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## School year advancing rapidly

By Dr. Brenda S. Dietrich, Superintendent of Schools

Can you believe the first quarter has come and gone and..... as of Friday, October 31st there are only 31 school days left before winter break! This school year is certainly moving swiftly forward. It's hard to imagine the first semester ending so quickly and to realize that we have very few weeks left with our students in 2003.

I would like to bring you up-to-date on some "old news" and some "interesting news" happening in USD 437. First of all, I hope you have all received the correct health insurance cards for you and/or your family. There were some glitches with getting those cards to you in a timely manner, but the glitches were a Blue Cross Blue Shield issue over which we had no control. The Business Office worked diligently on your behalf to make sure you could get the services you needed, even if you did not have your new card.

Unfortunately, BCBS insures many school districts and businesses in Kansas whose enrollment period is exactly the same as ours. As you can imagine, the BCBS staff became overwhelmed with the volume of new applications they had to process, which caused the delay in our cards getting distributed promptly.

Some good news is that we gained over 50 new students in FTE this year. Our unofficial new student count is probably closer to 70 students, but we are being cautiously optimistic until we receive the final figures from the state auditor. Many of those new students are English Language Learners who have varying abilities to speak and understand English. Our ELL population has grown from 25 identified students in 2001-2002 to over 100 identified this school year. As a result of that dramatic growth, our ELL program and staff will need to expand to provide services for these students. The Board agreed last month to allow us to hire a long term substitute to assist our current ELL instructor and her aide this year, but we expect to have to ask for another certified ELL instructor for next year.

ParentConnect, an Internet based program that allows parents to access their child's grades, assignments, schedules and attendance, has been working very smoothly at the Middle School and High School. The feedback from parents who have registered to use ParentConnect has been overwhelmingly positive. Parents are feeling better informed about what their child is (or isn't) doing at school and are very appreciative of being able to see homework assignments, quiz and test grades, and long-term projects in a quick, easily accessed manner. Most staff members have indicated that ParentConnect has reduced phone calls and visits from parents and has helped to improve homework completion by students. We will begin to provide these same opportunities to parents of students in grades 4-6 during second semester.

The Board of Education will soon approve the construction documents to build a new Tallgrass Student Learning Center. The plan is to have the building completed in time for the start of the next school year. The location for the new 10,000 sq. foot building is on the south side of the intermediary road that runs from the high school to the middle school and just east of the high school tennis courts. The location is relatively flat and has utility access. We will have to relocate the middle school discus and shot-put ring, but that is a relatively small project. No decisions have been made for the future use of the modulars behind the high school that currently house Tallgrass.

You might notice other construction taking place at WRMS. The middle school will have a new 6-lane practice track in the spring, but it won't be finished in time for the first week of practice. The middle school students will have to start the season practicing on the high school track. Asphalt plants shut down in the winter and it's just not physically possible to get the dirt work done and the asphalt laid before track season begins in March.

Lastly, I would like to share some information about enrollment trends in Kansas that came from a KSDE presentation earlier this year. We tend to focus only on our own district and forget there are 302

other school districts across the state. Most people do not realize that USD 437 is the 15th largest school district in Kansas, either. Some of the trends I found most interesting were the following:

- Enrollment in Kansas is slightly declining
- The number of disadvantaged students is 35% and increasing
- The number of students with disabilities is 13% and increasing
- The number of minority students is 20% and increasing
- The number of students with English as a second language is 5.5% and increasing

The good news is that, last year, Kansas was tied for 4th place in the nation for having the highest percentage of students graduate from high school. Kansas is also one of the top 14 states in the nation with the highest percentage of high school graduates who go immediately on to college. Since 1994, ACT college entrance examination scores in Kansas have risen twice as fast as the national average.

NCLB is going to require us to focus on accountability and tests scores will become the primary tool with which all districts are held to a very high standard. USD 437 is doing a good job educating students, but we need to do more. Our job is to make sure all of our students achieve to that highest standard. I think we can do it. It's going to take some thoughtful planning and strategizing, but we are poised to take that next step. We are going to be revising our Strategic Plan this school year and asking for your input through Focus Groups and surveys. You'll hear more about that later. We are also looking at ways we can help staff to better understand the state curriculum standards and easily link those standards to what we are teaching and testing. We have many exciting opportunities this year to move forward and engage in continuous improvement.

Even though there are only 31 school days left in this calendar year, let's make the most of them!

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## Teachers receive awards

Chris Goering of Washburn Rural High School has received the first KATE Outstanding Teaching Practices Award from the Kansas Department of Education. The award honors outstanding practices in the teaching of language arts. The purpose of this award is to recognize, promote, and reward outstanding teaching practices from all grade levels in the state of Kansas. In addition to recognizing outstanding teaching, the new award program is designed to promote school districts' language arts standards and the Kansas Curricular Standards for Reading and Writing adopted by Kansas State Board of Education.

