks from around the country — and Wyoming — will come to visit our schools and district as part of a five-year accreditation process. This is the first time in long memory that the Natrona County School District is seeking a higher, district level of accreditation versus accreditation solely in

schools. This year, we're going to show we meet both school and district accreditation criteria.

These special guests who come on behalf of AdvancED, one of the largest K-12 accrediting agencies in America, will be here the week of Oct. 23, visiting with staff at every school, trustees, cabinet members, department heads and myself. They will be seeking assurances that we are doing what we say we're doing around continuous improvement and all that it involves, including our mission, vision, goals, strategies and action plans. Each school will get a thorough full-day visit, and accreditation team members will talk with the principal, teachers, students, parents and community members. They also will spend time in classrooms, assuring that we're meeting the seven standards of accreditation.

Why is this important? What does it mean to be an accredited school district? It means that the journey our kids have gone through with us came from an accredited school district. It means that the diplomas they receive matter. It means we are meeting best practices of excellent school districts.

Results of their visit will be given via an "exit report," which will be held at 3 p.m. Oct. 27, at CSF. It will be a fully advertised meeting of the board of trustees, and I welcome you to join us. If

"What does it mean to be an accredited school district? It means that the journey our kids have gone through with us came from an accredited school district. It means that the diplomas they receive matter."

you are unable to come, the results will be widely communicated. The accreditation team then will make its recommendation to the State Board of Education.

My best hope is that we demonstrate through observation, artifacts and the conversations we have with these 37 people that we live continuous improvement every day in this school district. I hope that they will give us feedback that both affirms that and gives us opportunities for improvement in all of our processes. I think we've done a lot of good work on continuous improvement efforts and meeting these standards. Accreditation standards are very much aligned with all the work we've done with continuous classroom improvement and with all of the Baldrige work. I strongly believe we live continuous improvement every day, and that they will validate that through this assurance visit.

I want to thank all of you — from custodians to teachers to the board of trustees — for all of your hard work to improve our systems and for working toward our five strategic goals. I want to thank you for making this an ever-improving place where students can learn.

ACCREDITATION, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"The process is intended to build capacity in schools and for districts to be able to continuously improve," Bond explained. "Accreditation is also intended as a means of guaranteeing to the public that our schools are high quality and have high-quality processes and results."

The results will be presented at a public board meeting "exit report" at 3 p.m. Oct. 27, at the Central Services Facility. They also will be available at www.advance-ed.org.



"The feedback we get will help us continuously improve all of our processes," Superintendent Joel Dvorak said of the upcoming accreditation process. (Stock photo.)

WHO IS YOUR HR GENERALIST?

"How much leave time do I have?" "How do I renew my teaching certification?" "How do I apply for a job?" "Will you help me resolve a conflict with my coworker?"

Questions like these — along with questions about Applicant Online, contracts, evaluations, transfers, retirement, training, policies and procedures and violation of policy or law complaints (to name just a few) — should be directed to your HR generalist. Listed below are the district's four HR generalists and the schools and departments they serve, along with fun tidbits of information. Their offices are located at CSF, on the south side of the building, where Back on Track/Alternative Learning Center used to be.

NAME: Nell Davis

SCHOOLS/ DEPARTMENTS SERVED:

Bar Nunn, Casper Classical Academy, Star Lane, CY, Dean Morgan, Frontier Middle School, Mountain View, Pineview, Poison Spider, Powder River, Transportation, Business Office and substitutes with last name A-F

FAVORITE FICTIONAL BOOK OR CHARACTER: Little Jack Horner

PHONE: 253-5230

NAME: Ryan Kelly

SCHOOLS/ DEPARTMENTS SERVED:

Cottonwood, Crest Hill, Oregon Trail, University Park,



Kelly Walsh, Midwest, Willow Creek, Curriculum & Instruction Division, Warehouse Department, Facilities & Technology Division and substitutes with last name S-Z

FAVORITE FICTIONAL BOOK OR CHARACTER: "The Shack"

PHONE: 253-5396

NAME: Kelli Patik

SCHOOLS/ DEPARTMENTS SERVED:

Alcova, Human Resources Division, Community Partnerships, Superintendent's Office, Evansville, Fort Caspar Academy, Grant, North Casper, Paradise Valley, Park, Red Creek, Roosevelt, Sagewood, Southridge, Transitions Learning Center, Verda James and substitutes with last name M-R

