



## ON SECOND THOUGHT

The Thinking Classroom model challenges students such as Trinity Vanderbeek, left, and Taylor Stevens of West Ridge Elementary School to learn differently.

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## Growing pains District deals with increased enrollment

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

Student enrollment throughout School District 27J is expected to continue its rapid climb, with seat shortages reaching 1,148 at the high-school level and 521 at the middle-school level by 2017.

This year, enrollment at Brighton High School has hit a record-high: 1,840 students — 130 over capacity. Turnberry Elementary has also exceeded its site capacity and Prairie View High School is at capacity with 1,804 students. Overland Trail and Vikan middle schools are close to capacity. When the district's total enrollment is calculated, Planning Manager Joy Gerdorn expects the number of new students to be at least 500 more than last year, forcing the district to explore bond funding to address school facility needs soon.

"The continuing enrollment growth will require the district to

construct new facilities, or make significant other operational changes to accommodate our students, such as year-round multi-track scheduling," said Gerdorn.

"The numbers at Brighton High are now where they were years ago when we went to the split schedule and started building Prairie View," said Board of Education President Joan Kniss. "You can add modular classrooms, but you can't add common space like more cafeteria seating or library access."

The influx in students has been a result of the housing boom from 2002-07. Many of the young students who began enrolling during the boom are now progressing to middle- and high-school facilities that had been built to hold smaller populations. In 2000, the district's K-12 enrollment was 5,643. That skyrocketed to 12,224 in 2007 and

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Crowded hallways are commonplace at Brighton High School both at the start of school in the morning as well as during the change of classes.  
PHOTOS: JOHN CARR



# 27J is a district with many stories to tell



**DR. CHRIS FIEDLER**

It's an honor to welcome you to this first edition of the *27J Educator*. Over the course of the past year and a half we've developed a variety of new ways to communicate with our school community. I'm especially excited about this new publication because it reflects who we are in so many ways.

We are excited about the programs we have in place to help our students grow and learn. You'll read about our terrific WEB program at Vikan Middle School that puts our eighth-grade students in mentorship roles for our younger middle school students. There's a story about the exciting transformation into an International Baccalaureate school that is underway at

Northeast Elementary. Our Career and Technical Education programs at the high school level are thriving and the HOSA program at Prairie View High School is a great example of the way those programs help prepare some of our students for the workforce.

I hope you'll also take a few minutes to read about the Thinking Classroom. This concept is really the driving force behind all of those wonderful programs in our schools that I just mentioned. We want to empower students in their own education by giving them an active role in their own education. In the Thinking Classroom, students don't just collect information. They gather that information and then use it to develop new thoughts, insights and realizations about the world around them.

We are also a district that faces challenges. You'll read about our continued enrollment growth, particularly at the high

school level, and how we accommodate that growth. Ensuring that we have adequate space for our students to learn is a challenge that we have faced since the turn of the new century and it will remain so well into the future.

I believe our story is also about partnerships. I'm excited about the work that is being done at North Elementary and the attached Malcom Park thanks to a joint project between School District 27J and the city of Brighton.

We are 27J and, when we work together for the best of our children, we accomplish amazing things every day. Thank you for your support and thank you for letting us share some of our stories with you.

*Dr. Chris Fiedler is superintendent of District 27J.*

## Board president has fond memories of experience



**JOAN KNISS**


Eight years ago, as I neared the end of my teaching career, my friends kept asking what I was going to do to stay involved in education. I'm proud to say I made the best decision I could have made when I decided to run for the School District 27J Board of Education. Serving on the board has been a blessing in my life. As I come to the end of my term, I'm going to miss the involvement with our students and staff. As I think about the past eight years, these are some of the highlights for me:

- Visiting schools and watching staff members work their magic with children. Whether the staff member is a third grade teacher, a custodian, a bus driver, the district planner, or an office manager, we are so fortunate to have such wonderful employees.
- The "bookend" events: the first day of each school year and the graduations at our high schools especially when I have been able to hand a diploma to a grandchild.
- Groundbreakings for new schools because at that moment we are creating a new community of learners.
- Serving with board members who have a common goal of providing the best education possible for our students. I have greatly appreciated working with my colleagues on the board.

