Blackburn Chronicle

Message from Program Director Jodi Pesek

Wow! What a fast-paced third year I have had as Blackburn’s Program Director! It has been gratifying to see the hard work of students and the diligence, care, and concern of staff members for our young people. We take success seriously here at Blackburn. No challenge goes unaddressed. I am so proud of the attention paid to academic and behavioral success by our staff. Every staff person is a member of a committee or initiative that makes a difference in the lives of students.

And make a difference we do! Blackburn is proud to announce that we had 30 graduates this academic year, with four additional potential summer graduates. We know that staff alone do not successful students make. We cannot help students accomplish their goals without actively engaged families. We love it when students’ families come to visit—especially for positive events. In January, we held a Family Fun Night. More than 125 students, staff, families and community members came to enjoy an evening of fun and games. We look forward to more positive family events in the future!

We continue to utilize our Stay in the Game (SITG) initiative to motivate students to maintain a respectful and attentive focus in the classroom. All classroom teachers participate in supporting our students with SITG. Additionally this year, we embarked on the district initiative, Multi-tiered Systems of Support for Behavior (MTSSB), which will assist us in focusing our efforts where they are most needed and impactful. Our after-school program is still going strong, with academic, cultural and intramural activities. We plan to continue all that is working well for us as school begins anew in the fall. Please read on to see what we have accomplished! Have a safe, enjoyable summer!

Common Sense Media by Deborah Nichols

Blackburn Alternative Program endeavors to educate our school community, students and parents as well as staff in responsible, respectful use of digital technology. We are committed to preparing 21st Century Learners equipped with the knowledge of appropriate behaviors that demonstrate positive digital citizenship. By incorporating Common Sense Media lessons into our classes we are able to achieve this goal. Sharing the Common Sense Media message with our community, as well as our staff and students has opened a dialogue between staff, students and parents with the shared goal of safe appropriate use of technology. We will be including Common Sense Media’s Digital Dilemmas into our newsletter. This is one more way to begin a conversation with our students encouraging positive digital citizenship. For our next installment, please see the one-page Digital Dilemma about sexting attached at the end of this newsletter. For further information on Common Sense Media please go their website at https://www.commonsensemedia.org/.

2017—2018 Student Calendar

First Trimester
Hexter 1…………...8/17 - 9/28
Hexter 2…………...10/2 - 11/10

Second Trimester
Hexter 3…………..11/13 - 12/22
Hexter 4…………..1/9 - 2/23

Third Trimester
Hexter 5…………..2/26 - 4/12
Hexter 6…………..4/16 - 5/25

Beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, OPS will implement an adjusted grading scale. Please contact Ms. Pesek or Mr. Humphries at Blackburn if you have questions.

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Family Fun Night

On Friday, January 13, Blackburn held its first Family Fun Night. More than 125 family and community members joined students and staff for food, games, a bounce house, live music, a photo booth and lots of other fun activities. We are eager to host a repeat! We loved having family members and community partners like Charles Drew and Fuel360 in the building!

Stay in the Game

Participation in our School-Wide Positive Behavior Support program, Stay in the Game, continues to motivate students to attend classes on time and to demonstrate respect in the classroom to peers and teachers alike. As a result, 17 students qualified to participate in our 4th end-of-the-hexter party on May 24. These students “stayed in the game” by meeting the signature requirements (75% and above). Pedro Johnson had a whopping 97% of signatures—wow!! Congratulations, students and a big THANKS to our crew of Game Changers, who make sure to reinforce their efforts!

Student Council by Robert Sanders

It was an exciting first year for Blackburn's Student Council. Juniors Brandon Washington-Thomas and Kamiya Pittman were elected President and Vice President in a school wide election at the beginning of the year, and then hit the ground running! Blackburn's Student Council organized Spirit Weeks for the entire school to participate in, staged a mock Presidential election in November, helped to set up Blackburn's holiday dinner give away, family night and prom, and even found time to undergo peer mediation training with the Concord Mediation Center. Student Council members established themselves as leaders within the student body and often brought the concerns of students to our weekly meetings, working with Blackburn's faculty and administration to brainstorm and implement solutions. The staff coordinators of Student Council are Ms. LaDeidre Jackson and Mr. Robert Sanders.

