

Suicide prevention, attendance, eligibility engage Banks board

Discussion October 13 at the Banks school board meeting was largely about topics that impact teens. The district has partnered with Forest Grove and Gaston school districts to provide suicide prevention training for staff, students and the community. The board also discussed revising the policy controlling student eligibility for sports and activities, review of the elementary lifelong guidelines, administrator and facility reports completed the meeting.

SAFE Teen program

Student assistance counselor Sandy Cox introduced Forest Grove school nurse Michelle Bero, who made a brief presentation about developing suicide prevention skills. A key group of counselors, and others who work closely with teens, were trained in the SAFE (Suicide Awareness For Everyone) Teen program this past summer. The goal of the program is to make staff, students and community aware of skills that can be used to prevent suicide. Bero told the board that the research-based program has been in use for over 10 years and, where it has been implemented, there has been a marked decline in suicide rates.

The program was adopted in response to a double suicide attempt/suicide in Forest Grove last spring. According to Bero, at least 15 students came forward after the incident, indicating awareness that the students were considering suicide. Additional students indicated they had considered suicide, too. Cox said Banks staff worked with 19 students who had considered suicide, with a total of three hospitalizations.

Cox and Bero stressed the importance of training everyone because "you never know who a student will turn to." Banks staff will be trained at an in-service on November 20. Parents and community members have two opportunities to attend the evening training sessions. The first will be in Forest Grove November 13; the second in Banks on December 3. More detailed information will be covered in the next issue of *The INDEPENDENT*.

Elementary Guidelines

On a more positive note, elementary Principal Marty Voge told the board about guidelines adopted in order to present a consistent message of expectations for the variety of children

who come through the door. The guidelines are as follows:

Be Trustworthy: Act in a manner that makes you worthy of trust and confidence;

Be Truthful: Be honest about things and feeling with oneself and others;

Use Active Listening: Listen with the intention of understanding what the speaker means to communicate;

Use no Put-Downs: Do not use words, actions and/or body language to degrade, humiliate, or dishonor others;

Do Your Personal Best using the following life skills; Integrity, initiative, flexibility, perseverance, organization, sense of humor, effort, common sense, problem solving, responsibility, patience, friendship, curiosity, cooperation, caring, courage, pride, and resourcefulness.

Voge went on to explain the High Flyers Club. He told the board that about 180 kids, representative of all academic achievement levels, have signed up for the program. Students must obtain a sponsor to work with them to complete their pursuit. A sponsor can be any adult willing to support the student.

The program has six components. The first is to name and describe the five lifelong guidelines. The second component stresses academic achievement tied to state benchmarks in math. Though attendance was considered for the third component, timely completion of homework was selected instead. Attendance issues sometimes are not within students' control, Voge explained, but students can control turning

in homework when it is due. The fourth component requires a candidate to do his personal best and not receive any behavioral referrals. The fifth component requires student candidates to obtain their teacher's signature verifying their efforts in classroom performance, regardless of their level of academic achievement. The final component is participation in three hours of community service, verified by the sponsor, over the 12-week period. This activity must be outside of the candidate's home and/or family, but is otherwise very broadly defined.

Junior High Report

One area of concentration this year in the junior high school, Principal Mark Everett reported, is improved attendance and the identification of struggling students as early as possible. The effort has prompted approximately 60 phone calls to parents in order to offer strategies for academic success to students who have been identified as having difficulty. Parents have expressed appreciation for the early and personal notification, Everett said.

After questions from the board about how students are transitioning to junior high, Everett said that this year's seventh grade class has done well, but the eighth grade class continues to struggle. Educators recognize that classes differ from year to year, Superintendent Marilyn McGlasson added, and a shift of just a few students can make a dramatic change in class personality, often accounting for a difference

in classes' ability to adjust.

High School Report

High School Principal Jim Foster told the board that calling parents directly seems to get them into the school to discuss issues concerning their students. He said the site council will be addressing the problem of declining participation in student activities. Foster also said that drug and alcohol awareness programs need to be emphasized due to an increase in alcohol and drug related problems. He added that the state university system will not be accepting a "D" as credit for classes required for entry into the university system beginning with the Class of 2006.

Eligibility Policy review

McGlasson told the board they have a "moral obligation" to seriously consider the athletic and activity eligibility policy in order to avoid the appearance of complicity in varying enforcement of policy. She said that problems have occurred when coaches of one sport apply a higher standard than policy requires, resulting in differing treatment of students in different sports seasons. Foster added that there are changes that he, the athletic director and coaches wanted to make.

A broad-based committee is looking at neighboring schools and at policies of other Cowapa League schools, McGlasson said. The committee will report

to the board in February or March along with proposed revisions. McGlasson stressed that policy is first and foremost a board responsibility but that it was a good opportunity to examine the policy from all angles, and to work collaboratively with the staff.

Facilities

Though McGlasson's characterization of the high school buildings (built in 1960 and 1969) as "aging" drew a snort from *The INDEPENDENT* reporter (Vernonia's newest school was built in 1953), she accurately informed the board that upgrading buildings is an increasing concern. The high school gym was closed for a while to replace chains that hold light fixtures. Steam pipes were repaired, and the community gym, junior high and high school are being re-keyed to solve security issues in those areas. McGlasson reported that all gyms are in use from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with scheduling through the athletic director. Every building administrator turns in a monthly safety report about his building. The board suggested that administrators rotate, to review the condition of another building and ensure that familiarity does not allow unsafe conditions to be overlooked. Foster, Everett and Voge agreed with the board, indicating they could actually have fun accomplishing an otherwise boring task.

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