- Having more than 100 parents attend a board meeting to show support for middle school sports.
- I am also very proud of what the Board of Education has accomplished over these past eight years:
- Hiring two very talented superintendents: Dr. Rod Blunck and Dr. Chris Fiedler.
  - Adopting a formal governance method that allows the board to do the important work of goal setting and creating a vision for the district and that allows the staff to do what they were hired to do.
  - Spending half of our board time listening to and talking with community members whether it be the city council members who serve the communities within our District, graduating seniors, or small business owners

- Recognizing exemplary staff members with our Reaching Out Awards or community members who support our district with the Reaching In Awards.
- These eight years have gone by so quickly, and, yes, I will sincerely miss serving on the board. However, I know that the district is in good hands with our instructional leaders and the Board of Education members who are currently serving. I thank the community, the staff, and my Board of Education colleagues for allowing me to serve. It has truly been an honor.

*Joan Kniss is the outgoing president of the School District 27J Board of Education.*



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# Malcom Park makeover a boon for North Elementary School

By KEVIN DOYLE

If all goes according to plan, North Elementary School students will enjoy a refurbished North Elementary-Malcom Park Play Yard when they return to class in 2014.

A \$100,000 Play Yards Initiative Grant awarded by Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) covers more than one-third of the cost of the \$281,000 project. An additional \$95,330 will come from an Adams County Open Space Grant, which was scheduled to be approved in September. The remaining funds will be provided by the City of Brighton, CO (\$28,500 cash match, \$3,500 in-kind services) and School District 27J (\$37,500 cash match, \$16,016 in-kind services).

City of Brighton Parks and Recreation Director Gary Wardle said the project design phase starts in November, the contract will be awarded early in 2014, and construction will begin when the current school year ends next spring.

"We are resurfacing and repairing their basketball and foursquare court area, adding handicapped accessibility, and building an outdoor classroom and a seated, landscaped area as well as an entrance arch that makes it feel like a special place," said Wardle.

North Elementary, a preschool through grade 5 facility, shares a five-acre site with Malcom Park. Eighty-five percent of the 374 students qualify for free or reduced lunch and the majority speak both English and Spanish.

"The students participated in the conceptual design of the Play Yard. It was the students' idea to combine the school and park areas into one big playground and name it their Play Yard," said Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Mark Heidt.

GOCO was established in 1990, and a 1992 constitutional amendment created the GOCO Trust Fund.

This is the first year grants were available to school playgrounds.

North Principal Rich Bucher, now in his seventh year, credited Heidt for guiding the proposal through the process.

"Mark is the one who brought all of this to my attention," Bucher said. "In many ways, Mark is the organizing captain.

He has been the key communicator and the liaison between the City, the school district and the grant folks."

Upon project completion, Heidt said "the outdoor classroom, wild environment area and natural playground will provide first-hand opportunities for environmental education."

The outdoor classroom will be surrounded by well-manicured plants and shrubbery and is unquestionably the jewel of this makeover.

"The outdoor classroom will be amazing. Our vision is the creation of an environment that promotes healthy lifestyles through physical activity and social interaction," said Bucher.

"Essentially, the classroom reminds me of how amphitheaters might be designed. It will have benches that look more like logs and the kids will use clipboards or small lap tables in order to learn outside.

"We feel we can enhance critical thinking and better actualize the thinking classroom by [students] doing some thinking outside in a natural and new environment," added Bucher, whose hope is clipboards are replaced by iPads or digital tablets in the not-too-distant future.

The community will have public Play Yard access on a daily basis with the school section available when school is not in session. The city runs an annual summer Funshine camp program on a rotational basis and North Elementary will be the host school in 2015.



Carla Silva-Tarelo, upper right, Yasmin Lemus-Corona, center and Camila Corona-Ibarra enjoy North Elementary School's slide. At left, a statue at the Bridge Street entrance to Malcom Park.

"Our children and families want to be proud of their school and this will help immensely," Bucher said. "I like that the Play Yard will be open to the general public. As principal, I support this project wholeheartedly as our children are in need. This summer I watched neighborhood kids come to the park and play basketball on hoops with no nets that are crooked. Our tetherball poles are bent and rusted and our play area overall is very unappealing. I am confident that the children and families who reside on this side of town will benefit immensely."

Wardle said the strong working relationship between the City and District 27J dates back 15 years. In fact, Wardle said: "The school used to be where the park is and when we needed to build a new school, the city and the district executed a land swap. We appreciate working closely with District 27J on this project as well."



The playground plays an integral role for many students at North Elementary.





