



Blackfoot School District 55

Directions Newsletters

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Directions: Blackfoot School District #55 Newsletter

Volume 6 Issue 1

Early October 2013

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Welcome back everyone! This school year brings some news that I've looked forward to sharing with you.

I'm sorry for the delay in publishing this; by now most of you have probably heard of the problems we had with our network. We're grateful for all the persistent work and patience that our Technology Center staff have showed in seeing it through.

Charles Stanford, public relations specialist

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2013 employees of the year gather on the BPAC stage during the staff meeting on August 27.

District Employees of the Year for 2012-2013, Continued

In our June newsletter, we presented most of the recipients of the Teacher and Inviting Employee of the Year awards for 2012-2013. Here we present two more.

Irving Kindergarten Center:

Blackfoot native Julia Nilsson enjoys her "wonderful job" teaching at Irving. She says: "5-6-year-olds are typically very excited about school and very teachable, so the kids make it the best job in the world!" She has been teaching at Irving for 14 years, after four years teaching in Snake River. She appreciates the "very cohesive teaching staff" and "very positive environment" at Irving.

Asked about a particular challenge from last year, she answered: "the most difficult thing was seeing a lot of, not just a few but so many, little children who had very hard things going on in their personal lives. Keeping them going and learning and knowing that this was one place where they could find love and stability was the most challenging thing I faced throughout the year.

"I enjoy traveling when I have the time and money to do it. I love reading and I love spending time with my husband, kids and grandkids. The highlights of my summer were having my daughter and grandson there all summer while her husband is deployed and preparing for and seeing my son marry a sweet, lovely girl whom we all love!"

Also a Blackfoot native, Kristine Schnittgen works as special ed para-pro at Irving. This is her third year in this position, but she has worked for the district for eight years. One of her favorite experiences from last year involved helping a little girl who is blind. She says: "it's always a challenge to try and help a child who is almost non-verbal. I know they're trying so hard to get me to understand and I wish I

could just read their mind."

We thank both of these dedicated women for their hard work for the children of Blackfoot!

District Welcomes New Teachers

41 new teachers have joined our district this year. At a special meeting in the district office on August 20 they gathered to orient themselves in the district's policies and procedures and get acquainted with each other.

Below is a list of new staff who have made the commitment to dedicate their time to teaching.



Animated conversation among new colleagues.

- Chantelle Anderson: CNA teacher, BHS
- Darcy Barnes: Special Ed teacher, BHS
- Vicki Barrett: 1st grade teacher, Wapello
- Anne Bird: English teacher, MVMS
- Rachel Blanch: Extended resource/Special Ed teacher, Groveland
- Amber Blaylock: 6th grade teacher, BSGS
- Devin Bodkin: English teacher, BHS
- Sarah Briscoe: 4th grade teacher, D.D. Stalker
- Ellie Cantrell: P.E./Health teacher, MVMS
- Jennifer Colley: Speech/Debate teacher, BHS
- Heidi Cornell: Math teacher, MVMS
- James Davenport: English teacher, BHS
- Jan Dorn: English teacher, BHS
- Chris Dunbar: Choir teacher, BHS and MVMS
- Kala Ebbe: Counselor, D.D. Stalker, Fort Hall and Ridge Crest
- Tracy Folsom: 3rd grade teacher, I.T. Stoddard
- Daniel Frongner: Math teacher, MVMS
- Theresa Garcia: 1st grade teacher, Ridge Crest
- Camille Georgeson: 5th grade teacher, Fort Hall
- Tonya Hanson: 4th grade teacher, Wapello
- Erica Hernandez: 2nd grade teacher, I.T. Stoddard
- Michael Hiatt: Counselor, BSGS
- Terri Jansma: 6th grade teacher, BSGS
- John Johnson: Math teacher, BHS
- Justine Kelley: Kindergarten teacher, Irving
- Amanda Lammers: Kindergarten teacher, Fort Hall
- Daniel Lewis: Art teacher, MVMS and BSGS
- Nicole Likes: Kindergarten teacher, Irving
- Lecia Lopez: District-wide consulting teacher
- Kelli Martinez: Special Ed teacher, MVMS
- Mercy Nelson: 1st grade teacher, D.D. Stalker
- Emily Palmer: 2nd grade teacher: Wapello
- Cindi Peterson: 1st grade teacher, D.D. Stalker
- Debora Peterson: 2nd grade teacher, D.D. Stalker
- Mandee Peterson: ENL teacher, D.D. Stalker
- Jodi Togiai: Instructional coach, BHS and MVMS
- Eleshia Watson, 6th grade teacher, BSGS
- Janean White: 6th grade teacher, BSGS
- Nicki Wieland: 1st grade teacher, I.T. Stoddard
- Tringle Witt: Math teacher, MVMS
- Tanner Smith, Business Ed teacher, BHS