Washburn Rural Middle School music teacher Mark Fuller recently received the Jane Froman Singer of the Year Award from his alma mater. Columbia College in Missouri issues the award to students for outstanding performance in choir. Mr. Fuller initially received the award as a student in 1976 when the award carried a different name. The current award honors Jane Froman, a performer whose three-decade career began in the 1930s and included work in radio and television, recordings on major labels, nightclub performances, and appearances in Broadway shows and Hollywood movies. She retired to Columbia Missouri where she became acquainted with students including Mr. Fuller. Some of her public service work included raising funds for children's programs at the Menninger Institute. While in Columbia to receive the award, Mr. Fuller spent time with students and faculty of the college.

Auburn Elementary School Music Teacher Dennis Blackmore recently received the Teacher Who Makes a Difference Award. Mr. Blackmore was surprised with the award at a school assembly. The award is sponsored by KTKA-TV.

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## Foundation grants awarded

The Auburn-Washburn Public School Foundation recently awarded Classroom Grants for the 2003-2004 school year. The following projects received full or partial funding:

Eager Reader Story Time sponsored by Sharon Heitman at Parents as Teachers. This outreach program encourages parents to read and spend activity time with their children. With grant PAT will offer

two or three 6-week story time sessions. Funding goes toward books, materials for Arts & Crafts, snacks, and postage.

Right to Write sponsored by Kim Brack at Indian Hills. Funds will purchase small lap size dry erase boards for classroom use to accommodate immediate daily writing assessment.

Your Big Backyard Magazine sponsored by Jaymie Genovese at Indian Hills. Grant will cover classroom subscriptions to broaden reading skills and expand Life Science objective of classifying major animal groups.

Accelerated Reading Materials sponsored by Marilyn Campbell at Indian Hills. Grant will provide expanded AR books and tests.

Guided Reading sponsored by Christine Little at Indian Hills. Grant provides supplemental reading materials and guided reading sets. Tapes will be made that go along with the listening center to enhance reading instruction.

Mathematics: Making a Literature Connection sponsored by Christine Little at Indian Hills. Funding will help integrate areas of reading and math for first grade curriculum. Literature will be read to the class and then implemented with mathematical ideas in math center.

Independent Student Center Materials sponsored by Karen Manner at Indian Hills. Funding provides listening center read along sets to use with small groups while the teacher focuses on individual children. Grant will help build a listening center library, and begin a phonics materials library.

Technology Within the Classroom sponsored by Jason Jones at Indian Hills. Funding provides video equipment that will allow instant projection of the computer screen to the wall-mounted television. Teacher will be able to easily share with students the web editor program, PowerPoint book presentations, and the multimedia video yearbook he has implemented in his classroom.

Early Morning Jazz Ensemble sponsored by Tess Dozier and Clayton Kaus at Indian Hills. Funding will help purchase books needed to start an elementary jazz ensemble.

Cupstacking sponsored by Dave Chooncharoen at Indian Hills. Funding will purchase classroom set of stackable plastic cups for this popular physical education game where students use cups to create various organized stacks as quickly as possible.

Pathways to Reading sponsored by Kathleen Galvin at Jay Shideler. Funds will provide classroom materials for the program which enhances the development of reading skills for all students and remediation for those below grade level.

Learning Aprons sponsored by Betsy Scott at Pauline Central. Grant provides Learning Aprons with pockets which cover different skills like writing, sounds, senses, math, etc.

Guided Reading Centers sponsored by Kristy Adams at Pauline Central. Funds will help set up centers with Books on Tape, Reading Rod Sets, Pocket Chart Center, and Alphabet Stamps.

Going Out to Eat sponsored by Joy Bishop at Pauline Central. Funds will go toward multiple full-place settings of dishes to help teach table manners and social skills

Summer Readers Make Better Grades sponsored by district Library Media Specialists. Stickers will be placed on final report card envelopes that say "Vacation Readers Make Better Grades" to encourage summer reading.

Wings Program sponsored by Rachel Pantos at the LEADERS program Grant enables leadership staff from the 190th Refueling Wing to mentor 6th grade students in leadership, honor, heroism, the importance of self, how to become your own life manager, interpersonal communication, triumph in goal setting, and conflict resolution skills. Funding will cover the cost of Air Guard wings and ribbons given upon graduation and the fee for the teambuilding workshop.

Wanamaker Wildlife Garden sponsored by Maureen Smith, Pat Worden, Jenny Lang, and Glenda Dixon at Wanamaker Elementary. Funding will be used to build and maintain feeders and habitat structures to attract wildlife to the school's rain garden.

Calculator Based Ranger Project sponsored by Betsy Wiens, Sheryl Allison, and Carrie Davis at Washburn Rural Middle School. Funding provides Calculator Based Rangers to be used by all 8th grade students. They will also be used for data collection and analysis.

Fitness Stations sponsored by Audrey Roberts at Washburn Rural Middle School. Funding will provide for the moving and placement of fitness stations donated from the former Menninger facility.