Inclucity by LaKeisha Bonam

From January 13-15, seven Blackburn students accompanied me to Inclusive Communities’ Inclucity, a two-day camp where students come together with other teens from multiple school districts to discuss issues of difference and acceptance and the difficulties of that journey. Students engage in activities as varied as skits, spoken word poetry, songs, and cabin group and culture group discussions. Students reported that using their skills and talents to explore social justice issues was a powerful experience. Particularly impactful was “You think you know me, but...” a spoken word self-expression. Our students benefit tremendously from this opportunity; I look forward to taking another group next year!
**Spotlight on Students, cont’d.**

**Prom**

The Burn Royale on April 14 was quite the event! Beautifully designed and decorated by LaKeisha Bonam, Lysa Swan, and Michala Butler. The room was filled with exciting games of chance! Staff and students alike tried their luck! The musical stylings of our own Dishon Watson kept everyone in high spirits and groovin’ to the beat! The perfect cap to the evening occurred when Ms. LaDeidre Jackson announced King Nolan Andrews, Queen Kamiya Pittman, Prince Ryan Friedrich, and Princess Justyce Sharp!

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**Graduation**

Blackburn held its 2017 graduation on May 22 at UNO. Family, friends, and OPS staff proudly watched students collect their diplomas. The class was presented by board member Yolanda Williams along with board members Ben Perlman, Marque Snow and board president Lacey Merica. Executive Director Pam Cohn showed her support for our graduates as Moniki Gunn-Cannon imparted her wisdom to students with an energizing speech. Community partner extraordinaire Dominique Morgan wrote original music, Shine, for the graduates. What a beautiful honor! Two students, Latazia Carter and Denise Fellows, talked about their successes followed by Denise earning a $500 college scholarship, courtesy of Andrew Storz at Appreciation Financial. Director of Equity and Diversity, Sharif Liwaru, introduced our graduates as they crossed the stage, then led them in "the changing of the tassel." We are humbled and honored by the community support and incredibly proud of the class of 2017!
Engaging students through service learning is part of the heart and soul of what we do at Blackburn. We continued two long-time projects this spring. Get the Word Out is in its 6th year of implementation; Food for Thought is in its 14th semester! We are proud that our teachers have such strong content mastery and provide higher level application of their curriculum. We would not be able to make these wonderful connections, however, without the leadership and support of the UNO Service Learning Academy and the strong partnerships with UNO professors and their students.

Our UNO Service Learning partner of 6 years with the Get the Word Out project, Dr. Mitzi Ritzman, was recognized with the Outstanding Service Learning Faculty Award at a ceremony in April. With Dr. Ritzman and her speech pathology students, our staff and students are "getting the word out" about the benefits of serving the community! We are grateful for our partners and revel in their successes.

African American History Challenge by Robert Sanders

On February 4, for the first time ever, Blackburn sent students to compete in the annual African American History Challenge hosted by 100 Black Men of Omaha. Beginning in September, students began studying African American History in monthly review sessions with other teams of OPS students. Students discovered narratives of African Americans dating back to the arrival of Africans to the Americas all the way to present day issues and events. They were then tested on their mastery of those facts in a city wide trivia competition. Juniors Cinye Ingram and Niasha Mitchell represented Blackburn; we could not be prouder of their hard work!

Food for Thought/Culinary Arts by Thelma Bell

It was a very successful year for the Blackburn Culinary Arts and Foods classes. Our classes were afforded the opportunity to join with the UNO Sociology Department in service learning which put our classroom learning and foods skills to the test!

On a weekly basis, the Culinary and Foods classes prepared full course meals, including soup, salad, main entrees and desserts that were then catered for our senior citizen community partners at Adams Park Community Center. Our Spring Fling on April 15 was the highlight and finale of the project this spring. Our senior citizen friends came to Blackburn and we were able to serve them an array of foods and enjoy their company on “our turf.”

On another note, it is with sadness that I have to leave this project and my students at Blackburn, who have proven they have learned the skills I endeavored to teach. My students did extremely well with sanitation, food safety, food preparation, and service. Many of them have the skills necessary to launch a career in food service; I am so proud of their achievements! I retire feeling accomplished!
Service Learning cont’d.

Get the Word Out

Students from Dr. Mitzi Ritzman's Speech and Language majors at UNO worked in their partnering classrooms at Blackburn Alternative School as part of their "Get the Word Out" service learning project. Dr. Ritzman's students spent the semester assisting students with language and literacy skills in Biology, Art and Yearbook classes. Several special projects were begun during the semester, including the “Rad Women” project in Ms. George’s Graphic Design class, where students wrote personal narratives and created graphics to accompany. (Phase 2 of this project will include “Rad Community Women”—stay tuned!)

The Yearbook class interviewed members of our neighboring church, Pilgrim Baptist, to create a series of short social media videos in celebration of Pilgrim’s 100th Anniversary. Much creative energy was invested in this project and we were eager to share it with the church. The videos will be introduced to church members on June 10th.

