E-news is an important tool to keep our parent community informed. Please call the main office at 425/837-5800 if you have any questions about our e-news.

May 1, 2015

SBA Debrief

As we have completed over half of the new state assessment for grades 3-5, the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), our team met to debrief our learning. Below are some thoughts related to our observations and a parent question that has come up. Regarding the Common Core and SBA, social media and the web is loaded with information and misinformation (intentional or otherwise). There are also legitimate concerns that have existed since the standards-based learning movement began. The focus of our staff team use standards and assessments to promote positive and powerful learning opportunities for all. The school district has a parent information page available for more information on this test. (Click here)

Newcastle Staff Insights into the Language Arts SBA:

1. The SBA felt more engaging to students. Students reported that the test was a lot more interesting than other tests, both in the format/technology and in the content of the test.
2. The SBA more closely resembles our best instructional strategies. The pattern of the questions from reading the text, to using tools to analyze text to the types of questions are much more similar to our approach to teaching literacy and how adults look at text than prior assessments.
3. Typing and the technology was not the biggest hurdle and for most students was not a significant hurdle at all.
4. Following written directions is critical and was a significant hurdle for some students. We need work on teaching the skills and habits of following written directions. We think this is an important life skill as well.
5. Stamina was a challenge, particularly for our younger students. This was a bigger, longer assessment than they are used to.
6. Independently working at their best level, was also a challenge for some students. Some students didn't apply the same level of work to the assessment that they do in class. Of course in class work the teacher can offer more reminders and encouragements during an activity. So we need to work on students being able to complete larger tasks independently with their best work.

The teaching team reflected on many other practical implications for instruction. The vast majority of our reflections were clarification of standards that we believe will improve learning for long-term success. Examples included continuing to rethink the blend of fiction and non-fiction texts and helping students independently use strategies for identifying and communicating important details from text.
I have heard there have been rumors or fears that this test will be used to hold students or staff accountable. When we make decisions about students we look at multiple measures of achievement. The SBA is one piece of information. We have never had a student repeat a grade due to a test, for example. As far as staff, this district does not use standardized test to affect teacher pay or promotion. The state requires multiple measures of student GROWTH as a part of the teacher evaluation, but the majority of teacher evaluation is based on the use of best instructional practices.

The web is loaded with opinions on the Common Core and the SBA tests. We would like to focus on the original purpose of educational standards - to help us make instructional decisions that will prepare student for a successful future. Without claiming that the standards and tests are perfect, we will approach the assessments and data with a healthy perspective. We seek to use information we get from the standards, the tests and the data as a part of the information that helps us adjust our approaches and programs to learning and encouraging the healthy development of our students.

If you ever have questions about these tests please don't hesitate to email me at mellishr@issaquah.wednet.edu.

Sincerely from your principal,

Rich Mellish

Office Staff Change & Opportunity
After 5 years at Newcastle, Laurie Holmes, our registrar and front office secretary, has decided to take on a new position outside Issaquah Schools. Her last day will be May 8th. We wish her the very best in her new adventure!

Of course this means we have an open position to fill. THREE schools in our district currently have open secretarial positions. As in our case, our secretaries are most often the first point of contact with new families, guiding their introduction to our school. Often our community turns to secretaries for help when a problem occurs. At the same time our secretaries have multiple daily, monthly and annual tasks to complete simultaneously! This is not an easy job.

We are looking for someone who is organized, efficient and offers positive, effective public service. If you know of someone who fits this description, most of these positions are open through May 8th. Details for each position can be found at https://issaquahjobs.hrmplus.net/.

Counselor’s Corner
Dear Newcastle Families, it is extremely bittersweet for me to share that I will be leaving Maple Hills and Newcastle next year to transfer Pacific Cascade Middle School. I have absolutely loved working at the elementary level and it will be extremely difficult for me to leave! It has been an incredible joy to work with our amazing students and staff here at Newcastle. That said, I began my counseling career at PCMS and when the opportunity arose to return in a full time position, it
was one that I could not pass up. As I will still be in district, I plan to work closely with whoever takes my place to ensure students and families are continually supported during the transition.

I will gradually begin informing students throughout the next couple weeks, but please feel free to share with them as well. I look forward to spending these last few weeks with our amazing students and staff! And as always, if I can help support your student in any way for the remainder of the year, please do not hesitate to reach out.

~Ms. Mez

**Dates to Remember**

**May 5th**  PTSA Staff Luncheon
              Chess Club, 3:40 pm

**May 6th**  Great Kids @ Lunches

**May 7th**  Chorus, 8:00 am
              Scratch Code Club, 3:40 pm

**May 8th**  Kindergarten Muffins with Moms, 9:15 am