

# A Message from the Superintendent



*Gail Malay*

## **Special Education**

There has been a lot of news this week about special education, I thought it would be important for the community to have some background on this topic and to hear some thoughts from our special education staff.

Special education means modifying instruction to meet individual student needs. There are many laws and regulations involved with special education. One of which is...we are required to do child find...a process which screens three and four year old children for any special needs. We provide therapies and development preschool for children that are found to have developmental delays.

In the K-12 system, most of our special education students are learning disabled. Research is showing eighty percent of learning disabled students have problems with reading. Our district has focused on literacy for the last four years. We have sent our elementary principals to training on leading reading instruction improvement. Teachers have received training in DIBELS...an assessment out of the University of Oregon. This tool clearly identifies which students are on track to learn to read and which ones need additional time and instruction. All of our K-5 schools have an uninterrupted 90-minute reading block. Last year the Governing Board adopted new reading resources that have leveled readers...books that are above level, on level and below level to meet individual student needs. We are now adding a comprehensive intervention system to help those students who are struggling. Our goal is to reduce our learning disabled population and we are beginning to see progress in this area.

Currently we have 836 special education students; this is approximately 11% of our population. We spend a considerable amount of money in this area. From our Maintenance and

Operation budget \$3,514,850 is allocated; 96% of this money goes to salaries and benefits. We have two grants in special education...IDEA (6B) and Preschool. The total allocation for our 6B grant is: \$1,061,465...of which over 96% of this money is spent on salaries and benefits. The rest is used for staff training and equipment. Our preschool grant allocation is: \$35,531...64% of this is spent on salaries and benefits; the rest goes to funding child find, supplies, licensing, and fingerprint clearance cards. Special education is a labor intense area and most of our money goes directly to pay people to instruct and assist our students.

This week I spent time talking with some of our special education teachers who were eager to share their students' successes and challenges they face each day. One of our highly qualified teachers of 36 years in special education shared that behavior problems often impede academic growth. Some of the other obstacles that our teachers face every day in trying to leave no child behind include:

- Some students come from dysfunctional home settings where they struggle to have their basic needs met
- Some students are unmotivated to learn
- In some situations we do not have parental support. When parents work with teachers and the system, we are able to get better results.
- Communication can be an issue...people are busy and they have to have patience and continue to work at communication.
- A few of our students, particularly at the high school, come to school only to socialize.
- Some students have poor social skills that affects their learning.
- Some have inadequate rest and nutrition which affects learning.
- Some students and parents do not assume responsibility for their actions.

Many people like to offer advice to educators because everyone has gone through school and has some experience with education. All I ask is that we listen to our experienced staff and try to help them to overcome some of the obstacles they face each and every day as they enter the classroom.

Our district is committed and working hard on continuous improvement. Last year we saw a 5% gain at the elementary level in our test scores. If we are truly to help all students we

need to work together. Educating a diverse population of learners is challenging. The school district is more than willing to step up to this challenge and we appreciate the fact our community invested in two overrides to help us. Together WE can!

If there is something specific you would like addressed in one of my columns please feel free to e-mail me. [gmalay@havas.k12.az.us](mailto:gmalay@havas.k12.az.us)

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