As I take a moment to reflect upon my first six months as Program Director of Blackburn, I revel in the many accomplishments of our students and staff. As you will see throughout this newsletter, Blackburn has a strong team working to ensure that every student, every day, is being prepared for success in keeping with the mission of the Omaha Public Schools. We have added several new staff this year, some of whom are profiled in this newsletter. Those not included in this edition will be introduced in the spring newsletter. I feel most fortunate to have Christopher Humphries on board as my Assistant Program Director. He brings new energy and a strong instructional leadership background to Blackburn.

We are working diligently to strengthen our curricular offerings and to improve student engagement. We are getting better all of the time at how we engage students through incentive programs such as “Stay in the Game,” service learning and our career education courses. In fact, Blackburn played a small role in a Nebraska Public Television PSA created for the UNO Service Learning Academy. There are more celebrations and highlights throughout the newsletter.

This fall we started an after school program on Tuesdays and are in the process of expanding its offerings. Students are offered a variety of opportunities to create, explore, engage and interact. Additionally, they are served dinner as part of the program. Please contact our counselor, Dr. Suzi Yokely-Busby, if you would like more information about the after school program.

Blackburn’s Parent Teacher Organization gained a great deal of momentum during first semester through two particular events, a holiday basket drive and a focus on seniors and post-secondary readiness. It is gratifying to see how parents are getting involved with Blackburn.

By working together, we will continue to develop opportunities for growth and success for the Blackburn students. My door is always open to students, parents, community members and staff. The work ahead of us at Blackburn will be not only challenging, but also very rewarding.
David Watkins has been awarded a Gold Key Award by Scholastic for the scepter that he designed and brought to life at Blacksmithing, under the direction of Master Blacksmith Elmo Diaz and Art Teacher Hilary George. David made the scepter as a way to honor his mother and gave it to her as a holiday gift. His mother now has the additional gift of seeing David awarded his gold key at a ceremony later in February. Congratulations, David!!

The Students have Spoken!!
By Hilary George

The staff members at Blackburn wanted to know what our students wished to learn about research, and discuss in school. After voting from a list of topics developed by the students, the top pick was school lunch programs!!! For one week in March every teacher will teach their 4th period with this topic in mind. We can’t wait to see the artifacts, research, and change that might come from this school-wide project! This project stemmed from results of the Student Engagement Survey taken by our students. Two of the lowest scoring categories were students seeing relevance in content and student/teacher relationships. Minnesota Humanities is supporting this as an Adaptive Action Research Project.

Stay in the Game
by LaDeidre Jackson

Stay in the Game is a school-wide behavior incentive program where students are recognized for their skill attainment. For the 5th and 6th hexters, the skills focused on will include Being Proactive and Being Accountable! There will be a BIG celebration in May for students who have achieved their goals. Also, students, remember to stay in the game by following the ABCs: Academics, Behavior, & Credits!
Spotlight on Students

Blacksmithing

We currently have 10 students enrolled in Blacksmithing, in both beginning and advanced classes. Students love having the opportunity to create functional objects out of metal. They even have the opportunity to learn some basic welding from Elmo Diaz, Master Blacksmith, and to dabble in stained glass with Kathy Diaz. Our students learn the practical applications of physical science concepts like heat transfer while learning functional skills that can potentially lead to a career path. Hilary George takes her Mixed Media class to the forge twice a week to extend the curriculum.

Mitten Drive

Just before the holiday break, Blackburn Pep Club Members held a Mitten/Sock Fundraising Drive. We raised exactly $110.00 as well as actual mitten/hat donations! Mrs. Hansen and Ms. Williams dropped off the donation to the Salvation Army Night Watch Program. We thank all of the students and staff that helped make this possible!

Principal Student Advisory Council

by LaDeidre Jackson

The Principal Student Advisory Council is looking for student leaders to become members of our organization! We meet every Tuesday afternoon from 3-4:15. For more information see Miss Jackson (Room 407) and/or Ms. Machmuller (Room 411). Our upcoming events include Blackburn’s first Prom on Friday, April 17th, from 6-9 p.m. The theme is “Midnight in Paris.” There will be a live DJ, food, and the crowning of a Queen and King.

