Blackburn Chronicle

A Message from Program Director Jodi Pesek

Greetings! It is hard to believe, but another school year is “in the books” for Blackburn students, staff, and community partners. The school year flies by at a supersonic pace, so I am grateful for the summer months upon which to reflect, plan, and move forward with the best strategies and practices for educating our young people as we develop our school improvement plan for next year.

One of our most successful program initiatives is Stay in the Game (SITG,) which encourages students to be on time for class, to be respectful to others, and to fully participate in instruction. Teachers routinely discuss these concepts with students as part of Multi-tiered Systems of Support for Behavior (MTSSSB) and their efforts paid off. Staff will be meeting over the course of the summer to discuss how to continue to strengthen and enhance support for positive behavior in the building.

Of course, one cannot “stay in the game” if they are not in the game, which is why the OPS district-wide initiative for attendance, Strive for 95, is so important. Our Attendance Committee, led by teacher Jeff Brandt, worked diligently to encourage consistent student attendance. During March and April they paired 2nd period classrooms to encourage a healthy competition for which team could have the best attendance. There were many winning teams throughout the competition. Each of their students earned a $5 McDonald’s gift card donated by our neighbor and community partner, Pilgrim Baptist Church. We are thankful for Pastor Cedric Perkin’s and his parishioners' generous support of our program and continued strong neighbor relations. Strive for 95 will continue as a school improvement goal for the 2019-2020 school year.

Blackburn graduated 34 students on May 17th. Proud families packed the Kroc Center to witness this monumental achievement and to listen to inspirational speeches of support from school board member Kimara Snipe and community partner Dominique Morgan. Ms. Snipe made sure that our students know that they can find her at the Charles Washington Branch Library. Mr. Morgan described the supportive environment availed to students at Blackburn and encouraged the graduates to “find their Blackburn” wherever they land. Dr. Logan led the students in switching their tassels from right to left, signifying that they are indeed graduates.

Four students were the recipients of scholarships for which they submitted essays. Two of the scholarships were created specifically for Blackburn students; we are humbled and grateful. Ashlei Spivey pays homage to her mother with the Lisa Spivey Legacy Scholarship, which was awarded to Talanay Houston-Drummond and to Jason Keys; Dominique Morgan honors his parents with the Colleen Jo & Troy Lee Starks Jr. Scholarship, awarded this year to Neida Chicas-Vasquez. Additionally, Johnathan Minnifield was awarded the Board of Governors Scholarship.

Two graduating seniors, Shannon Mayehama and Harley Huckleby, gave heartfelt speeches reflective of their high school journeys and time at Blackburn. Listening as students describe accomplishing their high school goals with the support of caring educators and family members is a wonderful privilege that reminds us of why we decided to enter this field of endeavor. We are very proud of these young achievers!

I hope that our staff, students, families and community partners have a safe and restful summer. Please feel free to contact me at Blackburn if you have any questions or concerns that arise before school begins in August. We look forward to seeing ALL Blackburn students on August 14, ready to learn. Every Student, Every Day, Prepared for Success!
**Spotlight on Students**

**Family Night by Destiny Cooper**

On March 1, 2019, Blackburn held a Family Night from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. We were able to meet new people and hang with people’s families. For food they served us a nacho bar with ground beef or chicken, chips, cheese, sour cream, salsa and more. We also had three of the best teachers at Blackburn doing face painting—Mrs. Colón, Mrs. Olou, and Mrs. Tregle. We played plenty of games including basketball and bingo. A lady from the Nebraska Extension 4-H group also brought a Jeopardy game to teach us about safety. This was my second Family Night, and I encourage other students to go because it gives you a chance to meet new people and try new things. According to Kranecia Thompson, “I like Family Night. It gives me a chance to meet new people because my circle is small.”

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**Black & Brown Legislative Day by De’Mond Johnson-Valentine**

Tajanay Houston and I went with Ms. Bonam to Lincoln in February for the Black and Brown Legislative Day. The goal was to help communities of color bring their concerns about legislation to Nebraska senators. We learned about four areas: Voting rights, prison reform, education and budgets. The field trip was cool because we got to meet senators, eat lunch with them, and learn directly from them. We also got to win McDonald’s cards with $20 on them. The tour of the Capitol was cool, too, because we got to visit their offices and see where they work. We listened to the senators from the galleries above the senate floor, then got to meet them in person. It was an educational day!
Top 2019 Senior!

Niaysha humbly poses with Dr. Logan

Niaysha Mitchell was chosen by Omaha Public Schools as a top senior because of her scholarship, service, and leadership. Top seniors were invited to an award breakfast in May, where they were feted by parents, principals, and Superintendent Logan. We are proud of Niaysha and her accomplishments!

Grief’s Journey Fundraiser

Each May, Blackburn students participate in a fundraiser for Grief’s Journey, an agency that supports individuals and families when they have lost loved ones. Grief’s Journey has a simple but important mission:

“No one has to walk their grief journey alone. We believe everyone has a right to excellent and compassionate grief support and that our community is stronger with it.”

All grief support programs are offered free of charge, so fundraising is an important part of the agency’s mission. This year, Blackburn raised more than $700, making our school the top team fundraiser for 2019. Blackburn students are compassionate!

CCCC 2019!

Our counselor, Dr. Busby, is trying something new this summer to keep students involved and engaged with community members. “College & Career Champions’ Club kicked off on June 11. Thanks, Dr. Busby, for making this happen!
Rad Women Redux!