Northeast Elementary School students, seated left to right, Andrea Rico-Jacobo, Abel Zertuche, Lexi Pascucci and Tate Tompkins receive some guidance from older students Joanna Rodriguez, left, and Daniel Montes, right, as International Baccalaureate Coordinator William Parker monitors their progress.

# Northeast Elementary going global

## School embraces IB philosophy

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme, offered to more than one million students in 146 countries, demands the best from motivated students and teachers.

At Northeast Elementary School, which was designated an IB Candidate School in April 2012, hundreds of students and teachers are equipped to join that elite and motivated group.

“This honor and achievement represents a culmination of years of hard work by the Northeast administration, faculty, staff and students,” said Principal Michael Clow. “We believe that knowledge is actively built, not passively learned. We will be offering an inquiry-based curriculum that empowers students as they develop as knowledgeable, respectful, compassionate and responsible world citizens and reflective lifelong

learners.”

Northeast’s IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) focuses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world outside. The school will receive its authorization visit next school year. In the meantime, the IB curriculum is being collaboratively crafted and taught by teams of Northeast teachers.

“We have 72 hurdles to get over this year,” said IB Coordinator Bill Parker, explaining the school must prioritize its actions and develop a program of inquiry with 50 units for preK-6.

Examples of units currently in development include: how equilibrium is maintained by the efficient use of power both in science and in our personal lives (second grade); the challenges and opportunities provided by varying geography of regions (third grade); how human history and individual roles shape progress and innovation (fourth grade); and how migration and settlement are influenced by exploration and/or a change in circumstances (fifth grade).

Clow, who came on board as principal four

years ago, recognized the need for a transformation.

“I knew we had to achieve rigor, and the question was, ‘what would drive us in the best direction for our students?’” he said.

Staff, parents and administration analyzed a range of options, including converting Northeast into a magnet school or one with a science and technology focus, but realized IB would be the best fit.

“We can’t predict the future, but our students will need to be able to adapt and adjust to find meaningful careers in an increasingly competitive world,” said Clow. “We want to create a learning environment where our students are thinkers, communicators and risk-takers.”

Parker, who was hired the same year as Clow and has 17 years experience in education, as well as a background in international business, was in full agreement about the benefits of establishing PYP at the school.

“We need to prepare students for a global marketplace,” Parker said. “We’ve taught so many subjects separately in the past, but in the real world, problems are solved in a

trans-disciplinary manner.”

The IB Organization was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968 as a non-profit educational foundation, establishing the IB Diploma Programme for high school students. In 1994, the Middle Years and Primary Years programmes were added. The programmes are designed to cultivate academic excellence and international awareness, helping students to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world.

For learners in the 3-12 age range, PYP seeks to nurture their natural curiosity. Teachers are challenged to uncover the experiences that children bring with them, and use this as the foundation to help students make sense of what they learn and to understand its relevance in their world.

“The goal is to gain student engagement and foster a love of learning, which in turn will accelerate achievement,” said Parker.

There are 393 PYP schools in the U.S. — 43 of which are in Colorado. If authorized, Northeast will be the first PYP school in School District 27J.



# HOSA program puts students on fast track to medical careers

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

With forensic crime dramas such as “CSI”—the most watched show in the world—and medical dramas saturating most networks, it is not surprising that the effect of their popularity is influencing the career paths of today’s youth.

At Prairie View High School, science teacher Veronica Randall is seeing more and more interest in the health sciences among her students. Fortunately for them, a growing demand exists for highly skilled health-care professionals due to an aging population, longer life expectancy and the current advances in technology.

“The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that eight of the 20 careers with the highest demand for employees in the next decade will be in the health-care field,” said Randall. “And the Colorado Health Institute claims that if current trends continue, by 2025 there will be a statewide shortage of more than 2,200 care providers.”

In the fall of 2010, Prairie View introduced the Project Lead the Way Biomedical Sciences (BMS) Program—a sequence of courses that follows a proven hands-on, real-world problem-solving approach to learning. Students explore the concepts of human medicine and are introduced to topics such as

physiology, genetics, microbiology and public health. Through activities, such as dissecting a heart, students examine the processes, structures and interactions of the human body, often playing the role of biomedical professionals to solve medical mysteries. They also explore the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease, working collaboratively to investigate and design innovative solutions to the health challenges of the 21st century such as fighting cancer with nanotechnology. Current course offerings include: Principles of Biomedical Science, Human Body Systems, and Medical Interventions, all taught by Randall as Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

As a co-curricular support to the BMS courses, Prairie View implemented a chapter of HOSA (formally known as Health Occupations Students of America) in January 2011 with Randall as advisor. HOSA is a national career and technical organization created to promote career opportunities in the health care industry and to enhance the delivery of quality health care to all people. Since its inception in 1976, HOSA has grown steadily reaching more than 135,000 students through 48 affiliated state associations.