Students work at 100 years old anvils

Mrs. George grinds away

Ms. Williams and Mrs. Hansen prepare to deliver the collected winter gear to the Salvation Army.

Back: Carlos Decker, Ennisha Devers, Wilbert McDowell IV, Tahreemah Brandy.
Seat: Ezequiel Zuniga, Isabel Cerna, Keshawna Wallace-Godbold, Thomas Lathrop, Alize’ Torres
The fall festival getting under way

In November, Dr. Lyn Holley’s Gerontology class joined Blackburn students as they prepared and served seniors a Fall Harvest celebratory meal, while UNO students participated in games and inter-generational dialogue. We thought you might enjoy a peak behind the scenes of our fabulous chefs, Ms. Middleton, Mrs. Dombeck and our guest chef for the event, Mr. Joe Shimerdla! Mr. S, you can guest cook for us any time!!

Kristen Biodrowski educates us about the NE Humane Society.

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Ms. Pesek introduces Millie to Tahreemah

Our Food for Thought project is in its 5th year of service to Adams Community Center, with our culinary students serving a weekly meal to roughly 60 senior citizens. Under the direction of FCS Teacher, Kamina Lemons and her venerable assistant Mrs. Middleton, strong relationships have been forged and great meals served. Twice a year, the students host major events where the senior citizens come to Blackburn for a more formal meal.

Service Learning

Our Reality Bites project recently finished strong for the 4th year in a row. With our UNO service learning partners and Dr. Rose Strasser, we have been training dogs at the Humane Society. Every Tuesday and Thursday, students chose a canine companion to work with and to teach some basic skills to make them more adoptable. We trained them using a clicker and positive reinforcement strategies. Many of us became very attached to the animals; we have the utmost hopes and wishes that they all find happy “fur”ever homes! We even got Ms. Pesek involved with training. She brought her little dog, Millie, to our class and learned a few tricks from Dr. Strasser.

On October 28, we presented what we learned about behavior from this project. We learned that it often takes a quiet environment to learn a new skill so the new task gets the animal’s complete focus. We noticed that showing affection resulted in better cooperation. We came to realize that you can’t use violence or harsh words to force good behavior on dogs. That holds true for children as well. Dogs and humans alike need breaks and time to gather themselves during work tasks. We’d say that this was a good personal learning experience for everyone!
Every Picture Tells a Story

A bit of advice might be a good thing! Students participate in a presentation at UNO moderated by Ernest Steele and Hakim Holloway.

Blackburn Creative Writing Students authored an advice book for teachers in training. We think all teachers would benefit from our students’ insights!!

Get the Word Out

Our students and several teachers are working on multiple projects aimed at “getting the word out.” They are working with UNO Speech and Language students as service learning partners to get the word out about all of the positive things at Blackburn through vehicles such as this newsletter and the Facebook page. Additionally, students are working on “The News” videography to create a PSA to get the word out about Ted E Bear Hollow and its valuable mission to support grieving families. The News is a place for teens to find out about people, places and things close to home and around the world. Check our Facebook page, Blackburn alt, for more details as they develop! Finally, these ambitious folks are making the first-ever student created yearbook at Blackburn! We are grateful to our staff, Noelle, Hansen, George and Bonam for their valuable contributions and for teaching our students the power of their voices to inform and affect change!

Blackburn’s Food Basket Drive

Blackburn staff, students and families gathered at the December PTO Meeting for a Basket Drive. Their successful efforts resulted in 42 food baskets plus raffle prizes for attendees.
**Staff Notes**

**Get to Know**
**Our New 2014-2015 Assistant Principal, Mr. Humphries**
by Markia Bass

Our new Assistant Principal, Mr. Humphries, is a very busy man, so I only had a few short minutes to start finding out what makes him tick!

