

I N N O V A T I O N

Section 2

'Every kid, every day'

Wilton school pushes forward-thinking approach for healthy, happy students



Wilton high school and elementary students team up for the first ever school-wide Read-a-Thon. The Read-a-Thon is one of dozens of changes instituted at the school, with new programs, resources and attitudes making their way through the school. (PHOTOS BY ALYSSA MEIER)

BY ALYSSA MEIER

At Wilton Public School, the goal is not only to reach educational milestones and get kids to graduation, but to foster an environment where students are supported, inspired and set up for success long after they take off their caps and gowns.

"We want them to walk out the door and feel confident as citizens," Wilton Principal Courtney Seiler said. "In this 13 years that we get to have them, we want to really develop the respect, empathy and citizenship piece."

"And we want them to have a good time while they're here," Superintendent Amanda Meier added.

The women, two of the three females under 30 years old heading the Wilton School, sat down recently to explain the leaps forward the school has made in the last several years. One of the most significant, the change from a split school to a joint administration managing k-12.

Meier was hired at the school in 2015 as the elementary principal, but that set-up changed the next year as she became the principal for all k-12 students, with Seiler serving as assistant principal. The next year, Meier would be hired as the school's administrator, with Seiler taking the principal reins and Macy Hettich signing on as assistant principal.

"I think one of the things we're most proud of is going from being an elementary and

a high school to really looking at what it means to be a Miner from pre-K all the way to 12 grade," Meier said.

Meier and Seiler said having a kindergarten through grade 12 approach has made for smoother transitions between elementary and high school classes, and that it opens the door for different grade levels to work together.

"It got the elementary staff with high school staff, the elementary kids working with high school kids so they are seeing those high school kids as leaders," Meier said.

But the new administration set up isn't the only thing new at the school, which is booming with added programs and activities. In the last year, the school has brought back cheerleading, approved a junior national honor society program, opened up an after-school daycare run by volunteer students, started a branch of Close Up, instituted student-led conferences and launched a brand new summer program. And overwhelmingly, these ideas come from one place -- students.

"We have created an environment where kids are comfortable telling us things they want to see in their school, Meier said. "We tell them all the time, 'These are your walls, this is your building, what do you want to see?'"

From the Close Up group to a

EVERY KID

continued on page 2



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walking club that helps students let out some energy, the ideas are primarily stemming from the kids themselves.

“Junior National Honor Society came from a freshman that wanted to have that opportunity, and same with cheerleading,” Seiler said.

Other ideas, like the school’s new little library and mini food pantry, stem from other invested members of the school. The little library, which will be installed outside of the building for students to pick up and drop off books, was the brainchild of a school board member. The mini food pantry, coming this fall, was an idea from assistant principal Hettich.

Inspiration is coming from every angle, something the women credit to a newly-improved environment.

“The culture just naturally shifted. It’s just different,” Seiler said. “There is just a different level of respect and we really push the relationships and that motto of ‘Every kid, every day.’”

Meier said the culture change was put into perspective during a recent accreditation survey, where students expressed feeling safe at the school, something Meier said helps her sleep at night.

“Our kids come here and they know it’s safe to take risks and they know that they are loved,” Meier said.

That healthy mentality is something the staff promotes through staff and student recognition, trauma-sensitivity training and intervention programs. Seiler said it is important to remember that the emotions

students are feeling will likely impact how they perform in class, and that addressing mental health is part of the school’s job.

“They don’t just drop their luggage when they come in,” Seiler said.

To make sure each student is on track both academically and emotionally, the school has intervention programs developed to offer help to kids who may be struggling.

“These are little humans and we have to make sure that their bellies are full and their hearts are full before we can put math and reading in front of them,” Meier said.

The school also promotes proper hygiene, healthy eating, water consumption and balancing screen time with activity. Meier and Seiler said they work to ensure students are not only taken care of during school hours, but that they are developing good habits for when they aren’t in class.

The school is keeping pace with progress on the academic front as well, bringing in new curriculums, advanced education classes and resources for those getting closer to graduation.

“We had two Career Discovery nights and that really helped connect our push for life after high school, Meier said. “It helped bridge the word that we are trying to do in the school by allowing parents to see that first hand.”

