

Team teaching comes to Botsford School

BY MARIE CHESTNEY
STAFF WRITER

For the first time this fall, two teachers will teach the same group of first graders at Clarenceville's Botsford Elementary.

The concept of team teaching is so novel to Botsford that it has raised a few eyebrows among some parents.

In a letter going out to the parents of the 18 students in the class, principal Jesse Baker will explain how the two teachers will share classroom responsibilities.

Fearful that some children might not adapt to having two teachers, one mother recently expressed her concerns in a letter to the Clarenceville Board of Education.

"The lack of a consistent routine from day to day could be confusing to five-

and six-year olds," she wrote. "By not being with the children every day, it will take the teachers longer to get to know the class."

"Different teaching styles of the same subject matter and different discipline styles could be confusing to the children at a time when important fundamental subjects are covered."

Team teaching is allowed under the district's policy with its teachers, but no teacher had asked for it, said Jim Lancaster, assistant superintendent for instruction/personnel.

"The mom has legitimate concerns," Lancaster said. "These are the same questions Jesse Baker asked. We need to have a fair set of rules for kids and be consistent. It will take a lot of coordination between the two."

"Teachers have to jointly plan certain things, speak with a common voice, and

articulate the curriculum so that it doesn't overlap."

The two teachers, Dawn Habkirk and Kathy Blahunka, have both taught at Botsford. And, as new mothers, both want to work part time. Habkirk taught first grade last year; Blahunka has been on maternal leave and is returning to work.

Under the team-teaching plan, one teacher will lead the class Monday, Tuesday and a half-day Wednesday.

The second teacher will take over Wednesday afternoon, and lead the class until the end of school on Friday.

For 90 minutes at noon Wednesday, during lunch hour and music class, the two teachers will meet to go over class assignments and any problems students might be having, Baker said.

"I think it's a wonderful thing," Baker said. "We'll have two professionals

working with the kids. Change can be wonderful or frightening. But kids adapt well."

"The teaching styles of the two teachers are not different. They are friends and will be on the phone a lot."

The students' kindergarten teachers knew the new first graders would face the challenge of having two teachers and thus put the most adaptive students into the class, Baker said.

"They asked, is this a child who can handle this change?" Baker said. "If the answer was not, they were not a candidate for this class. They were not randomly assigned."

Team teaching works well when both teachers are good teachers, which is what Habkirk and Blahunka are, said the two educators.

"We saw it as a great idea, having two exceptional teachers who want to work,"

Lancaster said. "They were will spend as much time on classwork one-half time as they would full-time. It's the nature of these two teachers."

In other districts where it has been used, team teaching rarely elicits complaints, Lancaster said.

"There are some fears initially, but they get alleviated. Kids already are used to different faces. They have a classroom aide. And they go to music, art and have new teachers there. Kids adjust to different personalities."

Team teaching will also work well with the theme teaching done by elementary teachers, Lancaster said.

"Subjects get integrated into a theme. Kids may read something in the morning involving ladybugs. The math may also involve lady bugs, as well as science and social studies."

New school chief: Reward parents, staff extra efforts

BY MARIE CHESTNEY
STAFF WRITER

Just days into his new job as superintendent of Clarenceville Public Schools, Tom Tattam put three new ideas on the table.

If approved, two of Tattam's plans would give special recognition to staff and parents who have "gone the extra mile" for the district.

The third would begin the process of seeking North Central Association of Schools and Colleges (NCA) accreditation for both Botsford and Grandview elementary and Clarenceville Middle School.

"I believe the board of education and the superintendent should model an organizational culture that rewards quality," Tattam said.

A special pat on the back for staff and parents would celebrate the "good things" done in the district that support quality teaching and learning, he said.

The special recognition also is a way to thank parents and guardians for volunteering, for working on school improvement teams, and for serving as program boosters.

"We can do many things to try to improve MEAP test scores, student motivation and attendance, but without the support of the parents, many of our actions will have no impact," Tattam said. "We must find ways to get parents involved and recognize that their support is an important part of the school district process for improvement."

Another way to improve Clarenceville schools, Tattam said, is to have them accredited by the NCA.

Accreditation now used by the state is primarily based on MEAP scores, Tattam said.

"I believe the school improvement process suggested by the NCA, the clear standards of performance recognized by the 19 state association of schools and colleges, and the use of performance data in decision making about ways to seek improvement in schools, which is part of the NCA process, makes an investigation of this nature a worthwhile exercise for this district," Tattam said.

Taxpayers get a break in Walled Lake

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The continuing legislative backtracking to clean up loose ends caused by the rushed-through Proposal A will pay off for homeowners in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District.

They will get a \$10 reduction in their property taxes for 1996-97, thanks to a change in the state School Aid Act recently signed into law by Gov. John Engler.

That change was necessitated after Walled Lake school officials noticed a minor glitch: a

portion of social security and retirement costs for employees of a county vocational technical center were being footed by local taxpayers. (The Oakland Technical Center-Southwest Campus is operated by Walled Lake schools for the county.)

In recent years, those expenses were estimated at about \$175,800 annually.

Due to Engler's new bill, the Oakland Intermediate School District and the state will pay for those expenses instead of Walled Lake district homeowners.

It was Walled Lake schools

Superintendent James Geisler and Sandra Motz, the district's business administrator, who noticed the problem and contacted Oakland Schools officials and state Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-Commerce Township.

"We knew when Proposal A was adopted (in 1994) and property taxes were cut, some issues would surface which would need to be addressed," said Dobb in a recent press release.

"A glitch in the law had our taxpayers shouldering some of the social security and retirement costs at that site. That was wrong, so we fixed it."

Dobb added that although the \$10 reduction "may not seem like much to some, . . . the trend is important. We are watching out for taxpayers, and we are cutting taxes for homeowners without cutting funds for schools."

She also praised the work of Geisler and Motz for identifying the mistake and bringing it to her attention.

Meanwhile, Geisler said it was merely an oversight that Walled Lake taxpayers originally shouldered the vocational education burden.

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