“It is a student-led organization of future health care professionals



Desiree Perez, a HOSA member, inspects a slide after transferring a fingerprint to it.

providing opportunities for health-care students to develop, practice and refine their leadership, public-speaking and teamwork skills,” said Randall. “HOSA endeavors to support students in their academic pursuits and to achieve success upon entering a post-secondary educational environment.”

Last fall, HOSA participants at Prairie View began meeting during their common lunch period, rather than after school. This year, Randall is incorporating more HOSA curriculum within the BMS classroom and expects membership to jump from 35 to 75.

“I’m excited that this past summer Project Lead the Way and HOSA started working co-jointly to develop more competitive events and lessons that cross over between the two entities, which will directly benefit our students,” said Randall.

Participating students may compete in up to four HOSA competitions each year. In order to qualify to attend the annual National Leadership Conference, a competitor must place in the top three of his or her event. There are six event categories: health science, health professions, emergency preparedness, leadership, teamwork and recognition. Students may only compete in one event at nationals, so those that qualify in multiple categories must choose one.

Last year, Randall accompanied five students to Nashville for the national conference. One student competed in the clinical specialty event and the other four participated in the biomedical debate.

“Overall it was a success for our first time attending as a chapter,” said Randall.

This year’s State Leadership

Conference is scheduled for March 6-8 at the Pueblo Convention Center and the National Leadership Conference will take place June 25-28 in Orlando.

Randall is encouraged by the path many of her graduates have taken, and is optimistic the program will continue to grow.

“Overwhelmingly students that have been through our program continue their post-secondary education, most with an emphasis within a health-care field,” she said. “We have numerous scholarship recipients, including one Daniels scholar who will be working towards either an MD or DMD at CU-Boulder. Many are studying to become general practitioners, pediatric oncologists, anesthesiologists, veterinarians, nurse practitioners, nutritionists and medical researchers.”



Jaydon Thao and Harley Shorman use a caliper to measure parts of a human skull.



Janel Schweiger uses black powder to dust for fingerprints.



Veronica Randall, director of Prairie View High School’s HOSA program, assists Jacqueline Merz with a project.





# Recipe for good health



Thimmig Elementary School students, McKenna Dunn, left, and Cesar Erives enjoy their healthy lunch.



Nutrition coordinator Tawnia Nies places rolls in a bread warmer.



Nevaeh Herman, left, and Jewlianna Ruiz pick up their milk during lunch at Thimmig Elementary School.

PHOTOS: JOHN CARR

## Healthy options provide the key ingredients for eating right

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Items such as green beans, broccoli florets, fresh plums and kiwi wedges are monopolizing the lunch menus of schools across the district in a push to serve healthier meals and increase nutritional awareness among students.

As a result of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, all 27J schools—and schools throughout the country—are now required to serve greater quantities of fruits and vegetables, as well as low-fat dairy, leaner protein and bread products with whole grains and increased fiber. Schools are also expected to reduce the levels of sodium, saturated fat and trans fat in meals. These improvements, largely based on recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, are aimed to enhance the diet and health of school children, and help mitigate the childhood obesity trend.

The changes went into effect last year, but the district’s Nutrition Services had been one step ahead in an effort to make the transition smoother for its students.

“We knew what the rules would be, so we started slowly implementing changes over the last few years, looking for healthier options that would also be kid-friendly,” said Director of Nutrition Services Tony Jorstad.

Jorstad said one of the biggest changes has been that students are required to take at least one full serving of fresh fruit and vegetables at each meal. Some of the offerings at the elementary-school level, such as “orange smiles,” are designed to appeal directly to the young students. At the high-school level, a greater variety of salads, such as a spinach salad with chicken and strawberry dressing, is also available on a rotating basis.

“We’re offering more of a selection of fresh produce and changing up the selection every day,” said Katie Lopez, assistant supervisor of Nutrition Services. “I think parents are happy that their children have these healthy options available and that they’re learning to eat well.”





Cheyenne Berant, left, and Joey Vongphasouk get some help from student teacher Mrs. Richardson at West Ridge Elementary School.