These changes have started fostering results, with the administrators reporting students being more engaged and talking



Wilton high school and elementary students team up for the first ever school-wide Read-a-Thon. The Read-a-Thon is one of dozens of changes instituted at the school, with new programs, resources and attitudes making their way through the school. (PHOTOS BY ALYSSA MEIER)

about possibilities they hadn’t considered before. And when it comes to letting students dream, the Wilton School isn’t putting up any walls.

“When we went to kindergarten graduation last year, some of their dreams were to be a ninja or things like that, and we came back and had that conversation about how do we get these kids to believe that they can do whatever they want

to do,” Seiler said. “You can be whatever you want and success can be whatever you feel.”

Seiler and Meier said it feels great to see the school, staff and students making progress and that they can’t take all of the credit for the changes.

“We couldn’t do this without our staff,” Seiler said. “There’s no way we could do this alone.”

The women said they were continuing to find new ways to improve the school and the school experience, with no limit to what the Miners may achieve.



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“When we set our kids down, they run into daycare. That’s a good feeling because it tells us they really like it.”
 – ECCCC parent



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Hazen child care center helps meet community need

BY DANIEL ARENS

The energy within the community of Hazen is strong, as is evident by the origins of the county's largest child care center, right here within its city limits.

When a community health task force met a couple years ago and determined that lack of child care options was one of the biggest issues facing the Mercer County area, they likely did not anticipate how quickly a large facility could come together.

Late in 2016, New Bethel Congregational Church closed its doors, and the church agreed to allow the Energy Capital Cooperative to use the building as its new child care center. The cooperative, a partnership of industry, local businesses, schools and others, came together and began making plans for renovating the space.

Energy Capital Cooperative Child Care's (ECCCC) New Bethel Center opened on May 30, 2017. It was founded by eight employers that recognized the child care struggle their employees faced. Led by Basin Electric Power Cooperative, they took the initiative to create a solution: form a new entity to own and operate child care



Hadlee Czywczynski, Brooks Peterson, and Kade Scheid; a few of the center's children playing.

facilities in the county.

"I think the cooperative approach for a child care facility was certainly innovative," Erin Huntimer. "It's an approach that really did work for this project, for this community."

ECCCC's founding partners are:

- Basin Electric and subsidiary Dakota Gasification Company;
- Sakakawea Medical Center;

- North American Coal Corporation, representing The Coteau Properties

CHILD CARE CENTER

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Dana Santini, the center's director.

Talking with your loved one about assisted living

It's not always easy to talk with an aging parent or loved one about a need for additional help that may lead to a move out of the family home, but ignoring the issues at hand won't make them go away. Delaying the conversation may put a parent's health, safety or well-being at risk, while their healthcare needs and your own stress level as a caregiver escalate.

An AARP survey shows that most older adults feel better about having this kind of discussion when things are going well, as

part of planning their future. Too often, families wait to have such discussions until after a parent has had an unexpected health issue or crisis, such as a fall, accident or medical emergency, and is no longer able to take care of themselves. The urgency at this time causes increased stress and uncertainty when the clock is ticking, care options are limited, and significant decisions have to be made quickly.

"Often I hear residents and their family members say they should have made the move to a senior care

community much earlier, not later," explained Karlene Holte, Social Service Designee at the Benedictine Living Center of Garrison, a leading provider of senior care services including independent and assisted living, long-term skilled nursing care, short-term rehabilitation, memory care, and outpatient therapy. "Having a conversation early and making a move when a loved one is still in good health means he or she can fully enjoy all the benefits a senior community has to offer, including staying active,

making new friends, and taking part in a wide variety of social, recreational and wellness opportunities. Such benefits have been shown to enhance healthy aging and enable older adults to remain independent and live a better quality of life longer."

Being proactive instead of reactive will help you have thoughtful discussions and ensure families have a plan in place should a loved one's health situation change unexpectedly. Selecting a "continuum of care" facility lets adult children choose the best care option for mom or dad for the time being, such as independent living at a facility, while looking ahead to assisted living or access to a higher care level at the same community should the need arise down the road.

