If you have had a busy year, you, like me, are wondering where 2016 has gone! Fall semester has flown by with a whirlwind of activities and events at Blackburn. As things have slowed a bit with the onset of winter break, I can reflect upon the last four months to share some highlights with you.

Last year, our “Green” team mobilized in order to improve Blackburn’s carbon footprint. As a result, we received granted funds that were applied to the purchase of two filtered water bottle filling stations which were installed in August. Staff and students were thrilled that their efforts paid off in a healthful way that benefits the planet as well.

Starting the year well-hydrated gave us the energy to focus on our school improvement goals. I have just reviewed Blackburn’s 2015-2016 progress; I am happy to report that, in a one-year period, we reduced suspensions by 40%, our graduation rate stayed above 80%, and we had an overall increase of .13 on the OPS Climate Survey. This year, the three goals we have chosen relate to increasing the graduation rate, increasing attendance, and expanding students’ ability to apply math in real-world contexts. In fact, Blackburn is already progressing on the improved graduation rate! Our best wishes for future success go out to mid-year graduates Darius Allison, Jaime Benitez, Tateanna Brooks, Jessyca Buie, Jose Canales-Tapia, Kentrell Hubbard, Allen McCray, and Octavia Walker. Congratulations!

Everything we do at Blackburn is with our overall goal for student success in mind. To that end, we have seven committees that meet and plan on a monthly basis and an actively engaged student council. We have a vibrant after-school program that more than 30 students have taken advantage of, where they pursue such offerings as dance, NICE, intramural sports, ACT prep, and the African American History Challenge.

We work diligently to find ways to authentically incorporate student voice into the curriculum and into the decisions that affect them. As a building, we are receiving training in Restorative Discipline, geared at mediating difficulties that arise with the goal of relationship restoration. There is no better way to keep students on track than to consider their input and value them as part of the process.

We also recognize that parent involvement is tremendously important to our efforts, as was evidenced by the recent success of the Food Box Assembly Night. Parents, students, community partners and staff worked together to assemble 59 food boxes to disseminate to our community. It was a wonderful evening of fellowship and service for all involved. Look for upcoming information about Blackburn’s Family Fun Night to be held the evening of January 13.

As you will see by reading our latest newsletter, Blackburn staff and students are engaged in many wonderful pursuits. I am proud of their accomplishments; more over, I am proud to have responsibility for this amazing program. On to 2017!

Jodi Pesek
Program Director

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Student Council
by Robert Sanders, Social Studies Teacher

Student Council is one of the new extended learning opportunities at Blackburn. Under the direction of Robert Sanders and LaDeidre Jackson, students meet once a week to discuss plans for how to improve the experience of every student at Blackburn. Our student council members modeled active engagement by participating in preparation activities for the 2017 African American History Challenge.

To begin the year, Blackburn staff and students elected Brandon Washington-Thomas as President of the Student Council and Kamiya Pittman as Student Council’s Vice President. The very next week Student Council ran a mock Presidential election and informed the student body about the positions of presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Additionally, Student Council conducted a “Boo Gram” Halloween fundraiser where students purchased and delivered candy to their fellow students and staff. It was an exciting start to what has been a fun filled year!

The Student Council is currently working with Blackburn staff to create a Peer Mediation Program. So far, the Student Council has been busy identifying areas of student life and the general Blackburn experience that need to be improved upon, and are assessing how best to bring students together in a constructive and collaborative way. Although this program is still in its early planning stages, the Student Council has been instrumental in developing recommendations and ideas!

The Student Council is looking forward to a successful 2017 and wish you and your families a very Happy New Year!

Stay in the Game
by Carolyn Rabideaux, English Teacher

The School Climate Committee is pleased to report that participation in our School Wide Positive Behavior Support program, Stay in the Game, is at an all-time high! As a result, more students than ever qualified to participate in our 3rd end-of-the-hexter party, with a whopping 24 students in attendance! These students "stayed in the game" by meeting the signature requirements (75% and above) for being on time and being respectful. Students enjoyed making their own ice cream sundaes and socializing in the cafeteria at the end of the day on December 20th.

Please remind your student that it’s never too late to get in the game. Students can start participating in Stay in the Game 4th hexter with a clean slate on January 9, 2017.

You can learn more about Stay in the Game and other things happening at Blackburn at Family Night on Friday, January 13, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. Please join us for food, games, a bounce house, live music, and lots of other fun activities. Family Night is free to attend! Blackburn students must be accompanied by a parent/guardian.