# New way to learn

Thinking Classroom challenges  
students to go more in-depth

BY KEVIN DOYLE

The thinking behind the Thinking Classroom is very simple: Students will be challenged to acquire a depth of knowledge in the various subject areas, rather than simply memorize information and regurgitate it on an exam.

"The classroom is no longer a place where kids go to only listen to what the teacher says and at the end of 13 years get a diploma," said District 27J Director of Student Achievement Will Pierce. "Kids have a responsibility to learn and grow beyond that."

Pierce said the Thinking Classroom model challenges the traditional teacher-student dynamic at every level, stressing the most important impact on a student's learning and growth results from their own thinking and hard work.

"We have to change school from what it has traditionally been," Pierce said. "We want kids to be better problem solvers and thinkers."

Pierce said that, starting this year, there will be new standardized testing in science and social studies that will reflect the Common Core and Colorado Academic Standards. "There will be a change in how students are assessed," he said. "What we're doing is consistent with that."

Based on the premise that compliant learning no longer works for the student or teacher, thinking classrooms seek to eradicate practices that have produced disengaged and uninspired students; teachers prone to lecturing and over-helping; and systems driven by mandates and guidelines that robbed professional educators of both autonomy and responsibility.

"We have wanted more from our teachers than to talk, test, and grade. We want more from our students than to just show up, be quiet, and do what is told of you," Pierce said. "Information is everywhere and if we are going to prepare our kids for a successful future, we must have them stop memorizing facts and start thinking about how they may use information to solve complex world problems."

For example, if a history class is studying the Civil War, rather than have students memorize a list of dates and key characters, a teacher may delve into what caused a particular battle to start and do similar conditions exist today.

While Pierce understands it is human nature to resist drastic change, the lines of communication are open.

"In some places, where the teacher is skilled at this practice, kids are responding with great energy, thought, increased responsibility and ownership for their learning. Other students are stunned by the overwhelming idea of responsibility and the expectation of participation," he said.

He said the parents he has spoken with are "pretty excited about the idea of kids learning and problem solving."

Julie Schwab is in her 11th year as a fifth-grade teacher in District 27J and 21st year overall. She said the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 caused a shift in her thinking. She has been implementing the Thinking Classroom model for several years.

"The teacher as the keeper of knowledge had to go," she said. "I had to ask myself whether the learning I was presenting my students was providing them surface knowledge or depth of knowledge. Were the students given the opportunity to meaningfully interact with the content and transfer the knowledge they were acquiring through authentic tasks across the content areas?"

Schwab's program is gleaned from a range of experts (Benjamin Bloom, Carol Ann Tomlinson, Nancy Johnson, Robert Marzano, Susan Drake, Shari Tishman) in the field of creating classrooms that actively engage students. She said purpose and clarity of target are the main elements of the Thinking Classroom.

When students and parents embrace the methodology, results can be transformative.

"When given the opportunity to work through the struggle on their own, what the child gains is a new sense of self and what is possible through practice, hard work and perseverance," Schwab said. "As parents watch this transformation occur, they become believers and advocates of the Thinking Classroom as well."

Pierce and Schwab agreed technology is a complementary piece of the overall plan, used to enhance, inspire and spark creativity in learning.

Does the Thinking Classroom work? The improvement in academic achievement is measurable. Schwab said she has seen consistent gains by all her students on the state assessment (TCAP) with 90 to 100 percent making at least one year's growth and at least 80 percent scoring proficient or advanced in reading, writing and math.



# Board president pleased with path she has taken

By MEAGHAN CASEY

Board of Education President and former Colorado Teacher of the Year Joan Kniss' career could have easily taken another turn. Thankfully for the thousands of School District 27J students whose lives she has improved over the last four decades, it did not.

"As a child, I wanted to be either a veterinarian or a teacher," said Kniss. "I had a teacher in the fourth grade who told me, 'boys are veterinarians, girls are teachers.' So I decided to be a teacher. That just shows you the power of a teacher's words. The little things that you think are innocuous, your students take to heart."

Regardless of the influencing factors, Kniss is confident she chose the right path.

"I know I made the right decision," she said. "I never once said that I was going to work; I always said I was going to school. Every day was just a good day. I was blessed to have such wonderful students."

