

Making headlines again

Mapleton lauded for brave decisions

BY TAMMY KRANZ
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A tide of positive recognition keeps flowing in for Mapleton Public Schools.

First, voters approved a bond in November 2010 that enabled the district to receive a \$32 million matching grant from the state to build new schools. The district tried and failed three times prior to get a bond to pass.

Then in early October, the district's superintendent, Charlotte Ciancio, was named the 2011 Colorado Superintendent of the Year.

And finally, just a couple weeks after the superintendent's announcement, the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) named the Board of Education the 2011 All State School Board for "sustaining governance excellence in an

era of intense challenges."

"I think it's wonderful we got the reward, but to our board the bond passing validated the community's recognition what we're doing and trying to do," said board president Norma Frank, who has been president six of the eight years she's been on the board.

Ciancio said the award was a recognition of the hard work and dedication of the volunteer board.

"It's an honor for us to highlight these individuals and the boards of the past that have elevated Mapleton," she said. When reflecting on the recognition lately of the district, Ciancio said, "It takes a long time when you're in reform to see the fruits of your labor. The hard work for several years is paying off."

In 2006, Mapleton decided to reform its small district (the 2010-11 enrollment was 7,634 students) from a traditional school structure to a small-by-design model.

Frank said the decision was

scary but necessary because the students hadn't been achieving to their potential.

It was decisions like these that have made Mapleton stand out. Randy Black, CASB director of member relations, said CASB was looking for "nimbleness with leadership," bravery and courageousness while making tough decisions.

"It took time," Frank said of seeing positive results. "That may be where the courage from the board comes in - to be committed to see the process through."

Right after the restructuring, student test scores declined but in 2009 and 2010, the district saw gains in its Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores.

Ciancio said the board was a role model of courageous leadership. She also noted how well the board members got along.

"If they disagree, they do it politely and gently with one another," she said. "They try to find a common solution. There's a great



Photo provided

The Colorado Association of School Boards chose the Mapleton Public Schools Board of Education as the 2011 All State School Board. The board, from left, Craig Emmert, Cindy Croisant, Norma Frank, Raymond Garcia and Vic Domenico.

deal of heart in the board of education. The children of this community are well served by this board. I'm a lucky superintendent."

Frank shares the CASB recognition with her fellow board members: Cindy Croisant, Craig Emmert, Raymond Garcia and Vic Domenico. Domenico lost his

bid for re-election to the board on Nov. 1.

There were 13 applicants for this award, Black said, and it's the first time Mapleton has won. Past winners include Plateau Valley and Littleton.

The board will be recognized at an awards ceremony Dec. 9 at the CASB conference.

Schools see homelessness spike

BY SARAH JONES
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Last night, 1,500 youth in the metro Denver area were either in a shelter or on the streets without a place to call home.

In the 2009-2010 school year, 2,804 Jefferson County District R-1 students experienced homelessness in one form or another at least once throughout the school year, said Jeffco homeless liaison Sheree Conyers. Last year was their highest count on record, putting Jeffco at the top of the state with the number of students experiencing homelessness. In contrast, Jeffco counted 59 homeless students in 2010, Conyers added.

Jeffco is not the only district seeing a spike, Adams County Five Star Schools counted 629 homeless students, a 56 percent increase in their homeless count in the 2009-2010 school year, said district homeless liaison Rochelle Garcia-Gomez.

Both Garcia-Gomez and Conyers cite the economy as a main source for the increase in students and families seeking district resources.

In an effort to raise awareness for runaway and homeless youth, Jeffco schools and the Gemini Adolescent Treatment Center in Lakewood, a branch of Family Tree, are working together during November to educate students

and community members on how to help and prevent homelessness and runaways. November has been declared Homeless and Runaway Youth Awareness month in Colorado.

In 2010, 18,000 school-aged children in Colorado experienced homelessness, and on average, one in seven youth between the ages of 11-17 will run away, said Gemini Outreach Program Supervisor Nicole Sherwood. The shelter has seen a 40 percent spike in the need for emergency shelter beds and family support services in recent months. In October, Gemini saw 17 youth come through the doors and had to put three teens on a wait-list.

"That exceeds by far our record, so to speak," Sherwood said.

Last year, Gemini helped 107 youth in their shelter beds. On average, during the years before that number had topped out at 70. The shelter has four regular beds and four overflow beds available, and they have been in constant overflow for the past four months.

"We went way up to 20-30 beds of an increase in a couple of years," Sherwood said of the increase in the number of youth helped at the shelter each year.

Family friction is one of the main reasons for teens to run, and today's economy has caused an increase in family violence. Family

homelessness or housing instability has also seen an increase in the past several years, causing an increase in the number of youths in an unstable environment.

Within 48 hours of being on the streets, 75 percent of youth will have engaged in unsavory behavior to meet a basic need, Sherwood said.

"There are some really young kids out there doing these kinds of things," she said. "Often times they are approached or made to feel vulnerable so they feel they have to do it survive."

Additionally, 90 percent of teens will be assaulted in some way in the first 48 hours, Sherwood added, which often takes the form of bribery or coercion for food or shelter. On average, 5,000 teens die on the streets each year from suicide, assault or disease, which averages out to 14 teens per day, Sherwood said.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the 15-22 age group and 62 percent of teens who have lived on the streets admit to attempting suicide at least once, she said.

In order to raise awareness, Gemini is bringing the word to the classroom with in-class presentations on homelessness and teenage runaways. Jeffco is also partnering in the effort to bring the word to the students, said Conyers.

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