

After school program keeps eye on elementary kids

Afternoon volunteers needed

By Sharon Corcoran
The Goodland Star-News

Most would agree that elementary school children shouldn't be left to fend for themselves when the bell rings, but finding someone to watch them has been a problem.

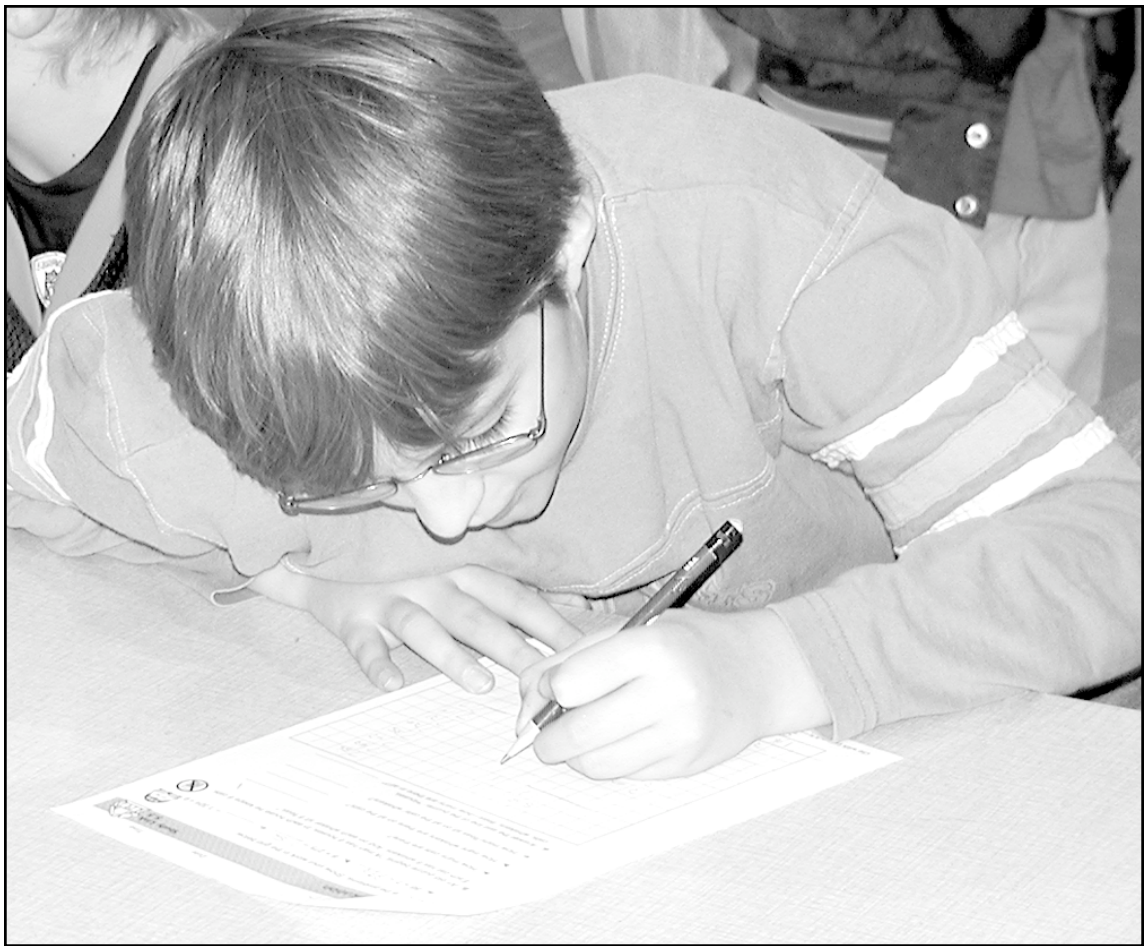
The Sherman County Extension office started a program in 2004 to keep an eye on kids after school and provide activities to keep them busy. That program, the Northwest Kansas After School Project, has money to pay for a coordinator and an aide and for snacks but is finding itself overextended.

The program has 43 applications for the new session which started Monday at Central Elementary School, said Wendy Wellman, director for the program in Goodland and Colby, but only has room for 35 kids. And there aren't enough hands to help even the 35, she said.

The program needs volunteers to come in one afternoon a week to help kids with homework, pass out snacks and make sure kids get to where they need to go, Wellman said.

One volunteer is needed just to call and find out where the kids are if they are supposed to be there and don't show up, said LaDona Frerichs, agent assistant for the Sunflower Extension District (a combination of the Sherman, Wallace and Cheyenne county Extension offices).

There's such a big need, she said. The program has come so far, so fast, in just two years, Frerichs said;



Jane Petrachich (left) and Tyler Amthor (above) worked on their homework at the beginning of the after school program's first day of session two.

Photos by Sharon Corcoran/The Goodland Star-News

it is a very successful program. But it is short on volunteers, she said.

The program received a \$19,321 grant last year from the Kansas Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Kansas Juvenile Justice Authority last year, said Sue Evans, director of the Regional Prevention Center in Colby. The program got the same amount this year, she said, and it pays for the after school program in Goodland and Colby.

The money comes from fees

generated through court costs, Evans said; the grant is administered through the prevention center. The grant pays part of Wellman's salary, Evans said, and the prevention center gives money to the school districts to pay a coordinator. Wanda Schritter is the coordinator in Goodland, said Superintendent Shelly Angelos, and the school district pays her aide, Deb Mentzer.

The school district helps with transportation and provides their facility, Evans said, and there has

been a lot of help from the community, for example, the Extension office.

Besides, she said, the grant pays for snacks and supplies, and the prevention center buys them in bulk for the programs in Colby and Goodland both. The program is all paid for and just needs volunteers, Wellman said.