In celebration of Women’s History Month, our RAD Women of Omaha exhibit was displayed at UNO’s Community Engagement Center, supported by the Service Learning Academy at UNO. This exhibit was made last year under the direction of Art Teacher Hilary George, English Teacher Deana Colon, and visiting artist Kim Darling to honor 38 women whom Blackburn students determined to be difference-makers in the Omaha community. Sales from the art produced raised more than $3000 for Youth Emergency Services in Omaha.

The exhibit opened on March 8, International Women’s Day. Six of our RAD Women were on hand to celebrate, including Dr. Cheryl Logan, Brenda Council, Assistant Fire Chief Kathy Bossman, Senator Megan Hunt, Felicia Webster, and Julie Dierberger. You can learn more about the RAD Women project by checking out the Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/BlackburnRadWomen/?modal=admin_todo_tour.

Food for Thought: Spring Fling

Every semester, under the direction of Foods teacher Staci Christiansen and assistant Beverly Middleton, our culinary students produce and serve a weekly meal for approximately 60 individuals at Adams Park Community Center, our community partner of 10 years. So many of our senior citizen friends have been with us since the project’s inception that our weekly visits feel like a family event. Our university partners on this wonderful project are Jeff Knapp’s UNO Social Work 1500 students. They help prepare the meals at Blackburn and serve alongside Blackburn culinary students every Wednesday during the school calendar. Once per semester, our senior citizen friends and other invited guests visit Blackburn for a celebratory meal and fun activities. Please read what students Kranecia Thompson and Destiny Cooper wrote about the event:

On April 17, the Culinary students along with help from UNO social work students and Service Learning, held a Hawaiian-themed Spring Fling for Adams Center Residents. Adams Center residents came here. We had pulled pork sliders and chicken kebabs, salad, coleslaw, and for dessert we served pineapple upside-down cake. Everyone who came got to wear Hawaiian leis.

We also had a few Blackburn students perform their spoken word poems, and Mr. Washington sang two songs for us. Two of your very own – Destiny and Kranecia – helped come up with the menu after meeting with people from the Adams Center, and Culinary students prepared the food for everyone to eat. The Adams Center residents really enjoyed themselves this year, and all of our hard work paid off. All there is left to say is we did a good job, and we want to give a shout out to Mrs. Christiansen and Ms. Middleton for working hard too!

Get the Word Out: 30 Americans

by Kranecia Thompson

Mrs. Colón’s and Mrs. George’s English and art classes, along with help from UNO’s Service Learning Department and speech language pathology students, recorded podcasts on the exhibition 30 Americans at the Joslyn Museum this spring. Students gave their own interpretations of their favorite works and recorded them for the Joslyn’s YouTube channel. Blackburn students made six visits to the museum and became mini art critics during that time.

Check out the podcasts at Joslyn’s Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQ1KKWEP_x4&list=PLKD8v7ISuMO1X3nJMiFx4bg1NMa5y09
Staff Notes

Staff Service Awards

Blackburn has many dedicated staff members who put their hearts into providing the best possible education and support for the students in our charge. We appreciate our staff, many of whom were recently recognized by Omaha Public Schools with service awards:

- Jodi Pesek 25 years
- Larry Valenti 25 years
- Vicki Stark 20 years
- Anh Nguyen 15 years
- Joseph Shimerda 15 years
- Mark Thomas 15 years
- Lysa Swan 10 years
- Timara Kroeger 5 years
- Florence Rhoden 5 years
- Ryan Sweeney 5 years

Jodi Pesek & Larry Valenti celebrate 25 years of service to OPS! That’s 50 years!

A Dose of Advice: Energy Levels by Timara Kroeger, RN

In this fast paced world we live in people find themselves feeling tired and drained. There are a variety of things you can do to help improve your energy level. Below are some changes we can make to improve our energy levels.

- First and foremost make sure you are getting good sleep. It is recommended that an individual get approximately 7 hours of sleep a night. If you often feel tired throughout the day, you may need more quality sleep. Try going to bed earlier and reducing your screen time before you go to bed.
- High levels of stress can make you feel tired and drained. Finding ways to minimize lifestyle-related stress can help keep up your energy levels. Strategies to improve your energy levels may include taking some time for yourself to relax, read or just go for a walk.
- Exercising regularly may increase an individual’s energy level. If you live a sedentary life style participating in regular exercises like brisk walking or cycling can give you the energy boost you need.

- Eat nutritiously. A diet based on whole, healthy foods benefits your health and your energy levels. In contrast, a diet high in processed foods can negatively affect your energy levels. Also avoid sugars – they may give you energy fast, but it is short lived.
- Drink water. Remember six eight ounces glasses of water is what we need, dehydration makes you feel tired

Many people feel tired and lack the energy to function at their best throughout the day. However, drinking enough water, eating healthily, getting enough sleep and exercise can benefit your energy levels and your health. If you feel tired, take a good look at your lifestyle to see which healthy changes you can make to boost your energy levels and make you feel great.

“Drink water! Dehydration makes you feel tired!”
Blackburn Alternative Program offers a traditional high school academic curriculum supported by a social and life skills focus, problem solving strategies, career education, and service learning. This blend of programming is intended to help students re-engage in the learning process while gaining and refining their academic, social, behavioral, and employment skills. Blackburn strives to meet the individual needs of students by offering smaller classes, flexible scheduling, and opportunities for personal growth.

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