Superintendent Chad Struhs reminds district employees of their responsibilities to the children.

Staff Meeting

Over the past month, employees of the Blackfoot School District have been preparing for the return of students to the classrooms. Part of that preparation was a meeting held in the BPAC auditorium on August 27 for all district staff. In the meeting, MVMS Principal Todd Lauritsen recognized the 2012-2013 Teachers and Inviting Employees of the Year.

Blackfoot Education Association Co-President Jackie Bombard encouraged us to respond positively to the current conditions in education, using an analogy of a carrot, an egg and coffee. Each of those things respond differently to boiling water: the carrot goes soft, the egg stiffens, but the coffee changes the water into an appealing beverage. Comparing the stresses of our jobs to hot water, she called on us to respond to those stresses by changing our working environments for the better. She then presented this year's BEA officers.

In a presentation that was brief but to the point, Superintendent Chad Struhs called

on us all to consider our work in light of metaphors taken from the recent animated movie Rise of the Guardians. During the movie it becomes clear that the guardians have become overwhelmed and distracted by their day-to-day responsibilities. Although they are charged with protecting the world's children from evil, the appearance of an actual child in their midst confounds and flabbergasts them. Struhs called on teachers to guard against suffering a similar fate. He said "don't get so caught up in the mechanics of teaching that we forget what education is about." MVMS History Teacher Jason Winward appreciated the irony of being too busy helping children to make time for a child. Commenting on the presentation afterward he said "we need to take a step backward to make sure our efforts are not in vain."

Reflecting on the character of the Sandman, Superintendent Struhs warned against the negative effects that outside pressures from government and society can have on the dreams of our children, and called on each teacher to stay mindful of the core motivation which drove them to work in education. "Let us keep the hopes and dreams alive," he said. He then challenged all of us to remember that we take on a sacred charge in the guardianship of the children entrusted to our care.

"I thought it was a very good meeting. Jackie did a great job with her speech! I appreciated Chad's presentation," said Librarian Tamera Hickman, who works at Ridge Crest and Wapello. BHS Social Studies Teacher Valerie Williams agreed: "Very inspiring! It gave me pause to stop and think: what is my center and how can I find it?" Language Arts Teacher Traci Kirby, also at BHS, said that both presentations "were positive and made me feel like what I do as a teacher is important. What makes us who we are as educators? When we find ourselves, we need to give it to the children."

District Students in Sho-Ban Parade

The 50th Annual Shoshone-Bannock Festival took place on August 9-11. Students from our district were well-represented in the parade on August 8. Among them were outgoing Miss Sho-Ban Queen Natasha Watson (who graduated from BHS in 2012), the BHS Indian Club, and Fort Hall Elementary Princess Chelsirae Means.

The parade was a joy to watch, with plenty of traditional regalia and handicrafts on display, as well as horseback riding, cycling and dancing. Floats sported clever decorations, from which participants threw candy and other favors to the crowd in an abundance that had to be seen to be believed.



2012-2013 Miss Sho-Ban Queen Natasha Watson greets spectators.

You can see some [pictures of the event here](#).



Kindergarten Registration Enlists New Helpers

On August 14, Irving Kindergarten Center hosted its [registration in BHS' new gymnasium](#). This year they tried out something new: each elementary school sent a secretary to help new students register, according to which of the schools the student would attend next year. The gym had several stations around its edge, including Ashley Wasia from the Blackfoot Public Library, which is dedicated to working closely with our district in providing the children of Blackfoot with good reading opportunities.

