



Eager students start first day of school

Schools opened Monday in Goodland, and students were waiting on the sidewalk at Central Elementary for a bus to arrive to take them to West or North. The bus arrived about 7:30 a.m. and Cameron Mochette, 7, was the first one in line, with his brother Michael Mochette, 10, second. Cory and sister Mila Bell were next in line to board, and Teryn Tompkins, 6, was at the end of the line. Tompkins' mother Heather had walked Teryn to the bus stop and waited until the children drove away to the first day of school.

Photos by Tom Betz / The Goodland Star-News



Survey highlights 'at-risk' behavior

By Kathryn Gurfinkel

The Goodland Star-News

The confessions of school children surprised members of the Community Coalition in a report from the Kansas Communities That Care survey through the Regional Prevention Center.

Sherman County kids say they are drinking more, smoking more, chewing more and fighting more than they did last year, and more in most cases than averages on a state-wide survey. The survey showed that kids here say many of their parents have favorable attitudes towards drug use and antisocial behavior.

The survey asked kids about drug use, family history, exposure to violence and dedication to school. Students answered questions like: On how many occasions have you had beer, wine or hard liquor in your lifetime? and How wrong do your parents feel it would be for you to pick a fight with someone?

The questions are administered anonymously through the schools, asking the students to rate their perspective of the community, family, school and peers and individuals. The schools use the answers related to education to rate involvement and dedication of students.

Goodland Schools have given the survey to sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th graders since 1996.

Numbers that concerned the coalition included favorable attitudes toward drug use and antisocial behavior, including bullying and violence.

The survey showed that "antisocial" numbers were 5 percentage points above the state average and more than 10 percentage points above the average for individual antisocial involvement.

Asked about substance use in the past 30 days, a larger number of kids admitted using alcohol, tobacco and drugs than the state averages in most cases. For example, 23.5 per-

cent of eighth graders in Sherman County reported using smokeless tobacco compared to the 4.3 percent for the state.

Drinking was more prevalent here than across the state, with 64.1 percent of students in all age groups in Sherman County saying they had beer, wine or hard liquor — more than just a few sips at least once — compared to 53.2 percent in the state. That number was up 22 percentage points since last year.

In 2004, 15 percent of students asked in the county responded that they had attacked someone with the intent to hurt them in the past year compared to 12.7 percent for the state.

The numbers on some questions show a large increase in negative attitudes from last year. The number of children responding that it is very easy to get a drug like cocaine, LSD or amphetamines increased from 2.8 percent last year to 9.4 percent this year.

Diane Stithem, prevention program director for the Regional Prevention Center of Northwest Kansas, said she wants members of the coalition to spread the results of the survey to increase awareness and involvement in prevention programs.

One of the focuses of the coalition is to keep the illegal substances out of the hands of underage users and convince kids that using them is a bad idea.

In an effort to bring numbers down last year, Cris Lovington, community prevention consultant, said she gave a seminar on keeping tobacco out of the hands of underage children to employees at Walmart.

"The kids are telling you what's happening in the community," said Stithem.

More information on the survey is available at www.ctcddata.org then to the Using Your Data link and then the County Data Link.

Neighborhood Watch educates community

By Kathryn Gurfinkel

The Goodland Star-News

Judy McKee, coordinator for the new Neighborhood Watch program, told members of the Community Coalition about its goals at a meeting Friday.

"There's just not enough (police) officers to go around," she said, calling for the community to get together to take responsibility for its own safety and property.

"It's sort of being the nosy neighbor," she said, "but I want to take it beyond that and be the concerned neighbor."

McKee said members of her

group are raising the profile of Neighborhood Watch with a booth at the Northwest Kansas District Free Fair and at Pioneer Day in Kanorado. She said she spent Friday morning in Edson talking to community members about the group.

They are trying to get the word out about the program, she said, and educate people on crime prevention and reporting.

One of the big pushes, she said, is to inform people on how to use law enforcement telephone numbers. Members of the group are trying to circulate the 24-hour

numbers, 911 for emergencies and 899-4575 for crime reports. She said they are working on educating people reporting crime to remain on the phone until all the information is collected.

Recently, McKee said, she went to a meeting in Emporia, where she learned about programs through Homeland Security. The programs will teach citizens corps groups to come together to respond to disasters through Citizens Emergency Management Training. She said the programs would teach people how to help their community in the event of a

disaster.

In Emporia, she said, she developed a network of people involved in neighborhood watch programs.

"They all have the same problems we do," she said, "but they also have solutions."

People can get involved by organizing their neighbors to hold a meeting and inviting her to speak, McKee said.

"I can come and train and educate," she said. "Just let me know."

Groups that hold a meeting, she added, will then become eligible for new Neighborhood Watch signs to be posted in their area.

Grants available to help Sherman County kids

By Kathryn Gurfinkel

The Goodland Star-News

Sherman County has \$1,050 available for programs geared to help prevent child abuse and neglect and to support child care programs through the Regional Prevention Center of Northwest Kansas.

Smart Start Northwest Kansas, a group designed to increase the availability and quality of child care for children up to age 5, is offering a \$300 grant to go towards a childhood project. The group has put funds towards the accreditation of Judi's Rainbow Preschool, started in 2001, and the recent accreditation of the West Elementary Early Childhood Class.

"It's the only accredited preschool in northwest Kansas," said program director Maureen Ostmeier.

She said the coalition is eligible to apply for a grant to be used in supporting child care providers or preschool teachers. Some of the ideas she suggested include sending a child care provider to a state or national convention. The money also could be used for scholarships or for

promoting child care businesses.

The Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect group also is offering a mini-grant of \$750 in Sherman County, said Diane Stithem, prevention program director.

Last year, the grant awarded to Sherman County was used in a children's abuse and neglect component at the 2004 Sherman County Health Fair.

Money left over from the fair was used for a Day to Prevent Teen-age Pregnancy held by the Goodland High School group, Girls Responsibility and Accountability towards Culture and Education, known as GRACE. The group brought in two teen-age mothers who discussed the experience of having children so young.

Cris Lovington, community prevention consultant, said the two

mothers talked about the costs, time and strain of having a baby as a teenager. She said the county has a high rate of teen pregnancies compared to the rest of the state and the meeting helped to make an impact on the 60 students who came.

The prevention center has placed posters with tear off messages about child abuse in the schools and at the post office. They gave out blue ribbons during April, Child Abuse Pre-

vention Month.

Stithem said the center offers a class for teachers or day care workers to show them the signs of child abuse and how, when and why to report it.

This year, the \$750 again is available to be used to focus on prevention of child abuse and neglect.

"What you've got to do is apply," said Stithem. "They want something going on in each county."

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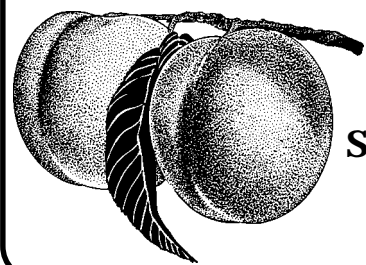
* As reported by Financial Planning Magazine, June 1996-2003 based on revenue

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