

School gets kids out walking

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

Every Wednesday morning, after the first bell rings at Sisters Elementary School, students stay outside on the playground. They're not there to play — they're there to walk. And they love it.

Staff and administrators at Sisters Elementary School are working to build community within their school. "Walking Wednesdays" allow students a chance to burn their energy and be outside in the fresh air for the first 10 minutes of the school day. It's not just for students. Staff and administration walk, too. Parents are invited to join in on the fun.

"Bring your coffee and walk the track with us," Principal Becky Stoughton said in her letter home to the families.

"It's great to get exercise," says third-grader Kayla Cashwell. "We are supposed to walk, but some kids like to run."

"It's my favorite part of the day," says another kindergartner.

"As a staff we worked on a motion and movement program last spring," says Stoughton. "Walking Wednesdays was born from that program — and the teachers asked for it again this school year. It falls into our school culture of building relationships with our students."

"I love being outside on these mornings," says kindergarten teacher Mylee Card. "There is something to be said for all of us, staff and students, about the fresh air. I wish we could do this every day."

"We want to bring families in the school at a different level of engagement," says Stoughton. "In general, kids aren't talking as much as they used to. I want adults in our school talking with kids, not talking at them. We are working hard to build conversations



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Students, teachers and parents get out walking in a community-building endeavor at Sisters Elementary School.

about what the students are doing and bring the families back into the school."

Sisters School District is one of four districts in the state of Oregon working with a grant from SWIFT Schools (Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation).

SWIFT, designed for grades K-8, is an on-going technical assistance process targeted to the needs of individual schools and districts. The program features five domains where each partner school receives training and support to better their programs. These domains include: creating a strong and engaged leadership and educator support system; inclusive academic and behavior instruction; fully integrated organizational structure and creating a strong and positive school culture; trusting family and community partnerships; and an inclusive local education agency/school relationship and policy framework.

"A SWIFT classroom represents a diverse learning community," according to the SWIFT Schools website. Using teachers, parent volunteers, specialized educators, and even peer-to-peer collaboration students are valued for their unique contribution to the classroom.

"This is year three of the SWIFT grant and we have a chance to go for another three years," says Stoughton. "It's not about the money with the grant, it's the technical assistance, research, and resources we receive and the support for our staff to help build relationships in and reconnect the community with our school."

While Walking Wednesdays is just one way the school is trying to bring more families into the school community, it is definitely one of the most visible. Monthly "Family Nights" are planned, focusing on different areas of curriculum — math, reading and literature, and art. Parents can get involved in these activities through the Sisters Parent-Teacher Community (SPTC), which meets monthly at the school.

Walking Wednesdays will continue through the year, even on inclement weather days. Students and staff can use the natural track made up within the school, around the halls, from the gym through the commons and around the C wing.

"Let's bring the families back into the school," says Stoughton. "Sisters Elementary volunteers and families are more than just field trips and bake sales — we are a community."

A close call on the highway...



PHOTO COURTESY THE FLY FISHER'S PLACE

According to witnesses, on Monday afternoon a semi-truck crossed the line at a curve and struck a trailer pulling a drift boat before running off the road on Highway 126 just east of Sisters. The occupants of the vehicle were unhurt. The truck driver reportedly fled the scene on foot.

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