Your loved one may resist a conversation about a possible change in their living environment or the need for additional help, preferring to pretend that life is as normal as it has always been for them.

In such situations, experts advise:

- Talk with them about the many benefits – including an active lifestyle; opportunities to focus on personal interests and needs; socialization and security; and freedom from the hassles of homeownership and home maintenance – that these settings provide.

- Respect their feelings if they make it clear they want to avoid the subject, then make a mental note to return to the conversation at a more

suitable time.

- Pursue the issue if their health or safety is at risk, yet recognize their right to be in charge of their own life.

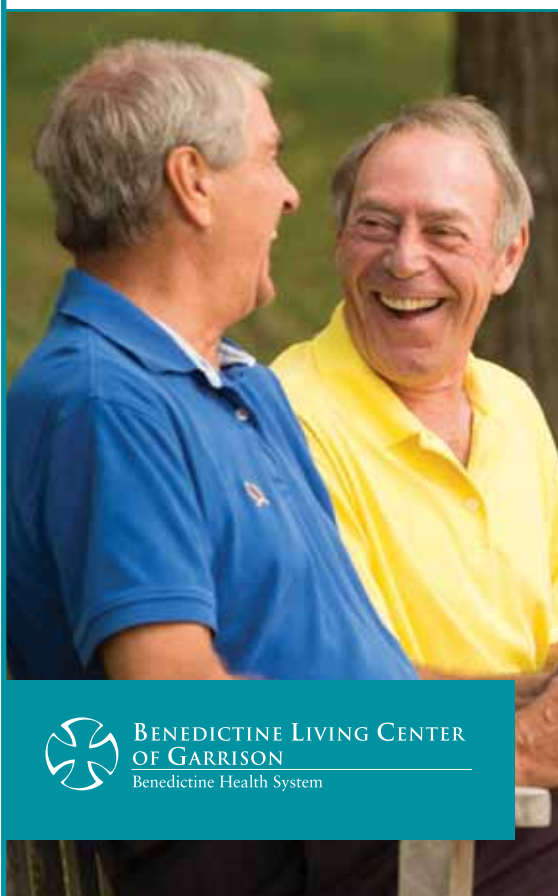
- If you decide you simply must intervene, act firmly, but with compassion: "Dad, we can't ignore this any longer, we must deal with the situation. I'm here to help."

- Involve other people your parents respect, such as a trusted friend, doctor or pastor.

- Hold a family meeting so everyone can discuss concerns and jointly develop a mutually agreeable plan. Once your loved one has agreed to at least consider the idea of seeking additional support, possibly in a continuing care senior community, research your options and learn everything you can about what life will be like for your loved one if a move is the answer.

Moving to an independent or assisted living community can be one of the best decisions a family can make for an aging parent, particularly when social interaction and maintenance-free living are desired, activities of daily living become more than they can handle, or their care needs are more than family members can provide. Starting the conversation early will make your loved one's transition into their next phase of life easier and more enjoyable for everyone involved.

(References: Loverde, Joy. *The Complete Eldercare Planner*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000. Solie, David, M.S., P.A. *How to Say It: Closing the Communication Gap with Our Elders*. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 2004.)



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The New Bethel Center is a licensed child care center with a capacity of 77 children ages infant to 12 years. Its partners have guaranteed spots for their employees, but many spots are available for the members of the community as well. The center offers extended hours of operation to accommodate shift-working parents. Weekly full-time rates range from \$160-\$175 depending on age. Daily, part-time, and shift-work friendly rates are also available.

In October, the facility was given the 2017 Project of the Year award from the Economic Development Association of North Dakota. This award honors a project that has made a substantial economic difference to its community.

Dana Santini is the center's program director. She's passionate about early childhood education and leads a playful learning environment where children can grow. "My goal is to build a family community within the center where children feel safe, loved, and enriched; parents can feel confident leaving their children; and staff members feel like they are an important part of the puzzle."

Huntimer led the project on behalf of Basin Electric, and serves as ECCCC's board president. She is amazed at how quickly the child care center came together, going from concept to completion in just one year. "We would never have gotten this far this quickly without the generosity of our partners, several area businesses, and many community volunteers," she said. "It's been incredible to see the time, energy, and care that has gone into making this happen. It shows how desperately needed this is in the community. Now we're excited to watch it thrive."