FAVORITE FICTIONAL BOOK OR CHARACTER: "The Sandman Series," by Neil Gaiman

PHONE: 253-5266

NAME: Gary Ukele

SCHOOLS/ DEPARTMENTS SERVED:

Centennial Junior High, Manor Heights, Mills, Natrona County High School, Summit, Willard, Woods, Information Technology Department and substitutes with last name G-L

FAVORITE FICTIONAL BOOK OR CHARACTER: "A Tale of Two Cities"

PHONE: 253-5354



FOR YOUR HEALTH

By Arlene Steward

HEALTHIER WYOMING

The fourth year of Healthier Wyoming, the employee wellness program put on by the state, began on Oct. 1, 2011. The program will increase your knowledge about health, fitness, nutrition, overall wellness and it gives you the opportunity to reduce your health insurance premiums by \$40 per month. When you participate in and comply with the program, you will be able to save a total of \$480 annually on your 2013 health insurance premiums.

The program consists of three components:

1. Complete three out of the six every-other-month challenges. Go to www.healthierwy.org for details.
2. Have an annual wellness physical with a licensed health care provider. Your physical form will be mailed to your home address this month.
3. Complete a health assessment after having your blood drawn with Wyoming Health Fairs. Please note this is a new health assessment that is being offered through Wyoming Health Fairs and the Mayo Clinic. This is the only assessment that you will need to take. This replaces the assessment on the Cigna website. You still will receive a \$50 incentive after completing the assessment.

Activate your health assessment with Wyoming Health Fairs one of two ways:

1. If you attend a blood draw event with Wyoming Health Fairs, you can request to be activated for your assessment at that time. For the schedule of Wyoming Health Fair blood draw events, go to www.wyominghealthfairs.com/state_employees.htm. Your blood draw results will automatically populate into the assessment. The results also will be mailed to your home or e-mailed to you, whichever you request. Then go to www.BeWellembodyhealth.com to complete your assessment.
2. If you have already participated in a blood draw event within the last 90 days, call Wyoming Health Fairs directly at (800) 979-3711.

Please note: If your blood screenings are performed by a different health care provider, after you activate your health assessment by calling the 800 number listed above, you may enter your blood screening information at that time.

The Fall 2011 "Wyoming Wellness Newsletter" was mailed to your home address.

OPEN ENROLLMENT

Changes made during open enrollment will become effective Jan. 1, 2012. This period allows employees and/or their dependents (spouse and/or children) to enroll in the health and preventive dental, and optional dental (subject to dental waiting period) benefit plans if they are not currently enrolled.

Also at this time, employees may elect to make the following changes:

- * Drop coverage (must remain in the optional dental program for one year)
- * Drop dependents (spouse/and or children)
- * Change deductible options
- * Change premium pre-tax and post-tax options (flexible spending for premiums)
- * Enroll or renew flexible spending accounts (medical and/or dependent care)

The following voluntary benefits have waiting periods if you did not choose to enroll when you first became eligible: vision, short-term disability (STD), long-term disability (LTD) and long-term care (LTC). You may inquire about these benefits at any time.

All paperwork must be completed and submitted to the district's Benefits Office no later than Nov. 30, 2011.

The state's September 2011 "Benefits Press" was mailed to your home address.

You may attend one of two sessions of the State of Wyoming Employee Group Insurance open enrollment meetings, both of which will be held at the CSF-McKinley Annex:

- * Tuesday, Oct. 25 11 a.m. to noon
- * Tuesday, Oct. 25 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Arlene Steward, benefits and salary manager, may be reached at (307) 253-5208 if you have any questions.

CC's Western History Center offers resources for NCS D students

By Jennifer Cousineau

The Internet likely is one of the first places students go these days to conduct research. With its instant access and [sometimes] reliable resources, it's no wonder why. But because we live in such a digital, at-your-fingertips world, are we forgetting about the hidden treasures that lie in books, maps, memoirs and photographs?

Located not too far from these same fingertips is the Casper College Western History Center, which houses a myriad of information, primarily of the Casper area, but also of the county, state and region. Its archivists and staff members are sitting with breath that is baited, just waiting to open their doors to NCS D students and help them with their research projects.

Sherri Litzinger's third-grade Manor Heights class recently utilized the center. They were given tours of the archive rooms and then got to work in teams to dig up facts about local banks, the original courthouse, Wyoming Medical Center, newspapers and schools.