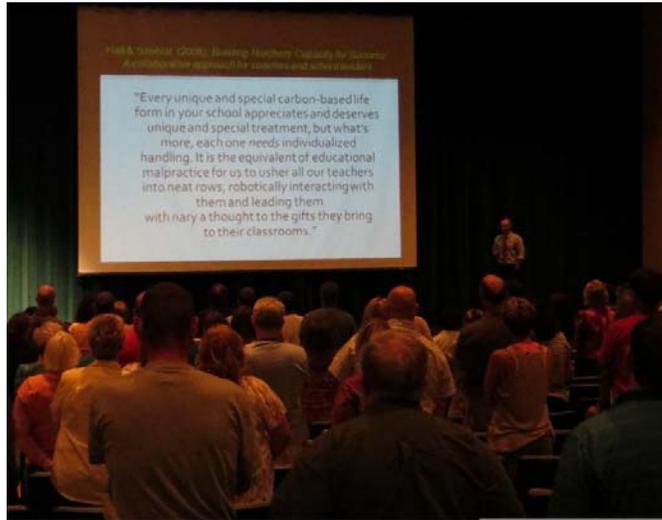
Alysse Bingham and Sally Parris, ready to assist.

While there I made some new friends who were eager to show off their athletic prowess, running and cartwheeling across the waxed floor.

Instructional Coaches

On August 21, administrators and teachers in the Blackfoot School District attended a special training session. Educational consultant Pete Hall prepared the district to use its new corps of instructional coaches. An instructional coach is an on-site professional developer who collaborates with educators to identify and assist with implementation of proven teaching methods.

In addressing us, Hall emphasized the central role of teachers in student achievement. Those charged with mentoring and helping the teachers to improve must look to their unique qualities. Changing habits is hard work, he said, but it can be done.



Pete Hall shares his philosophy with the new instructional coaches.

A Re-start for Summit

The [Summit Middle School](#) is bravely underway with two new teachers and 17 students, meeting in three rooms on the second floor of the district office. An [article in the Morning News](#) focused on Summit, pointing out its base in project-based learning. That phrase, "project-based learning," may sound like a newfangled notion, almost trendy, but it is not a new way of learning at all. Efforts to structure school around projects seek to approach the natural ways that people have always learned throughout history.



Summit students gather to race mousetrap cars.

Teachers Garth Carlson (formerly fifth grade, Fort Hall) and Amy Wren (formerly fourth grade, Wapello), and Principal Brandee Hewatt (Wapello) have worked hard all summer to prepare the school. Together with family and student volunteers they have hauled books, furniture and all kinds of supplies up and down the stairs. They also interviewed each prospective student to make sure they would fit with the school's plans and objectives.

Of the 17 students in Summit this year, three are returning from last year, and the school has a mix of 6th, 7th and 8th graders working together. So far they have assembled their own furniture, visited a local nursing home and the Eastern Idaho State Fair, and recently held a race of mousetrap cars that they built (though the cars were judged by distance traveled, not by speed). The teachers believe in letting students figure out as much as they can for themselves, and so they gave them the primary responsibility in finding out just how a mousetrap car is supposed to work. You can see some [shots of the final competitions here](#).

New Journalism Class at MVMS

In a classroom crackling with wit, Language Arts Teacher Randy Hickman led a group of eighth-graders in a discussion of photographic composition last week. These 16 students have enrolled in Mr. Hickman's Print Journalism 8 class, which is making its debut this trimester. Although the class is one that students choose to enroll in, it fulfills the English 8 requirement and therefore still leaves all the normal elective slots open. The class is designed for students who enjoy writing and aims to immerse them in the world of print journalism, working as realistically as possible like a professional magazine staff. The students will produce two digital magazine issues each trimester using desktop computers, digital cameras and other tools as needed. As a beginning exercise, the students experimented with digital cameras, taking photographs that they later analyzed in light of the medium's aesthetic and informational characteristics.

Originally, Mr. Hickman hoped to secure funding through a grant to help run the class, but even without it, he has high hopes for what the students will accomplish.

