

Ag-ed teacher hired

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Clayton Christensen was hired as agricultural education instructor and FFA advisor for 2013-14 at the April 23 meeting of the Re-1J Board of Education.

The position opened recently with the resignation of Guy Kuntz, and administrators are starting to interview to fill teaching positions that are open.

Christensen will graduate in May from the University of Wyoming with a degree in secondary education/agriculture business. He is originally from Wright, Wyo., and said in his application that he is very familiar with small-school settings and cherishes the feel of small communities and schools.

In high school, he was an American Farmer Degree awardee, and he has played an active role in FFA state contests throughout his college career. He was a part of the UW livestock judging team in 2012.

Three staff resignations, all effective at the end of the current school year, were also approved at last week's board meeting. They were from second-grade teacher Stephanie Mitchell, elementary school secretary Jeannette Knutson and elementary paraprofessional Brittany Dirks.

District climate survey results reviewed

In a concentrated effort to gain input from students (grades 3-12), staff and parents, the standard of excellence committee conducted surveys again this year. Committee members Andrea Kammer and Tiffany Watson reviewed the results at last week's board meeting.

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Graphs developed by the committee show comparison results for survey answers from the past four years.

Four options were available as survey answers including strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree (SA, A, D, SD).

Elementary parent positives included an improvement in the rating of technology, increase in number who A/SA that the school is safe, belief that students are ready to move on to the next grade level or course and high marks about teachers/principals caring.

Focus areas from elementary parents show the overall school grade was down this year with more "C" grades. The survey also showed 10 parents D/SD about the questions concerning the grading policy, and there's still parental concern for students not being accepting of each other.

Most secondary parent surveys showed agreement that students see value in the academic opportunity center's positive impact. Many parents also A/SA that the building is clean, which is a huge increase from last year's survey.

Quite a few secondary parents D/SD that discipline is consistent with the matrix and that teachers make sure students understand before moving on.

From student survey results, the SOE committee said many reported feeling safe at school, which was an increase from 2011-12. Students also said that teachers expect high-quality work and use class time for teaching. At the high school level, more students A/SA that discipline is consistent compared to last year.

All the food questions had high numbers of D/SD from student answers. Questions pertaining to the academic opportunity center helping master skills and improve grades also had high D/SD marks from students.

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Employee surveys showed staff members felt more recognized for their work than last year and that the district is more flexible this year. Staff A/SA that there is an emphasis on student achievement.

Employees noted an increase in safety but indicated they do not feel that students are accepting of each other. All the staff questions concerning the care of teachers and principals for students were high in the A/SA marks.

A large number of employees D/SD that the academic opportunity center helps students master skills and understand their grade. Some disagreed that building discipline is consistent. Elementary employees expressed that class size is not appropriate, and some employees D/SD that the school board asks them what they think.

SOE committee members talked about how the survey can be used for SB191 on educator effectiveness and how various district committees are beginning to overlap and help each other.

Based on their discussions of the survey results, the SOE committee took three areas to focus groups.

They addressed why many students don't feel comfortable asking the teacher questions, the inconsistency of building discipline and concern that the academic opportunity center isn't helping students master skills or understand their grades.

Several board members and Superintendent Bret Miles met with four small groups of students after the SOE committee survey overview was complete.

The groups included grade 7-8 students, 9-10 students, 11-12 students and a group who were class or organization presidents. The focus groups were asked general questions as well as specific follow-up questions from the survey data.

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All groups were positive, had good participation and wandered into topics of their own.

Miles reported year two of the focus groups was again a very positive experience. He believes there are tangible issues that the board can address that will be tied right back to these focus groups.

A suggestion was made to expand the focus groups to the elementary school next year.

Other business

In other business April 23, the Re-1J board:

—adopted a resolution proclaiming May 6-10 as teacher appreciation week. Board members were genuine in their own comments of appreciation for the teaching staff.

—acknowledged the generosity of the gift to start the Velma Biddle Memorial Scholarship Fund, which will award an annual \$2,500 scholarship in honor of Biddle, who was a strong supporter of students and of public education.

—looked at a teacher evaluation instrument summarized from staff review of the leadership team's progress toward implementing the new educator effectiveness law (SB191). Leadership team is close to proposing a draft policy.

—heard a third-quarter financial report from Miles, who noted they're on track to finish under budget and with an ending fund balance in the \$1.475-1.5 million range.

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