

Middle school aims to improve

By Leslie Mitts
Spilyay Tymoo

Faces aren't the only things new at Jefferson County Middle School this year.

Along with 12 new staff members and two new administrators, JCMS is implementing policy changes and striving to improve curriculum.

Ken Clark is the new principal at JCMS, after spending the past three years at Madras High School as an assistant principal.

He said families are encouraged to stop in and speak with the administration at JCMS. "We want them to know us as much as we want to know them," he said.

Clark has many plans for JCMS, he said.

"I want to hold the idea that JCMS is a unique school," Clark said. "I also want to create a school that basically provides the students a seamless transition from the middle school to high school."

Because of that, the behavioral expectations are now in line with the high school's expectations. Clark said he also wants to make sure that the curriculum demonstrates a clear learning path to the students.

"The kids will actually be able to see the progress," he said. "They'll be able to share with each other."

This way, in Clark's opinion,

"The kids have a real chance at a good, quick start in high school."

David Davis, a new assistant principal, comes to JCMS from Olympia, Wash., where he was a high school counselor.

He's optimistic about the upcoming school year. "We had a great start to the year so far," he said.

Part of that, he added, is due to the excellent staff.

This year, Davis said, several policy changes have gone into effect. Electronics (like cell phones and mp3 players) are now prohibited at the school.

In addition, he said, "We're a little bit more strict in our visitation regulations and our dress code."

While the dress code was there before, it wasn't necessarily enforced. According to Davis, the code is now clearly delineated for students.

As for visitation policies, Davis said they are just aiming to have the policy more clear to the public.

Davis said they are also going to be trying to improve performance on state testing and working on testing standards.

All of these policy changes are aimed at creating a better educational setting, Davis said.

"These policies were all given to the kids in their student handbooks," he added.

Matt Newell is returning to

JCMS as an assistant principal, and said there are several programs that are continuing to help students excel.

The EBS program was organized to give student positive reinforcement.

"Basically it helps students who make good choices," Newell said. "It helps them be recognized."

This year, Newell said, they have been working on implementing that in the school system and in the classroom.

"It's a really great reminder for the teacher to identify the kids who are doing a good job," he said.

Newell said that in addition to a positive staff, the students have shown some excellent behavior changes—leading to an initial decrease in detentions.

One aspect that all the administrators stress is a steady attendance rate.

According to Butch David, liaison for JCMS, the school is sympathetic to the needs of Native American students.

"A lot of kids miss a lot of school because of funerals," he said, or because of traditional family gatherings like the Pendleton Round Up or fishing trips on the Columbia River.

Students are also absent during Root Feast or because of rodeos or pow wows.

If a student has to miss school, David said, it is impor-

tant for the parents to call the school in attempt to prearrange homework with the student's teachers.

In his opinion, "I feel it would benefit them and their parents in the future."

Attendance is something that David said the school district has been working on for years—even trying to petition the state for a traditional leave day. "We're still working on that area," he said.

One thing that David believes can help parents and their students is the use of "Power School," an online program that tracks attendance and grades for each student.

If parents have questions about the program, David said help can be provided at any of the school's 509j school district.

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Families unite with FAST program

By Leslie Mitts
Spilyay Tymoo

The FAST program at Jefferson County Middle School may have been around last year, but this year the program is quickly gaining popularity.

FAST, which stands for Families and Students Together, is a multifamily group intervention designed to improve communication and promote togetherness in families.

Liz Littledeer is the coordinator of the program that has been growing steadily since its beginning at JCMS in 2005.

"It's a family functioning program that helps youth and family communities spend time together, enjoy a meal together," Littledeer explained.

The youth involved with the FAST program participate in a group session once per week. It's an activity, Littledeer said, that aims to teach the students about cultural awareness, team building and communication.

During the group sessions students practice talking with their parents. After the fifth week of group sessions, families come together for "family nights" for several weeks.

Families don't have to be traditional either, Littledeer said. "They just have to bring an adult," she explained. Sometimes that adult ends up being a grandparent, guardian, or simply the adult the student spends the most time with.

During the family nights, the families first start out by making a family flag. At the end of the program they are able to take their flag home with them.

During the family nights there are several group sessions—first there is a session with all of the families together, complete with talking, singing and more.

Then they split into three groups: one for middle-school students, one for parents, and one for the siblings. After that the groups reunite.

This way, Littledeer said, the parents are able to work on their communication skills both along-side and separate from their stu-

dents.

The groups are meant to reflect actual society as well, Littledeer said. "It's ethnically balanced," she added. "The team has to represent the same percentage in ethnicity that the school population is."

In the school, Littledeer said, "We have more Hispanics and Native Americans and it's the same on our team."

"It also has to be representative gender-wise," she added.

Currently there are 18 families participating in the program. Before they are able to participate, the FAST program conducts a home visit with each family.

During that visit, Littledeer said, they discuss the family's likes and dislikes—something that is used later during a fixed raffle.

For the raffle, a basket is prepared involving items that relate to each family, Littledeer explained. At some point during the series of family nights, each family will win the raffle.

Part of their winnings includes \$50 in cash, in order to help the family when it is their responsibility to prepare a meal for the group.

After their participation in the FAST program, Littledeer said, the families go through a "graduation" and receive certificates of completion and appreciation.

But they aren't finished then. Littledeer said the families then enter the program they call FAST Works—which some participate in for up to two years.

During this phase, families are able to remain in contact with the other families from their team and continue working on communication.

"Usually by the end they're pretty good friends with the other parents," Littledeer said. Because of that, parents are able to work together better in terms of forming Parent-Teacher Associations or other support groups.

Littledeer said she was surprised at the reaction from the participating families.

While at first she was unsure that families would want to do

a home visit and go through the experience, she said, now there are so many enrolling that a waiting list has been started.

"It's pretty exciting," she said. "It's been very busy."

FAST was developed in 1988 for at-risk youth.

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