Kniss, who grew up in Arvada, earned her bachelor's degree in education from the University of Northern Colorado, where she also pursued a minor in journalism. She student-taught in 27J and went on to secure a position at the former North Junior High School, teaching English and working as a school counselor. After 10 years there, she moved on to Brighton High School. When Thimmig opened as a K-8 school, she accepted a position to teach grades 6-8 grade for two years. She returned to Brighton High as an instructional coach and eventually retired in 2005, after 33 years of teaching.

"I was always happy here in this district," she said. "It offered a lot of opportunities to grow, and it has always been moving in a forward direction."

During her tenure, Kniss helped to develop academic standards for 27J, led literacy and writing teams, held various offices in the Brighton Education Association and was an active member of the National Council of Teachers of English and the Colorado Language Arts Society. She was named Colorado Teacher of the Year in 2001 and was recognized for that



Board of Education President Joan Kniss has fond memories of her tenure.

distinction at the White House by former Secretary of Education Rod Paige and President George W. Bush.

Kniss attributes part of her success to building relationships with her students and finding engaging and relevant activities to involve them in their own learning process.

"I think you have to be a caring person," she said. "You have to have the instructional skills, but if a student doesn't think you care about him or her as a person first, he or she won't care to learn."

Kniss has served on the Board of Education for nearly eight years, representing District 4. In 2009 and 2010, she was honored by the Colorado Association of School Boards as one of the organization's McGuffey Award winners.

"As a board member, I've had to have a wider district- and community-focus," said Kniss. "As a classroom teacher, your scope is more contained, but I think it's been helpful to bring that perspective and knowledge to this role. When you see something on paper like class size figures, you understand what kind of an impact those numbers will really have."

Kniss was elected president of the board 2½ years ago. She has encouraged her fellow board members to visit the schools, in an attempt to bridge the gap between the board room and the classrooms.

"They can see first-hand how it looks, for instance, when you have a handful of new, ESL (English as a Second Language) students all speaking different languages, and how that teacher has to be a skilled magician to connect with them all," said Kniss. "It's very eye-opening."

Kniss and her husband, Adam, have six children and 17 grandchildren—five of whom are students in the district. She will retire from the board when her term comes to an end in November.

## District undergoing growing pains

**GROWTH:** From Page 1

now stands at more than 16,000.

To update the enrollment projections through 2020, the district has commissioned Metrostudy, the leading provider of primary and secondary market information to the housing industry, to provide research, data and analytics on housing absorption.

Gerdom said she and others are meeting with high school principals to identify options to deal with the overcrowding. It is likely the district will need a third high school before 2017, but until then, the



existing high schools may have to open with split schedules or as year-round schools. The district has not decided on the location of the third high school, but the school, which would have to be funded through a bond election could possibly be built on the 73 acres of land in the northwest part of the district that has already been purchased. In February, the district selected DLR Group Architects to guide the design and development of the project. The design work is expected to be completed by December.

"The goal right now is to develop options and gather input, and then formulate

recommendations to the superintendent for a possible bond election next year," said Gerdom. "After the first of the year, we will be providing opportunities to our community to engage in discussions of the various options."

As the school year progresses, Gerdom and other district staff will begin to develop a communication plan for the public and present the information at community meetings, PTO meetings and other public gatherings.

"We want the community to be able to share their questions and concerns with us,"

said Gerdom. "Of greatest concern to each family is likely how any possible changes might affect their student and family. At the end of the day, the district will have to decide the best options to accommodate all students."

If a new high school project is approved, the district expects it will have to look at options for a new or expanded middle school. Seat shortages in the southern and western portions of the district will also likely justify building additional elementary schools in those communities.



# Vikan: a place Where Everybody Belongs



Karla Sandoval, a mentor with the Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) program at Vikan Middle School, shows new student Michaela Mohrlang the best way to reach her next class. PHOTOS: JOHN CARR

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

It's not every day, in every school building, that sixth- and eighth-graders pass each other in the halls sharing high-fives and a sense of camaraderie.

Yet that is just the type of atmosphere that exists at Vikan Middle School, where the Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) program—part of the national Boomerang Project—has been a huge success. Built on the belief that students can help students succeed, the program trains eighth-graders to be WEB leaders, mentoring and guiding sixth-graders in their transition to middle school.

This year, 43 WEB leaders were selected to mentor the nearly 200 members of the sixth-grade class. At the start of the school year, groups of 10 sixth-graders were put together with pairs of WEB leaders.

"It's a wonderful start because they're already part of a group, even though they just walked through the door," said seventh-grade teacher and WEB advisor Courtney McAnany. "It's a diverse group of leaders that were selected this year. We have athletes, musicians, bilingual students – you name it. It helps the new students to find someone to really identify with and feel like they belong."