The power and agility of young minds bent to a task of their choosing may never cease to amaze the alert observer. It is wonderfully apparent in the earnest enthusiasm these students show towards learning and discussing the principles presented in the classroom. Their work will be something to watch for.

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As autumn progresses, our wonderful students continue to distinguish themselves by the good things they do. We have seen more changes in personnel and programs, always bringing more challenges and opportunities.

If you are on Facebook, be sure to check our page regularly for what they like to call "exclusive content": there are more updates and pictures on there than I can fit comfortably in this newsletter.

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Margaret Contor Retires

September 30 marked the end of an era. Margaret Contor, who has worked at the district office for 20 years and in the district for 30, put in her last work day here. On the previous Friday, her grateful co-workers held a reception in her honor to bid her a fond farewell and thank her for her service.

Margaret has seen several changes in the Blackfoot School District since she began working here in 1983. After working as a substitute secretary for a short time she was hired as a part-time secretary at Second Chance which was a secondary alternative school program funded by a grant from the Idaho Bar Association. In January 1984, she began working full-time for the district as a secretary at Blackfoot Junior High School. She was then a secretary to the Assistant Superintendent. In 1989, she was hired as the secretary to the superintendent and deputy clerk to the board of trustees. During the last 24 years there were only 4 years she did not serve as the deputy clerk. She has served five superintendents, many different administrators, and 25 different board members.



District Office Staff on Playground Patrol

This year, district office staff have become familiar presences on the playground. Superintendent Chad Struhs, Business Manager Brian Kress, Student Support Director Kathy Lambson, Federal Programs Director Vicki Johnson and Curriculum Director Joy Mickelsen have donned orange vests at lunch time and traveled to the district's elementary schools, from the sixth grade next door all the way out to Fort Hall. They visit schools as requested once a week and have a good time while doing it.



Brian Kress enjoys a game of foursquare with sixth graders.

Bus Drivers' Breakfast

Our bus drivers are a wonderful group of down-to-earth and competent folk who are worth taking time to get to know. This crew knows how to have a good time too.



Melissa multitasks.

On October 23, as part of School Bus Safety Week, our Transportation department hosted a breakfast to thank the drivers for their hard work which is so easy to overlook day by day. It was a pleasure to meet some of the drivers, listen to their stories, observe their inspiring camaraderie, and see the formidable machine shop in the bus garage.

And let me not forget the food! There was a plenitude of pancakes, hashbrowns, eggs, sausage and bacon to ward off the creeping autumn chill, and then for dessert, Transportation Director Melissa Carrasco made three kinds of Dutch oven cobblers: apple, pumpkin and raspberry-pear-lemon. Yes, it was a good day to be a bus driver. You can see [pictures from the event here](#).



After-School Programs Increase

Children in Blackfoot have a rich array of opportunities for after-school activities. The Blackfoot School District is currently running two grants funded through 21st Century Community Learning Centers. According to the Idaho State Department of Education, the program is "designed to provide academic enrichment opportunities, art, music, recreation, sports, drug and violence prevention and youth development activities to students during non-school hours."

(<http://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/cclc/>) Schools and other organizations apply for the grants in October and are awarded in April.

The district received its first grant in 2010, with which it has funded after-school programs for Wapello Elementary, Fort Hall Elementary and Independence High School. In addition to out-and-about activities like swimming and bowling, students from the elementary schools benefit from spending time in art and craft projects with high school students. Other services include tutoring, homework help, and drug and alcohol counseling for high school students.

The most recent grant will pay for a project-based after-school program serving Blackfoot Sixth Grade School and the new Summit Middle School. This program will work in partnership with national charitable organizations for service learning organizations such as the sixth grade's annual turkey drive. Another partnership will be with the Idaho National Laboratory. A guest speaker from INL will present a project every month, and the program will organize family nights for students to share their work in math, science and engineering. Program staff will announce these events to parents of students and advertise them in the two schools.

In the district office, the after-school program for Summit Middle School has brought in many young people from other schools to take part in various learning projects, ranging from improvisational newspaper architecture to tinkering with a potato cannon. [You can see some pictures of the program here](#).