Concord Mediation Center Peace Sculpture

“Peace, to me, is coming home from looking at crazy people all day, to my bed and my phone and food to eat. Peace to me is a cold shower and thinking about weird things and life. Peace to me is playing with clay and making creative things. Peace is getting a pen and paper and writing your feelings. Peace is loving yourself and others.” – Nyabol C.

Nyabol contributed a piece of clay sculpture that represented peace along with classmates in Ms. George’s pottery class. The resulting peace sculpture was part of a service learning project for Concord Mediation Center, our community partner working with Blackburn on peaceful resolutions to disputes we encounter.

Trout in the Classroom

Yet another part of “Get the Word Out” was Ms. LaDeidre Jackson’s Marine Biology students’ participation in Trout in the Classroom. As part of the project, students created and exchanged quilt squares with students around America. The theme was “symbiosis.” Once all quilt squares were received, our very talented dean, Ms. Caprecia Williams, stitched the quilt together. The results are quite lovely; we are eager to display more Blackburn creativity!
**Staff Notes**

**Knicely Done by Dr. Suzi Yokley Busby**

Recently, Dr. Busby was recognized for her community work by John Knicely of WOW TV. Dr. Busby continually uses her connections in the community to benefit our students, so it is no surprise to us that she spearheads what is certainly one of the largest garage sales every year in the Metro.

"Open Store" took place on March 25 at the South Omaha YMCA. "You don't have to pay anything," Dr. Busby tells us. "You just have to show up. There's not anybody, whether a worker or a shopper that doesn't leave with a smile on their face and says 'I can't wait to see you next year.' It's one of my favorite days of the year." Knicely done, indeed!!

**Retirements**

On May 12, Blackburn celebrated the retirements of Connie Wheeler and Janice Hinkeldey. Speeches given by Melba Bentley and Deb Nichols reminded us of all of the skills and talents that these two will be taking with them!

Ms. Hinkeldey has taught in a variety of school districts in Iowa and Nebraska during a career that spanned 48 years. She taught Physical Education, English, Reading, ESL and was a counselor. Ms. Hinkeldey plans to visit us as a substitute teacher during her retirement!

Ms. Wheeler has taught in daycare through high school settings throughout Nebraska. She has expertise in content as varied as computer technology to family consumer science. Ms. Wheeler’s true passion is teaching fiber arts, which she will continue in retirement as a living history artist at Fort Atkinson. Additionally, Ms. Wheeler plans to work with Minnesota Humanities and their Karen Immersion program.

In a surprise turn of events, Ms. Thelma Bell announced her retirement this year as well! Ms. Bell has had an interesting career! She served this country in the US Army, she taught special education, and spent her last few years as Blackburn’s Culinary Arts teacher. Ms. Bell is also an accomplished actress. We hope to find her on stage in the near future!

Saying goodbye to such accomplished staff is not easy. Please know, retirees, that you will be forever in our memories and we hope you will carry forth good memories of your time with us!

**Grief’s Journey by LaKeisha Bonam**

Thank you to everyone that donated to Grief’s Journey this year! You have no idea how much this means!!! Because of your support, several families will be able to participate in the free services provided by Grief’s Journey (formerly Teddy Bear Hollow.) Blackburn staff and students raised $1122 for this worthy cause! Mr. Wright and his students won a pizza party for raising the most money. Congratulations!
Burnout Burnout. What actually is burnout and can anyone get it? Burnout is a physical or mental collapse caused by work overload or too much stress in your life. Burnout is emotional or physical fatigue rather than a type of depression.

There are 10 signs of burnout:

1. Exhaustion.
2. Lack of motivation.
3. Frustration, cynicism, and other negative emotions.
5. Slipping job performance.
6. Interpersonal problems at work and/or home.
7. Not caring about oneself or the taking up of unhealthy options for coping like smoking, drinking or eating too much.
8. Preoccupied with work when you are not at work – because if you are expending too much mental energy about work you lose your ability to recover from the stress of your day.
9. Overall general decreased satisfaction.

Remember, burnout over a long period of time can cause real health issues like digestive or heart problems, depression, and/or obesity. When you’re on the road to burnout, you can feel helpless. You need to remember you have a lot more control over your stress than you may think. There are positive steps you can take to get your life back into balance and overcome burnout. One of the most effective is to reach out to others.

If you are experiencing burnout you need to empower yourself and take your life back. Get out and do something positive to help you feel better, act can be for yourself or someone else. Take a break. Instead of paying so much attention to your smart phone, talk with your family members or friends. Or participate in a social events after work. And remember to avoid hanging out with negative people who do nothing but complain. Set aside some time to relax, get plenty of sleep, eat a health well balanced diet and get plenty of exercise.

Remember, if you don’t take care of yourself, no one else will.
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