Food Box Assembly Event

Blackburn students, staff, families and community members came together on December 19 for our third annual food box assembly and raffle. Almost 60 food boxes were assembled, thanks to the generosity of so many. We value the relationships that Counselor Suzi Yokely-Busby, Social Worker LaKeisha Bonam and Foods Teacher Thelma Bell have cultivated in the community that contributed to the success of this project. Serving together for the good of the community is at the heart of what we do.
**Mural Dedication Ceremony**
by Hilary George, Art Teacher

Last year, Nebraska Arts Council artist-in-residence Kim Darling, began working with the students of Hilary George’s art classes at Blackburn Alternative Program via a grant written by Suzi Yokley-Busby. The vision for this partnership was to create a piece of student generated artwork for the exterior of our building that would change the visual experience as students, families, and community members entered our building. Blackburn hasn’t always had the most positive of narratives written for us and we, as a building, have been working tirelessly to change any negative perceptions our community may have.

This project finally reached completion just in time for students to return to school for the 2016/2017 school year! After a lengthy process of art-making, approvals and fundraising we finally have our wonderful piece of student generated artwork for the exterior of our school building! The dedication ceremony was held on August 23, 2016.

Why is this mural so important? Besides creating a positive narrative to show our community and student advocacy through art, this mural is important because it showcases the personal iconography of each of the students who worked on the project. Each student who had a hand in making this artwork happen has a deep and powerful connection to their creation. It is not always easy to open one’s self up to creating original artwork, and it is even more difficult to have something so deeply connected to your heart be put on display to the public. We are incredibly proud of our students for trusting in the process and taking the risk of putting their voice and their images on public display. We could not be more proud of the hard work of the students of Blackburn!

Left to right-Marcella Morris, Kamiya Pittman, Hilary George (Art Teacher), Kim Darling (Artist-in-Residence), Jamie Benitez, Danny Arciniega, Jose Canales-Tapia

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**Common Sense Media**
by Deborah Nichols, Media Specialist

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 about encouraging positive digital citizenship. For our first installment, please see the one-page Digital Dilemma about privacy attached at the end of this newsletter. For further information on Common Sense Media please go their website at [https://www.commonsensemedia.org/](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/).
Service Learning

Food for Thought

Ms. Thelma Bell, with the ongoing support of paraprofessional extraordinaire Beverly Middleton, is overseeing our culinary program for a second year. Ms. Bell’s expecting expectations in the kitchen resulted in her students’ creation of many culinary delights for our senior citizen friends at Adams Park Community Center, where they serve a weekly meal in partnership with UNO’s Sociology Department.

This project once again culminated for the semester in a Fall Harvest dinner at Blackburn. The long-term nature of this service learning adventure has resulted in the development of wonderful relationships of our senior citizen friends with our students and staff. We highly value these relationships and look forward to continuing the project this spring!

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 fall. Reality Bites is in its sixth year of implementation; Food for Thought is in its seventh unbelievable year! 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.

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Reality Bites

Another long-term sustainable project in partnership with UNO Psychology Learning Lab seniors, Reality Bites enables our high school psychology students to learn the practical application of the behavioral principles of shaping and positive reinforcement in a real-world setting—training family-friendly skills to shelter dogs at the Nebraska Humane Society. This year, Dr. Rosemary Strasser was on sabbatical, but we were fortunate to work with three dog experts in her stead, all from UNO: Ali Phillips Buttner and Kristen Cunningham of the Psychology Department, and Cam Bexten from the Service Learning Academy. Teacher Jennifer Noelle provided strong leadership and modeling for her students to ensure they experienced success with the dogs as well as an application activity of the principles of behavior with humans. Could the students affect the behavior of others just by being positively reinforcing? The answer was a resounding YES! Try it and see for yourself how far a little praise goes!

Jaden Thiessen reinforces “sit” under the watchful eye of Cam Bexten.

UNO student MyAngel was well-celebrating her birthday.

Alexis Santana-Soriano made a lasting impression.

More than 100 meals were served by our resident culinary experts at the Fall Harvest event on Nov. 9th.
Blacksmithing
by Hilary George, Art Teacher

Big news from the Blacksmith shop: The Long School Neighborhood Association Sign is completed and installed at the entrance to the neighborhood at 27th and Lake! Kudos for this accomplishment go to Elmo Diaz and our neighborhood association president, Juanita Johnson. The Mixed Media students at Blackburn are busy getting acclimated to the blacksmith shop under the watchful eye of Master Blacksmith Elmo Diaz. At present, the students are working on their first forging project, a coat hook, while they learn the science and safety behind the craft. When we return from break, we will begin a special project in conjunction with our artist-in-residence, Kim Darling. Our goal is to fabricate a breathtaking kinetic sculpture to be hung in the atrium at Blackburn by May.

