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Year starts smoothly

By Dr. Brenda S. Dietrich, Superintendent of Schools

We have had a great start to the school year and I must thank all of you for putting your best foot (that would be without a flip-flop!) forward during our Back-To School Nights and Open Houses. Dr. Allen and I believe we made it to every building that has had an Open House to date. Your classrooms look great, parents seem pleased, and the remarks that I hear have been very positive.



There are several things that many of you have contacted me about, so I would like to use this Staff Newsletter to answer those inquiries because they may be of interest to a wider audience. We are receiving a few students who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Shawnee County Emergency Management officials have indicated that we will not see an influx from the Red Cross relief effort but some students have relocated to the district to stay with family or friends. The State Dept. of Education sent out e-mails to administrators informing them that these students and families are to be considered “homeless” and therefore qualify for free meals per federal regulations, are not to be charged text-book rental fees per our own BOE policy, and will have immunizations waived for a period of time. Our goal is to get these students in school ASAP and not create any roadblocks or obstacles to their success and transition into a normal, daily routine within our schools. We hope PTO’s will help with additional needs for school supplies and/or clothing or basic necessities and we will be contacting them soon. Anything we can do for Hurricane Relief is a positive and will be welcomed. The SEC staff is had a dress-down day for Hurricane Relief on Friday, September 9th, which is also the United Way’s Day of Caring. We pay \$5.00 to wear jeans to work that day and the money we collect will be sent to the Red Cross. There are many ways we can all help with this national tragedy and I encourage you to do as much as you can.

The Board of Education has purchased property in the Lake Sherwood area for expansion purposes. In 2003, the Long Range Planning Committee recommended the Board purchase land for use as a future school site. We have had steady growth in the past few years and recognize the potential for continued growth as the southwest area of Topeka sees increased construction of single family homes and some multiple family dwellings. The district worked with Bartlett and West Engineers to find property that was near utilities, had access to completed roadways, and was in a central area. The Board purchased 20.5 acres from Tim and Carole Etzel off of Nottingham Road, near Urish Road. The appraised value of the property was well over a million dollars. The district

paid \$700,000 with the balance of the value being graciously donated by the Etzels. We looked at many different properties, but it became clear that this site was the most practical site located within the high growth area. We have no construction plans or timetable at this point in time, but the contract does stipulate that the property can only be used for an educational facility. Building a new facility would be dependent upon a successful bond election.

I hope that you are all enjoying the start of a new school year and getting to know your students and their families personally. In Breaking Ranks II, a report from NASSP on school improvement, it clearly states that “improving student performance is inextricably tied to student engagement, and engagement for each student can be accomplished only through a more personalized academic and intellectual program.” I hope that you can find ways to engage your students this year and create the most student-centered classroom possible which will be the foundation for each student’s success in Auburn-Washburn.

United Way campaign offers chances to win while you help

The Auburn-Washburn United Way Campaign is underway. Watch for forms and flyers in your mailbox. By giving to the United Way this year you will again have a chance to win a paid day off. Just donate \$30 or more and your name will go into a drawing to win a free day off. Two drawings will be held. One for certified staff and one for classified staff. While the certified staff member is off, Dr. Dietrich will fill in. Communications Coordinator Martin Weishaar will fill in for the classified winner. To DOUBLE your chances, use Payroll Deduction. Everyone who donates \$30 or more and selects payroll deduction as the payment option will automatically be entered twice in the drawing for the paid day off. Payroll deduction can be selected for as few as one and as many as twelve pay periods. Deductions will begin with the November paychecks.

In addition, EVERY employee who makes a donation is eligible for a drawing to win gift certificates to Sheridan's Frozen Custard & Chili's Restaurant. Just complete the simple pledge form and return to your building office by the end of the day on Friday September 30th. Please contact Martin Weishaar at SEC (339-4072) if you have any questions.
GOOD LUCK!!!

Foundation considers grant requests

Over 35 Classroom Grant applications have been submitted to the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation. The deadline to submit proposals was September 8th. The Foundation is scheduled to select the recipients at the end of September and announce the winners shortly after that. This year the Foundation has budgeted at least \$22,400 for Classroom Grants of up to \$1,000 each with one grant up to \$5,000.

Multicultural Calendar

Rabbi Lawrence Karol has prepared a Multicultural Calendar which provides detailed information on holidays and events throughout the year. The calendar is available online (www.usd437.net/staff) with an explanation of the holidays following each month.

Newspaper to publish weekly school roundup

The Topeka Capital-Journal is now publishing a weekly report of school issues and activities. The report will be included in the Monday edition each week. Coverage will include school board meetings, fundraisers, school events, awards and honors, and other activities. Schools can send items directly to the newspaper at schools@cjonline.com.

Including SSN on leave requests enables processing

The question has been raised if employees must complete their social security number on leave requests. The answer is yes. It is critical that all parts of the forms are fully completed, including the social security number. With the current district software, leave information can only be entered by full SSN. It is possible to cross-reference the names with SSN prior to data entry but the process is labor-intensive and time-consuming. The Business Office must process hundreds of leave requests each month.

To help minimize the concern of privacy, schools have been instructed to find a location where employees can put the forms that keeps them private. If staff have questions or concerns, please contact Keith Love at SEC (339-4040).

Tutors needed

The Villages' group homes are in need of tutors to work with small groups of youth on their homework assignments as well as assist individual youth who have academic deficits. Each group home has 10 tutor hours per week available, to be scheduled based on the tutor's availability. The hourly rate is \$13.50.

For more information or to apply, please contact Diane Schulze at 267-5900.

Board meeting information now online

Auburn-Washburn Board of Education meeting agendas are now posted online (www.usd437.net) once they are finalized (usually the Friday before a Monday meeting). Minutes will be posted after Board approval (usually the day following the next regular meeting). A link is located at the top of this site.

Online Want Ads updated

The district maintains a free listing of notices from staff and items to buy, sell, or trade (www.usd437.net/staff). This listing is updated as items are received through the Want Ads GroupWise mailbox.

Donations made in memory

Several donations have been made to the Auburn-Washburn Public Schools Foundation in memory of individuals.

Bennie Turner - Rebecca Phillips' Father
Jim Wallace - Mike Wallace's Father
Rodney Steves - Michelle Richards' Father-in-Law