It's getting harder and harder to find people to watch kids, she said; so many families have both parents working. One boy in the after school program is being raised by

his great-grandparents, she said.

It would help even to have volunteers to sit with the kids and listen to them read, Wellman said.

A task force meets to plan for the future of the program, Evans said; and they would like to expand the program next year, the number of students and the ages of students accepted and make it for the whole school year.

Now the program accepts first through fourth graders, she said, but there have been requests to accept kindergartners and fifth and sixth

graders. The older students could be helpers for the younger ones, she said.

"It will take planning and additional resources to expand the program," Evans said. "The more people who help, the better off we'll be for expanding."

It just takes an hour for a volunteer to help the kids, she said.

"We're not just warehousing kids," Evans said. "We want them in a safe, nurturing environment, but we also want it to be enriching."

School careful to make sure kids counted as 'at-risk' qualify

By Pat Schiefen
The Goodland Star-News

With auditors questioning whether Kansas is using the best method to determine how much districts get for "at-risk" programs, Goodland school officials say they're careful to make sure students counted here truly qualify.

The Goodland School District counts 308 at-risk students, about 33 percent of the 944 full-time student equivalency used for the 2006 budget, said Superintendent Shelly Angelos.

A check by the state Division of Legislative Post Audit released in November 2006 concluded that school districts are receiving millions of dollars that they shouldn't have. The auditors — the division is an arm of the Legislature — con-

cluded that thousands of students statewide are counted as at-risk and should not be.

In Goodland, Bonnie Smith said, parents have to fill out an application and turn it in to the principal of the building the student attends to get free lunches. The principal reviews and approves or denies the application. The district follows state eligibility, said Smith, food service director for the Goodland School District.

"I double check the applications," she said, adding that applicants receive a letter to let them know whether they qualify.

In October, Smith said, the district does a random verification of the applications. They request the Social Security numbers of the adults in the household, pay stubs from two con-

secutive pay periods and give families a form to fill out, she said.

The verification process is completed by Wednesday, Nov. 15.

"Bonnie has done an excellent job," said Superintendent Angelos.

For the most part, Kansas counts students "at risk" of not graduating from high school because of low family income, measured by eligibility for free or reduced-price meals under federal guidelines. Those require an income of \$26,000 annually or less for a family of four, for instance.

Kansas and other states have used the number of free-lunch students since 1992 to give a timely and convenient measure of poverty because poor students have a higher risk of failure in school and may need more help.

An alternative is the poverty estimates published by the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census takes several years to publish, though, and its estimates and are not always considered reliable down to the school district level.

Census estimates also are less accurate for certain populations, such as rural or transitory families, said the auditors, and the Census counts children in the school district where they live, not where they are enrolled. The census poverty estimates take a significant amount of time to prepare, they said, and get less accurate the further into the 10-year cycle the information is used.

The state had 130,000 free-lunch students, they said, while Census data suggest 76,000 were at the 130 percent federal poverty level in

2003-4. The audit report estimated that 22,000 students getting a free lunch were not eligible. The rest of the difference is in the age groups and numbers of foster care children, the report says.

The auditors also figured that about 3,500 students statewide should have been getting free lunches but didn't apply.

The report said that some families make mistakes and under report on their income to apply for free lunches while others do so intentionally. Federal law requires school districts to accept the applications on face value, the audit notes. Districts cannot look at wage statements and tax returns. The school lunch program is primarily concerned that students who need free lunches get them, and concerns

about fraud and abuse are secondary.

The audit recommended that school districts try to verify a sample of at-risk applications and share the information with the audit team. Auditors suggested that the Legislature consider amending state law to have an age limit for free-lunch students for at-risk money and change the at-risk funding to an full-time equivalency count.

corrections

An article in Friday's edition of *The Goodland Star-News* said the Cowboys started their wrestling season at home against Atwood. That match was against Hoxie. The Cowboys compete against Atwood at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at home.

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Sixth graders show school board how media players used in class

By Pat Schiefen
The Goodland Star-News

Two members of Jona Neufeld's sixth grade class showed school board members how they used portable media players in their class when the board visited North Elementary School on Monday.

Neufeld explained how the devices were useful for English-as-a-second-language students because they could listen to something more than once if they needed it.

She said they have two of the players in her classroom, one the district bought and one from the English-as-the-second-language

program. She said she can hear students' improvement in oral reading.

Chloe Goodwin, daughter of Tina and Curtis Goodwin, showed how the class could scan in art work, record dialogue and add music to make a "podcast" of a book.

The book she talked about was "BFG" by Roald Dahl, about a 24-foot giant and the human girl he kidnaps.

Josh Whisnant showed part of a movie from United Streaming about Egypt. The district subscribes to the service, which has educational movies and video, said Neufeld.

Principal Jim Mull said the teachers wanted to remind the board that the laptop computers they use in the classrooms are 4 years old and beginning to show their age.

Later, Superintendent Shelly Angelos said the technology building project has cost \$17,087 to date, under the \$25,000 budget.

Angelos said she had met with representatives from the Northwest Kansas Technical College to continue a discussion on concurrent enrollment between Goodland High School and the technical college.

She said she and board member

Dick Short planned to attend the Kansas Association of School Boards convention in Wichita this week. Angelos said she will participate in a round table discussion of administrators on school finance.

In other business, the board

- Approved paying \$39,178 in bills.
- Decided to study whether

school buildings should be designated as emergency shelters for winter storms.

- Approved existing evaluation forms for administrators.
- Hired Beverly Frailey as a four-hour a day cook at North.

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