

Carbondale Attendance Center / Santa Fe Trail Junior High School

To: Dr. Steve Pegram, Superintendent
From: Mr. Michael Flax, Principal
Date: 4 October 2013
Re: October BOE Report

Start of the Year – It is my opinion that the year has gotten off to a great start. The visits to classrooms find student and staff engaged in a variety of learning activities. We have had fewer discipline referrals during the first month of the year as well. I believe there are a number of reasons for that, but the correlation between engagement and behavior is obvious. The more active learning is taking place the better behaved students are. Research has shown that time and time again. We are seeing the reality of that. Staff has been focused on the learning targets, and collaboration has been productive. A couple of groups of staff have asked for additional collaboration time during the afternoon activity period. We have been able to accommodate that a few times, and hope to continue that as often as we can. It has been a great September.

Instructional Strategies – We have increased our attention to the research-based strategies from *Classroom Instruction that Works*. Each month a strategy is reviewed with the faculty at a meeting with the expectation that all teachers will implement it in their classrooms. Mrs. Hamit and I are making visits to the classrooms, sometimes with the distinct intent of seeing these strategies in place. These strategies are not new to the staff at CAC, as we have been introduced by me over the past two years during staff development days. While these strategies are not new, new research comes out regularly to support the use of them by classroom teachers. The first two strategies in place this year are *Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback* and *Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition*. During the October staff development day the CAC staff will begin work with the *Cooperative Learning* strategy.

McREL – The new teacher and principal evaluation system is being piloted this year. However, even the teachers who are not being evaluated with the new system (called the McREL Teacher Evaluation System) are becoming familiar with it. The system divides teacher responsibilities into five standards. Over the course of the year each of those standards will be introduced to all teachers, one per staff development day. The first standard, Teachers Demonstrate Leadership) was introduced during the August pre-service week activities. All teachers followed that training up by completing a self-assessment on the five strands of that standard. Each teacher has met with me or Kristy Hamit to discuss those self-assessments. I completed my meetings earlier today. These meetings with teachers have been very insightful, and most teachers have been very open about what they perceive to be their strengths and their weaknesses. One told me it was a very painful process to look at yourself so closely. Administration will be presenting the second standard, Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students, at the October 14 staff development day.

Homecoming – The community of Carbondale and the CAC/SFTJH staff and students hosted the annual Santa Fe Trail High School Homecoming Parade last Friday. Kristy Hamit was the leader of the efforts from the school. We worked closely with Alice Smith, who had organized the community efforts in preparing for the parade and pep rally. I believe the event was a really

positive experience for everyone involved. Mr. Swaim gave us some license in how he wanted things to work, and from there the entire event came off successfully. We had many parents in the Carbondale community who worked very hard to decorate the downtown area and the parade route on Third Street all the way to the football field. The K-2 students had a full head-on view of the parade as it moved along into and around the track. The venue worked out quite well, with all of the district students in close proximity to the activities of the pep rally. Mr. Quilling did a great job including the elementary and junior high students in the activities. We want to thank everyone who participated in the planning and executing of the day's events. I have heard very little negative feedback, and a large amount of positive feedback, from the SFT community.

Activities – Our fall activities are moving right along. The volleyball teams will finish their season tomorrow with the Big Seven League Volleyball Tournaments. 8th grade, the third seed, will play in the tournament at Perry. Our 7th grade team is the sixth seed, and will travel to Jefferson County West for their matches. The cross country continues to do well at their meets. Hannah Honeyman, 8th grade, has finished first in every run she has competed in this season. Overall we have three students who have won races so far. 7th grader Regan Sisson and 7th grader Mark Huddleston have both won at least one race. The football teams are both competing well. The seventh grade team is on a winning streak sitting at 4-0 so far this year. The eighth grade team is 1-5 for the season so far. The eighth grade team has struggled to keep students healthy and grade-eligible, having only 11 boys suited up last night against Perry-Lecompton. We are hoping that next week we are able to field a full team. Girls' basketball practice begins next week.

Halloween Parties – The fifth and sixth grade classes will be having the annual Halloween parties this year. A few weeks ago the teachers proposed an idea for the theme of the parties. In keeping with our focus on college and career planning we are carrying that over to the celebration. Students who choose to dress up are asked to dress for a career that interests them. A note has been sent or will be very shortly from the fifth and sixth grade teachers regarding the parties. We understand that students may wish to have a different costume for their personal Halloween trick-or-treating away from school, but all costumes at school will need to follow the theme determined by the teachers. Personally, I always look forward to seeing what students choose to wear for their Halloween fun. I live in a neighborhood with lots of children, so each year get to see about 100 different costumes with lots of creativity. It makes the evening fun for me.

Spirit Week – If you read my Parent Informer last week, you might have read a semi-defensive paragraph about social media. I rarely react to things that are said or posted about school or myself on social media. However, there were some items that were just not factual posted, and I believe it is my responsibility to let parents know the school's position on that. The topic of Carbondale Attendance Center not participating in the high school homecoming spirit week activities was raised last week. Traditionally here at CAC we hold a spirit/dress-up week during Red Ribbon Week rather than during the high school homecoming festivities. We participated fully in the homecoming parade and pep rally, and we had a great time with that. However, we do not believe that we can give up the instructional time with two spirit weeks in the fall. Most of you know how keyed up children get when they put on a costume or dress up for something. This carries over into classroom and instructional time, and student misbehavior often follows

with that kind of activity. The teachers and administration in this building are not willing to sacrifice ten days of instruction for that kind of distraction. In a week or so you will all be receiving notice of our Red Ribbon Week activities. Dress-up/spirit week activities will be included in those.

October 14 – The staff development day scheduled for October 14 is a full day of learning and training for our teachers. The CAC/SFTJH staff will participate with the district faculty in the morning session directed at Standard Two of the McREL Teacher Evaluation System. Following that presentation, teachers will have some time to complete the Standard Two self-assessment. These will be discussed at individual conferences with the teachers during the latter part of October. After that the faculty here will be engaged in training on the instructional strategy of *Cooperative Learning*. Lunch will follow with time dedicated to the Build Your Own Curriculum collaboration and work sessions. That time will be divided for two purposes. The first part of the afternoon will find the 5-8 teachers divided into departments so there can be discussion on the curriculum across the grade levels. Teachers need time to look at science and social studies and language arts and math in a linear study as the College and Career Ready Standards are being applied to our BYOC work. That time will be followed by grade level (elementary) and department (junior high) work sessions on the BYOC formatting. This will be a full day of learning and application. I appreciate that the district allows for these professional development days spread across the school year.