To be selected as a WEB leader, students must either apply or be recommended by a teacher in the

spring of seventh grade. Typically, 40 out of 60 applicants are selected as leaders.

WEB leaders are responsible for helping sixth-graders with minor transitions such as opening lockers, navigating the halls and getting involved in clubs and activities. They can also be sought out to deal with more serious issues, such as bullying, creating a safer school environment for everyone.

Throughout the year, different events are scheduled for the sixth-grade teams to check in with their leaders. A WEB dance was held at the start of the year and a kickball game was planned for October. Leaders have also sat in on sixth-grade lunches and they continue to provide ongoing support and guidance for their academic and social success until they move on to grade 7.

"It's that recognition, to think, 'I know this person,' that makes the program so successful," said McAnany. "They appreciate seeing that familiar face and knowing they have someone to turn to – someone who has their best interest at heart."

In addition to their responsibilities as student-to-student mentors, WEB leaders also give school tours to visitors and are considered ambassadors of the school. They are required to wear WEB t-shirts every Wednesday so that students can easily identify them.

## AROUND DISTRICT 27J SCHOOLS

### DISTRICT

School District 27J has received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. The honor, bestowed by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada, recognizes 27J for its comprehensive annual financial report. The certificate is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and reporting.



### BRANTNER ELEMENTARY

After the devastating flooding that affected many parts of Colorado in September, students from Brantner Elementary School stepped forward to help. Brantner students, led by the student leadership team, conducted a school supply drive

for the St. Vrain Valley School District, one of the hardest hit areas by flooding. Students collected lots of supplies for St. Vrain and, thanks to the generosity of one school family, were also able to donate \$2,000 to the recovery effort.



### SOUTH ELEMENTARY

South Elementary teacher Cecilia Fernandez and her class of fifth-grade students received a special surprise Oct 1. Representatives from Office Max honored Fernandez as a local recipient of a Day Made Better Award and presented her with a certificate of appreciation, a Kindle tablet and \$1,000 in classroom supplies for her class and other classes at South. Each year, OfficeMax and

nonprofit partner, AdoptAClassroom.org, work with school principals across the country to select and recognize 1,000 deserving teachers with an A Day Made Better award and \$1,000 in supplies for the classroom donated by OfficeMax. Fernandez, a South teacher since 2003, was nominated for the award by Principal Kay Collins, who praised Fernandez for her commitment to the education of her students.

### STUART MIDDLE SCHOOL

Stuart Middle School hosts its eighth annual career fair Nov. 8. The event, which will feature individuals from a variety of different professions, is designed to get students focused on their future and possible career interests. In order to graduate from high school in Colorado, students are required to have an Individual Career and Academic Plan. This plan starts in sixth or seventh grade and helps students explore their academic strengths, career options and other interests.

### BRIGHTON HIGH SCHOOL

Brighton High School Principal John Biner accepted a \$3,000 check Aug. 23 from the Safeway Store in Brighton. The check was presented to the school during Safeway's grand re-opening celebration. The money will go toward technology upgrades in classrooms.



### WEST RIDGE ELEMENTARY

West Ridge Elementary teacher Kari Mendoza has been honored as a 2013 recipient of the University of Colorado-Boulder's Best Should Teach Award. The annual awards are presented to CU faculty and area public school teachers to recognize excellence in teaching. Mendoza, who has been a district pre-school teacher for 11 years, spent the past seven years at Southeast before moving to West Ridge for the 2013-14 school year. She received her award during an Aug. 22 reception on the CU campus.



# Trotting for a cause

BY MEAGHAN CASEY

With cow bells and motivational signs in hand, the Turnberry Elementary School community came together to rally for its student runners during the third annual Trot-a-Thon.

The event, held Sept. 20, raised more than \$28,000 for the school. Each of Turnberry's 860 students committed to running as many laps as they could on an eighth-mile track, collecting pledges based on their total. In teams, the students ran for 30 minutes at a time, averaging about two miles and totaling 14,811 laps combined. Parents, teachers and friends also participated in the run.

"We had great weather, our students had a great time and we are extremely grateful to our community for supporting our goals," said Principal Brett Minne. "It's wonderful for the families and community to get involved, and for our students to see their commitment. It's also a perfect opportunity to encourage healthy, active lifestyles."