Independence High School began their program on September 23. [You can see pictures from their kick-off event here](#).

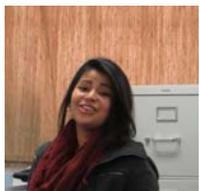
Service and Learning for Government Students at BHS

On September 30, 2013, students from Holly Kartchner's AP Government and We the People classes volunteered at the Willows Retirement & Assisted Living. They helped stage a kid-friendly rodeo event featuring live music, games, great food, and animals: chickens, horses, and goats. Each person who attended was given a cowboy hat and bandana to help get in the spirit of the rodeo. Children from the community enjoyed the activities and mingling with everyone else. They especially enjoyed the piñata shaped as a cowboy boot. Ms. Kartchner's students helped serve food, played with the children, and enjoyed getting acquainted with the members of the Willows. The students and children that attended were able to learn much about these individuals, and all enjoyed the company and stories that the elderly had to share.

Community service is a regular part of Holly Kartchner's classes, integral to learning and an indispensable part of good citizenship. Students in all of her classes also take part in regular discussions through a class blog on which students read and comment on news and opinion articles from home. Access to the blog is limited to the teacher and the students in the class, to protect their privacy and give them the security to express themselves.

-Article co-authored by Aleesha Lloyd

Second Year Spanish Students Learn about Music and Culture



Students in Paula Maldonado's second year Spanish classes at BHS learn more than vocabulary and grammar rules. Since language is so closely connected with culture, Paula gives her students the opportunity to get acquainted with cultural traditions of Spanish-speaking nations around the world. Students began the year by making their own coats of arms like the knights of old Spain, and their



classroom experience gives them several other cultural encounters, with a particular emphasis on Mexico, from whence so much influence has come to the United States through our close proximity and the movement of people and borders over the past 200+ years.

Recently the students have been learning about Mariachi music, a folk tradition that arose in the state of Jalisco and became so prominent in the 19th century that it has become one of the most iconic emblems of Mexican culture, along with other things from Jalisco such as the *charro* clothing that Mariachi performers appropriated during the music's professionalization and ascent to international popularity.

As part of this, the second-year classes learned a sad song of lost love, "Estos celos" by Vicente Fernandez. And on October 11, Sophomore Jeanette Ponce appeared as a guest singer in the two classes, in a performance that gained her a spot on the front-page of the *Morning News*. Jeanette and her family discovered her singing talent when her mother heard her singing Karaoke and mistook her voice for a professional recording.

Sra. Ponce performed "Yo soy una mujer" by the late Jenni Rivera, an affirmation of femininity told from the voice of a woman who knows her faults as a mortal but confidently declares her self-worth. She is a romantic soul who may fall in love to a song or poem. She does not worry about whether she is worse or better than others: she knows who she is and is content with her identity.

On November 1, students in Sra. Maldonado's second hour class worked together to decorate the hallway outside the classroom for el Día de los Muertos - the Day of the Dead - on November 1, after learning something of the holiday's cultural and religious background. The holiday is one of many products of syncretism between Christian and native beliefs. Students made traditional *papel picado* decorations: designs cut into squares of colored tissue paper and then hung up in long garlands. They also set up and decorated a memorial altar with other traditional decorations: flowers, candles, and of course skulls. The skeletal iconography that is the most immediately recognizable representation of Day of the Dead comes from the indigenous American ethos of recognizing and celebrating the cycle of life.



You can see more pictures of the students setting up the decorations [here](#).

IHS Child care Helps Students Succeed

For many teenage girls who get pregnant, the event spells the end of their schooling, because they don't have the resources to see to the care of their children while attending school. When Kendrick Pereira found herself in this situation last year, it seemed that she would have to drop out. But now the 11th-grader has plans of finishing high school early and studying Nursing at Arizona University. She intends to get a Master's degree in the field eventually.

Completing a high school course of study has been possible for Pereira and other students who attend Independence High School, because the school includes a child care facility. Students with young children can bring their children on the bus and focus on their classes, knowing that the children are cared for and nearby. They visit their children during class breaks every hour and a half and at lunch. The rooms have rocking chairs, cribs and toys. This year there are seven children there, ranging in age from three months to eight years.