What college(s) did you graduate from?
Dana College, University of Phoenix, and UNO

How long have you been with OPS?
10 years

What are some of the benefits of being an assistant principal?
I get to make a great impact on people’s lives.

What are your plans to better Blackburn?
I’m not really sure yet, I’m still trying to get the feel of the school for now.

What are some of your ideas to increase the graduation rate if you have any?
More and broader career opportunities.

What are some of the changes you would like to enforce while here at Blackburn?
Making it feel like more of a traditional school and offering after-school programs.

Do you have any incentive programs?
NBA (Never Be Absent).

Where did you teach before coming to Blackburn?
Northwest, Morton.

Do you plan on becoming a principal in the future? If so, how far in the future?
Yes, maybe 4 or 5 years.

**Meet Mr. Sweeney**
by Antwane Fuller

Let me introduce you to Mr. Ryan Sweeney, the newest member of the Math Department.

Mr. Sweeney has been teaching here for only 6 months, but he says he likes Blackburn because it’s kind of different. He feels he has more of an opportunity to give students individual assistance because of our smaller class sizes.

Mr. Sweeney enjoys working with juniors and seniors because they seem to have more of a sense about what they are doing and why they might benefit from learning.

As with all students, Mr. Sweeney wishes that we would take on more challenges and not try to take the easy way.

Although the kids keep him on his toes, Mr. Sweeney thinks that students at Blackburn are fun to work with. He hopes he can pass on to them his love for math!

**Let’s stay Healthy!**
By Timora Kroeger, Blackburn School Nurse

Advice on how to stay healthy can be confusing and may change from week to week, with certain foods or activities being frowned upon one week and then encouraged the next. The basic practices for good health have remained constant over the years, however, and all are things you can incorporate into your everyday life.

1. Eat a balanced diet.
2. Get enough sleep – 8 to 8 1/2 hrs. for an adult
3. Exercise – 2 1/2 hours of moderate activity or 1 hr and 15 minutes of intense activity
4. Manage your stress -- stress is linked with the development of heart disease, high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, acne and other health problems. Learning to control your stress can help you feel better every day and decrease your chances of long-term health problems. Meditation, relaxation and exercise are ways to manage stress.
5. Basic practices that should be incorporated in your everyday life like washing your hands to stop the spread of germs, cover your mouth when you cough and or sneeze (sneeze in your sleeve). If you have a fever stay home!
6. Get regular checkups – that is how little health problems are found before they become big ones.
Staff Notes

Coach Theo and the Ballers winning form!
By JeTorria White

This year’s Blackburn Ballers’ streak has been led by Coach Theo Peters. Theo’s passion for coaching came from his family, especially his older brother. Basketball was a big part of his family when Theo was growing up. Coaching basketball came from wanting to help kids. Theo had a mentoring program that included many young men who loved the sport. Because of that love for basketball, Coach Peters decided to put his all into coaching. His team reflects his leadership. Coach Peters has much to say about his team. He thinks this group of young men value their education. He values their winning, non-oppositional attitudes! Theo has learned many things from being a coach, such as players needing to be students first and athletes second. Theo hopes that after his ballers graduates from high school, they will continue to play basketball, because it is more than just a ball and a basket. Basketball can help reduce stress and assist with relaxation. It is another way to express oneself in a healthy way.

Blackburn ballers playing the game they love so much.

Mentoring

Each month, Human Resources selects a 2nd year teacher to spotlight in the Take Flight New Teacher Newsletter 2nd Year Teacher Spotlight. For the December/January edition, Mrs. Hansen was chosen. Well done, Mrs. Hansen!!

‘Mrs. Hansen’s warm personality and rapport with her students is excellent. She spent her first year of teaching building relationships with her students and planning lessons that were sensitive to their educational abilities. Her willingness to take suggestions, modify lessons, and experiment with new strategies demonstrated her motivation and reflection about teaching and learning. Because of her creativity and enthusiasm for the subject, students responded positively to her lessons. She is able to communicate effectively and carries out her responsibilities in a diligent and dependable manner.”

Mrs. Amellia Hansen
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