The idea for the Trot-a-Thon came from parent Jill McFall, who worked diligently during the summer of 2011 to put the event together and secure funding from local businesses for refreshments and prizes.

"It was just the best day," said McFall. "I've never seen anything like it. Everyone was cheering and all of the kids had a song they were introduced to, so the music was blaring. They were so excited, they just ran and ran."

The event raised more than \$35,000 that year. It brought in \$27,000 last year. All proceeds go directly to the school.

"The biggest advantage is that 100 percent of the profits goes right back to the kids," said PTA Co-President Marietta Heinmiller. "Plus, it's a simple fundraiser for busy families to commit to once a year."

"It's been amazingly successful," said Minne.



# Trotando por una causa

POR MEAGHAN CASEY

El pasado 20 de septiembre la comunidad de la Primaria Turnberry se reunió con cencerros y mensajes positivos en pancartas para motivar a sus participantes corredores en el 3er anual del Trota-ton (Trot-a-Thon)

Este evento recaudó aproximadamente \$28,000. Cada estudiante, de un total de 860 que asisten a Turnberry, se comprometió a correr un número máximo de vueltas en una pista de 1/8 de milla. En cada equipo, los estudiantes tuvieron la oportunidad de correr 30 minutos a la vez, promediando 2 millas por estudiante. Los padres de familia, maestros y amigos también pudieron participar en la carrera.

"Es maravilloso que las familias y la comunidad se reúnan, y que nuestros estudiantes sean testigos de este compromiso", comentó Brett Minne, director de Turnberry, "oportunidad perfecta para promover una vida activa y saludable".

La idea del Trota-ton fue introducida por Jill McFall,

madre de familia de Turnberry, quien trabajó arduamente para organizarlo en el verano de 2011 y asegurar las donaciones de negocios locales para la compra de refrescos y premios.

"Fue un gran día", dijo McFall, "nunca había visto algo parecido. La motivación era mutua y los niños corrían sin parar al ritmo de una canción nueva para ellos".

El evento recaudo más de \$35,000 ese año y \$27,000 el año pasado. Todas las ganancias fueron directamente invertidas en la escuela.

"La gran ventaja del evento, es que todas las ganancias serán invertidas directamente en la escuela de los estudiantes", compartió Marietta Heinmiller, vicepresidenta de la PTA [Comité de padres de familia]. "Además, es una recaudación lo suficientemente sencilla, ideal para que las familias con poco tiempo libre se comprometan una vez por ciclo escolar".

"Ha sido todo un éxito", concluyó Minne.

1. Students were assembled by grade level for the start their leg of the Turnberry Elementary School Trot-A-Thon. Los estudiantes fueron agrupados por nivel de grado para comenzar trota-ton en la primaria Turnberry  
2. Turnberry staff member Brenda Jones welcomes a group of competitors and announces the race rules prior to the start. Brenda Jones, empleada de Turnberry, le da la bienvenida al grupo de competidores y anuncia las normas de la carrera antes de que ésta comience.  
3. Sophia Heinmiller and Chase Beatty, both first-grade students at Turnberry Elementary, hold a banner announcing the name of their class team. Sophia Heinmiller y Chase Beatty, ambas estudiantes del 5to grado en la primaria Turnberry, detienen una pancarta anunciando el nombre de equipo de su clase.  
4. Turnberry fifth-grade students, from left, Asha Essebaggars, Isabella Heinmiller, Nikola Hilderbrand and Kallahan Franz display the name of their class team at the starting line to the Trot-A-Thon. Each individual student, classroom and grade competed to see who could finish the most laps during their marathon run.  
Estudiantes de quinto grado en Turnberry, de izquierda a derecha, Asha Essebaggars, Isabella Heinmiller, Nikola Hilderbrand y Kallahan Franz muestran el nombre de su equipo en la línea final del Trota-ton. Los estudiantes individualmente, por aula y grado, acabaron la carrera para ver quien completaba más vueltas durante el maratón.  
5. Turnberry Principal Brett Minne congratulates and encourages Trot-A-Thon racers as they circle the course. El director de la Primaria Turnberry, Breet Minne felicita y alienta a los corredores de tota-ton.  
6. Leanne Robinson, a volunteer from the PTO at Turnberry, checks off the scorecard of a student after his completion of one lap of the race. Leanne Robinson, voluntaria de PTO en Turnberry, revisa la tarjeta de puntuación de un estudiante después de completar su vuelta en la carrera.