Students from Sherri Litzinger's third-grade Manor Heights class recently visited the Casper College Western History Center (CCWHC) to conduct research on Casper's history. In this picture, they are looking through the Casper Star-Tribune Western Vertical Files. Photo provided by Vince Crolla, CCWHC.

"The [Center] is a great educational resource that our school district needs to take advantage of in educating our students about Casper history," Litzinger said. "My students had a wonderful time completing this research project with me. I think this is just something new to make school more fun for our students."

Though students of all age are welcome at the center, Teri Hedgpeth, Western History Center archivist, said that she and her staff are targeting third-graders and junior high and high school students — third-graders because they are required to learn about and understand Casper history, and secondary students because of National History Day. Resources available include: photographs, newspapers, books, manuscripts, obituaries, microfilm, blueprints, transcribed oral histories and some physical items or "ephemera," which Hedgpeth said tell their own stories. (None of the resources are loaned outside of the Casper College campus.)

"You don't have to teach history just through a piece of paper," Hedgpeth said. "You can teach through maps, photos and much more."

Hedgpeth assured that her goal is not to do the research for the students but rather, to enable *them* to do it.

"The thrill of discovery is cool," she said. "I love that myself!"

If you are interested in having Hedgpeth visit your class to talk about CCWHC resources or if you would like to arrange for a tour of the center, contact her at 268-2680 or hedgpeth@caspercollege.edu. The center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and is located in the Goodstein Library Building (LI 202). There is no charge to use the center or its resources.

For information on the 2012 National History Day project and how the center can help, visit www.caspercollege.edu/whc.

REST ASSURED: SCHOOL FOOD IS SAFE

By Jennifer Cousineau

Every person who handles or otherwise has anything to do with food in schools has been (and continues to be) highly trained in everything from receiving food, storage of it and proper ways to serve it, just to name a few, according to Mike Pyska, Natrona County School District Food Services manager.

All food-related staff — from warehousemen who deliver food, cooks and people in the kitchen who prepare it, lunch clerks, servers and even Pyska himself — take a ServSafe class, sponsored by the National Restaurant Association, in February and recertify in that class every five years. Pyska said he believes NCSD is the only district in the state that requires staff to take this training.

“This is a good program because food-borne illnesses are my worst nightmare,” Pyska said, especially when outbreaks like Listeria in cantaloupe and Romaine lettuce make national news. “We started this training to make me sleep easier at night. It covers everything from receiving food, safe storage temperatures, how to heat and cool food, different types of bacteria and what types of food cause different [bacteria] outbreaks. It’s important that we pay attention to this because we could make someone seriously sick.”

The training also includes information about personal hygiene (hand washing, gloves, hair nets, etc.), and checking for physical contaminants, such as not storing bottles of Ajax or bleach on a shelf above — or anywhere near — food.

In addition to vigorous staff training, all district kitchens are inspected twice a year by the Casper-Natrona County Health Department to ensure standards are being met. NCSD also is required to have a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) program, which monitors safety with food temperatures and times, and procedures for safely preparing food. Regarding the Listeria scare in produce, Pyska said that there are strict protocols in place for prepping fresh fruits and vegetables.

“Even if there was Listeria on a melon,” he said, “if you prepare it correctly there’s a greater chance of it not contaminating the food,” though he assured that the district will not be serving Rocky Ford cantaloupe any time soon.

“We will send California cantaloupe, which has shown no sign of illness,” he went on to say. “The public tends to get in a hysteria about certain illnesses, and rightfully so. But just because cantaloupe from one field in Colorado has Listeria, doesn’t mean the entire nation should or is going to stop eating cantaloupe.”

“Every day there is a chance of a possible contaminant that we monitor. The state sends us bulletins of recalled food and we make sure we’re not sending any of that out to our students. There’s a lot more to this job than making sure kids have food. We need to make sure kids have safe food.”



Any district staff member who has anything to do with food receives rigorous training to prevent food-borne illnesses, contamination, etc.

HIGH SCHOOL SYSTEMS WORK MOVES FORWARD

By Jennifer Cousineau

Last week, members of the Facilities & Technology Division met with representatives of Fanning Howey, the educational planning firm that has been contracted to develop the educational specifications and the most cost-effective remedy for the Natrona County School District high school system. Officials from the Wyoming School Facilities Department also participated via video conference.

“All the right players were at the table,” Mark Antrim, associate superintendent of Facilities & Technology, said.