Sarah Sellers and Vaneen Kohler divide their time caring for the children while their mothers are in class. Sellers, who is in her fifth year in the program, began as a substitute teacher at Independence. A dropout herself, she came to the position with a strong empathy for the students there. When she told school personnel that she needed to arrange for child care, they said "don't bother: we have it here. Bring your child!" From that beginning, she soon assumed her current responsibility directing the facility.

Independence High School's child care program helps young women from places as far afield as Aberdeen, Pingree, Riverside, Shelley and Fort Hall. The young mothers are grateful for the support it offers them. This is one way the school has turned obstacles into learning opportunities. Sellers says that the presence of young children in this high school helps dispel some of the students' misconceptions about what parenting would be like, which encourages them to think more carefully about their actions.

Bonny Dupuis, who joined the IHS faculty this fall, teaches Family and Consumer Science classes, including a course in parenting and child development which is open to all students. Dupuis, who has studied child development, says that she is glad to offer support to the child care facility from her educational and professional background.



Students' pledges to "give drugs the boot" decorate the walls at Donald D. Stalker.

Red Ribbon Week

As usual, there has been plenty going on for Red Ribbon Week in our district this year. Students of all grades take part in a variety of activities, from art projects to themed dress-up days (including Hallowe'en) to special assemblies. Many of these activities focus on fun, but they also afford opportunities for more solemn reflection. Some examples:

At [Blackfoot Sixth Grade](#), students dressed up with their usual enthusiasm and decorated doors.

At [Donald D. Stalker Elementary](#), a visiting ventriloquist entertained the children, offering his rare skill in the service of the message to stay away from drugs.

Mountain View Middle School hosted their eighth annual [Cookies for Courage](#) assembly, presenting their tokens of appreciation to the local firefighters and law enforcement officers, honoring them with a video presentation, and regaling them with a performance of the percussion ensemble. At the end of the week, Officer Greg Austin led the students through a sobering presentation on the dangers of drunk driving: a staged [crash scene](#) with Blackfoot High drama students portraying victims and survivors.

Red Ribbon Week continues to be an important part of the school year for the Blackfoot School District.

Good Kids

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting with some wonderful students at Blackfoot High School. As I talked to them, they told me about their interests, including art, physics, comedy and a variety of sports. They talked about their plans to go to college, their love for their home town and the importance of keeping family relationships strong, even across long distances. A young man shared with me the joy he feels at visiting cousins in another state in the summers. A young woman hopes to either get a softball scholarship for college or study nursing. Another, inspired by the example of an older sister, would like to become a social worker specializing in criminal rehabilitation. A serious student and an avid learner, she has studied three foreign languages during her time at BHS. Discovering some shared interests, we enjoyed an inspiring conversation, and I was able to refer her to a former professional colleague who might help her on her own career path.

Where did I meet these fine young people? In detention.

That's right: it's not just the bad kids who go to detention. In fact, on the day I visited, the room was packed. Students may be sent to detention for a variety of reasons, but the most common by far is that they arrive late for class twice. As a consequence, students are required to spend an hour in detention copying out the school's tardy policy once for each time they are late beyond the accepted limit. Junior Joey Martinez finds himself bemused by what he sees as an escalation of enforcement for tardiness infractions: "at least we show up," he said. When I asked him why he gets to class late, he said that sometimes he gets delayed talking to friends in the hall, and more often it takes a while to get things he needs from his locker.

Most of the students I talked to were anxious to keep their identities anonymous, showing the stigma that the D-word can stick on a student's self-image, even if they are never guilty of any malicious wrongdoing. Ms. Carroll has been in charge of the detention room for seven years and has yet to meet a bad kid. "Each one has their own story," she says, "and I love them all."

My admittedly narrow observation bears out her experienced opinion. My life is better for having taken the time to share in the thoughts, feelings and dreams of these good people. I'm grateful for their extension of trust towards me, and I share this as a reminder to us all to look beyond our preconceptions and not judge people too hastily, especially the young ones in our care.