The Road to Stress Reduction
by Timara Kroeger, School Nurse

With the end of the term approaching and the Holiday Season so near, I look out of the door of the Health Office and see the emotional energy running rampant. This is the time of the year when individuals need to take a step back and look at the stress in their lives and analyze how they are handling it. Chronic stress and negative emotions, without adaptive techniques, may lead to physical illness and burnout. Staff, students, and parents as well need to find adaptive ways to handle their stress. Here are a few ideas for stress reduction:

* Resolve anger and fear issues by discussing the incident of trauma with others, it is a way of debriefing or destressing.
* Realize that you have the right to say “NO” without feeling guilty.
* Exercise regularly
* Get enough sleep
* Eat healthy
* Listen to relaxing music to calm your mind

Have a safe winter recess!

Trout in the Classroom

On November 3rd, LaDeidre Jackson attended Trout in the Classroom training so her Marine Biology students can attempt to raise trout from roe (eggs) to fingerling-size in order to be released in Nebraska ponds and lakes. Trout are not native to our waters because they cannot thrive in warm water temperatures resulting from our summer heat. Ms. Jackson and her students will receive 150 trout roe (eggs) in January that they will raise in a specially chilled aquarium, courtesy of the Nebraska Environmental Trust and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Follow their progress on social media (@OPS_Blackburn on Twitter and Blackburnalt on Facebook!)
Counselor’s Corner
by Dr. Suzi Yokley-Busby, School Counselor

Here are some ideas for building Healthy Habits in your everyday life!

LEARNING
“Youth should know the importance of learning, developing, and using their internal abilities.”
*READ 20-30 MINUTES PER DAY

SERVICE
“Youth should understand the value of service and making a difference in others’ lives and in the community.”
*DO 10 MINUTES OF RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS PER DAY

USE OF TIME
“Youth need opportunities to develop new skills and interests with other youth and adults.”
*SPEND 3-4 HOURS PER WEEK IN HEALTHY EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

HOPE
“Youth need to believe in their own abilities and worth, also feeling some control over what happens in life.”

*SEEK HOPE AND HOPEFUL IDEAS IN YOUR READING, SOCIAL MEDIA, FRIENDS, MUSIC, ETC.
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
“Youth need to believe that living a healthy lifestyle, avoiding destructive behaviors, and seeking and being positive role-models are best practice.”
*HEALTHY THOUGHTS=HEALTHY WORDS=HEALTHY ACTIONS=HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS
www.search-institute.org/
Feel free to contact Dr. Yokley-Busby at 402-344-3385, ext. 1042 for more ideas on building healthy habits and relationships

Focus on Wellness

Blackburn staff know that the best way to be effective in the classroom is to be happy and healthy oneself, so we are focusing on wellness this year. On November 23rd, we held a Pickleball tournament at Adams Park Community Center, one of our favorite community partners! Thank goodness we had our resident pro, Carvie Erwin, on hand to show us the ropes and referee our play! The top two winning teams won Blackburn sweatpants so they can have the gear to maintain their A-games! Congratulations to Chris Humphries and Greg Buelt, who defeated Jeff Brandt and Devin Wright in a nailbiter! We know how to commune with each other—the healthiest of all our habits!

Happy New Year!
The mission of Alternative Education is to assist students to achieve their highest potential through individual, flexible and structured educational experiences designed to enhance their academic growth and foster lifelong learning.

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Privacy, Surveillance, and Self-Disclosure

Digital Dilemmas are brief hypothetical situations and corresponding questions designed to foster cross-generational conversations about different aspects of adolescents' digital lives. Use this fictitious scenario, based on real-life stories, to spark a conversation at home with your children and open up the discussion about these very important topics.

Breaking and Entering

Nik and his girlfriend Blair were hanging out at his house. Blair got up to go to the bathroom and left her phone on the couch. While she was gone, Nik noticed her phone light up and saw the name Matthew out of the corner of his eye. He was torn about whether or not to look, but decided he would just take a quick look at the texts that he could see on the main screen. Then, he couldn’t resist: he knew her phone password, so he typed it and opened the conversation. Before he knew it, he was scrolling through Blair’s conversations. He saw that she had been texting Matthew a lot. Nik was furious, but he couldn’t decide whether or not to confront Blair and admit that he had looked at her text messages. Finally, he decided he was too angry to ignore it. Blair could not believe that Nik had looked through her messages — she thought that he trusted her and she felt like this was a complete invasion of her privacy.

1. What is your gut reaction to this story?
2. Can you understand Nikhit’s decision to read Blair’s text messages? Has there ever been a situation when you wanted to read someone’s messages?
3. What do you think about Blair’s reaction: Did she have a right to be angry?
4. Are there any situations when it is okay to read another person’s private messages or emails?
5. Have you ever heard of something like this happening to someone you know? Has it ever happened to you?