Meetings also have been held to set up “roles, goals and controls for the delivery of that most cost-effective remedy,” which, according to Antrim, is to be produced by Nov. 10. Fanning Howey reps also have toured Kelly Walsh and Natrona County high schools, and have met with Dr. Mark Mathern, associate superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, who has worked with a very inclusive team to develop programming for the Center for Advanced and Professional Studies (CAPS).

There has been considerable discussion surrounding enrollment numbers that will be used to design the high school system. Antrim said the consultant will work through these issues over the next couple of weeks.

District personnel and Fanning Howey staff will hold weekly meetings through Nov. 10, to keep the work moving forward.

Could your students use a Tote?

By Lori Burns

Totes of Hope is a weekend food program that serves hungry students. Food is purchased at low cost from the Wyoming Food Bank of the Rockies. Plastic grocery bags of food are sent home with children on Fridays to help sustain them through weekends when school meals are unavailable.

Almost 60,000 Wyoming children live at or below the poverty line. Of those, more than half live in a family where at least one parent works full time. As jobs remain scarce and expenses continue to rise, many families aren’t making ends meet. About 9 percent of all Wyoming children experience food insecurity. That means they have gone without a meal because their family couldn’t afford enough food. Hunger leads to other problems, as well. Children who don’t eat are more likely to be ill and to act out, and they are less likely to be successful in school.

Currently, the Totes of Hope program is feeding about 100 students a week, and there is space available to feed an additional 100 students. There is no paperwork required for a student/family to qualify. A district staff member only has to identify a child or family in need and contact NCSD Totes of Hope program lead Lori Burns.

Totes is funded entirely by donations to the non-profit Casper Area Education Foundation. It costs only \$4 a week to feed a child, but that \$4 can make a tremendous impact. Please consider making a donation to support our students or donating plastic grocery bags for distribution purposes.

For more information on how to enroll a student in-need, volunteer, make a donation or if you have any questions, please contact Lori Burns in NCSD Community Partnerships at Lori_Burns@natronaschools.org or 253-5394.

NATRONA

COUNTY SCHOOLS
970 N. GLENN RD.
CASPER, WY 82601

ATTEND NOVEMBER DIVERSITY TASK FORCE MEETING

The NCSD Diversity Task Force will hold its November meeting on the 10th, from 4:45 to 6 p.m. in the Westwood Room at CSF. At the time of print, agenda items had yet to be determined.

HAVE YOU TURNED IN YOUR UNITED WAY FORM?

All schools and departments should have received United Way pledge forms for the 2011 campaign. Please return them to Geoellen Stretesky in MultiMedia Services at CSF by Oct. 28, keeping in mind that being the largest employer in the county, NCSD is a pacesetter for the rest of the community.

Every cent donated goes toward changing the life of someone right

here in Natrona County. If every employee donates \$5 per paycheck (\$60 for the year), we would hit \$150,000!

If you need more forms or have questions, call Geoellen at 253-5339. You also can visit www.unitedwaync.com for more information.

UPDATE: DISTRICTWIDE RECYCLING ON HOLD

After speaking with members of the Facilities & Technology Division, it was advised that I choose a few pilot schools to kick off the districtwide recycling program that was begun last spring. After review of what is currently done in the schools and the perceived eagerness to recycle, I chose six schools and since submitting my quote request to the city, I have received pleas from

five additional schools, asking to be added to the list. The following is what I asked for:

* Southridge: magazine/newspaper, copy paper, plastic

* Frontier: magazine/newspaper, copy paper, plastic (cardboard already is being recycled)

* Park: magazine/newspaper, copy paper

* Summit: magazine/newspaper, copy paper

* University Park: magazine/newspaper, copy paper

* NCHS: plastic (copy paper already is being recycled)

* Pineview: copy paper

* Grant: cardboard

* Cottonwood: cardboard

* Fort Caspar: additional cardboard bin or pickup

* Verda James: magazine/newspaper, copy paper, cardboard

Representatives from the city told me that the city does not currently offer plastic collection services. If your school wants to recycle plastic, someone from your school (staff, parents, students, etc.) will need to volunteer their time to take the bottles to recycling depots.

Just last week, I was directed to create a proposal for the Board Budget Development Committee as it begins planning next year's budget. Please continue to do what your school has been doing as far as recycling efforts go. I apologize this is taking so long but I feel very confident that it will all be worth it in the end.

Please feel free to e-mail or call me if you have questions.

~ Jennifer Cousineau,
253-5382