Books on Tape sponsored by Kerry Johnson at Washburn Rural Middle School. Funds to purchase tape recorders and tapes. The older students will read library and textbooks from Pauline South on to tapes.

These tapes could be used during the school day, or checked out for evening or weekends by Pauline South students.

The Children of Willesden Lane sponsored by Alice Bertels at Washburn Rural Middle School. Funds will purchase copies of "The Children of Willesden Lane", a video, and folders to keep journals. The project focuses on the true story of one girl's life as she is transported with other Jewish children to England to escape Hitler's rules.

Walking Tour of the Environmental Lab sponsored by Donna Sanders at Washburn Rural Middle and High Schools. WRMS students are designing a walking tour of our Environmental Lab while WRHS students are designing guidebooks for teachers and students. The grant will provide for a PowerPoint presentation on CD, accompanied by a full-color flyer picturing the area. The materials will be made available in each Auburn-Washburn school library.

Video Equipment Purchase sponsored by Clifford Manning at Washburn Rural High School. Funds would purchase a video camera and accessories to videotape the marching band at football games, parades, and other events. The tape is then shown to the students for positive reinforcement, and to guide improvement.

Using Visual Supports to Aid Learning sponsored by Meegan Shuler at Washburn Rural Middle and High Schools. Funds would purchase a camcorder to make videotapes to pre-teach and teach lessons to students. The camera will also be used to make digital pictures to use with students for visual schedules, sequencing, and organizing activities.

Data Collection Utilizing Graphing sponsored by Denise Moravec & Isaac Thompson at Washburn Rural Alternative High School. Funding will be used to acquire technology for collecting and analyzing data. The technology includes sensor probes for motion, temperature, light intensity, and voltage along with graphing calculators to graph data collected.

Integrity Counts at WRMS sponsored Marlena Weishaar at Washburn Rural Middle School. Grant will help fund projects including a new service learning activity called Integrity Counts Card Programs where students complete 2-4 hours of community service each nine weeks.

Quilt Connection sponsored by Carol Reynolds at Washburn Rural High School. Grant would fund material, batting, and thread to construct 20 quilts in an assembly line fashion to be donated to children in hospitals, abuse centers, and homeless centers.

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## United Way Campaign wraps up

### Winners drawn for day off and food

Over 130 Auburn-Washburn employees participated in the district-wide United Way effort, donating over \$6,500 toward the Greater Topeka Campaign.

The certified staff member whose name was drawn from all those donating \$25 or more was: **Nancy Rueter**, Pauline South Counselor. Nancy will receive a paid day off while Superintendent Dr. Brenda Dietrich fills in.

The classified winner was **Coni Fenton**, Pauline South Secretary. Coni will receive a paid day off while Communications Coordinator Martin Weishaar fills in.

Following are the names drawn from all donors for a \$20 Chili's gift certificate:

- Carolyn Blasing, Jay Shideler Teacher
- Cydne Kocher, WRMS Secretary

Following are the names drawn from all donors for a \$10 Sheridan's Custard gift certificate:

- Kathy Tryon, WRMS Teacher
- Gerald Simpson, PS Custodian

Congratulations to the winners and thank you to all who donated to the campaign!

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## Food Service staff working to enhance skills

Several Auburn-Washburn food service staff members are focusing on upgrading their skills. Susan Vitt at Pauline South recently earned Certification through the American School Food Service Association. Pam Cravens at Jay Shideler has successfully completed the ServSafe Certification program and has received a scholarship to attend Dietary Managers training this fall. Shannon Hoss at Pauline South also received a scholarship for the training.

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## Living the Dream activities available to schools

The Auburn-Washburn School District is a participating member of the Topeka Living the Dream Committee which celebrates diversity through the annual Martin Luther King Day activities. The week of events includes several programs geared toward students. Many of these programs are organized to travel to classrooms throughout Shawnee County. These include plays, panels, and presentations that will come right to your school. Finally, there are other opportunities to participate in the celebration of the life, values, and beliefs of Martin Luther King, Jr. These include speakers and banquets. Contact Martin Weishaar at SEC (339-4000) for more information.

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## Friends of Education program seeking school supporters to recognize

The Friends of Education Award program is looking for nominees. The program honors individuals and organizations who have made outstanding contributions to public education in the following categories:

- School Volunteer
- Community Leader
- Partner Activity
- Private or Public Institution
- Community/Civic Organization

Contact Martin Weishaar at SEC (339-4000) for more information.

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## Topeka Symphony offers free concert to schools

The Topeka Symphony is holding its 6th annual School Days Concerts on Thursday, March 4, 2004 at the Topeka Performing Arts Center. Two hour-long performances geared toward 5th through 8th graders are scheduled at 10:00 AM and 1:00 PM. Reservations for the free concerts are being accepted on first-come, first-served basis. Contact Martin Weishaar at SEC (339-4000) for more information.