For more information on ECCCC, contact director Dana Santini at 701-748-3838 or visit www.energycapitalcooperative.com.



One of the child care center's teachers, Danielle Holen reading to her class.

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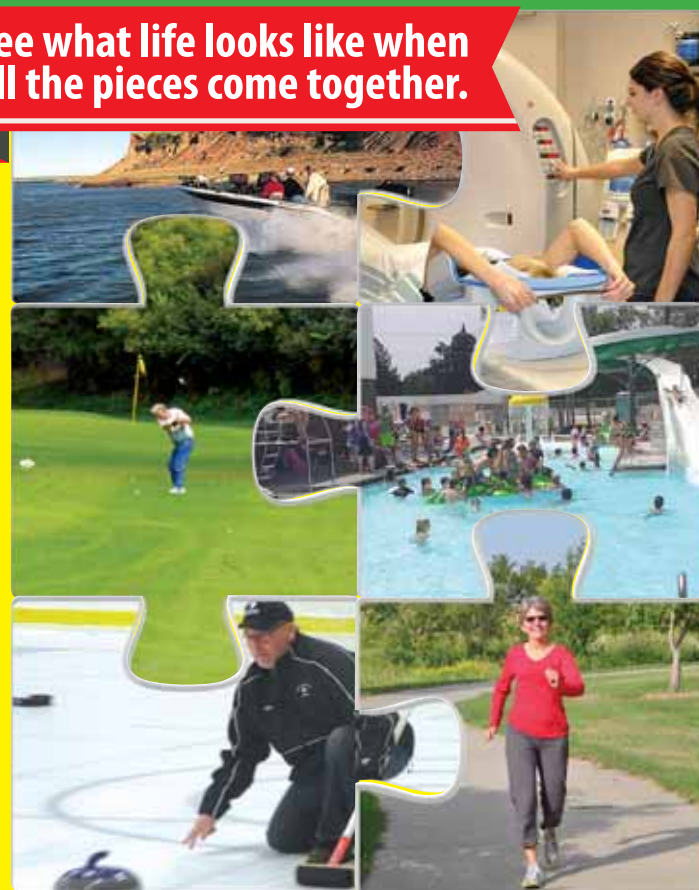
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Beulah schools, the cutting edge of EDUCATION

BY KATE JOHNSON

The Beulah School District is staying ahead of the curve with their cutting edge classrooms and lessons.

All three of Beulah's schools (elementary, middle, and high school) continue to advance their classrooms and students into the future of education. Over the last several years Beulah has continued to make additions to their curriculum, free time space, and school as a whole.

They are teaching elementary school students to code; they have provided a place for high school students to program and use a 3D printer; they have set up an innovation cafe in the middle school where students can spend time exploring technology; and they have made the addition of a therapy dog to their elementary school.

Maker Space

Maker Space allows students to dive into innovation on their own terms. They are able to dissect a computer, print a 3D object and make music off of ordinary everyday items. This is only a few of the current Maker Spaces taking place throughout the middle and high school.

This space is giving students resources to explore technology, without having to sit through a class. Students are able to come in and out of the Maker Space as they please, working on whatever project they left off at.

"We're just facilitators, providing them the environment, the materials and starting ground and letting them go," said Deb Shields, who is the technology director at Beulah.

It's not only a time to work on technology, students can also come into the Maker Space and color or sew. They are able to tinker with a computer, pulling it apart, and then put it back together again.

"The whole point of maker spaces is for kids to be exposed to a lot of this technology and to have different hands-on things and to explore them," said Shields.

Coding

Kindergarten through fourth grade are learning to code. Beulah's elementary age students are having their eyes opened to the world of coding.

Sarah Becker, Beulah's technology instructor has been teaching the elementary students about coding through a website called code.org. The first word they learned through their pilot program in 2016 was "algorithm."

There are integrated videos that teach them the steps. They learn about de-bugging, sequencing, patterns, programming and looping which is something that will be utilized in those age levels; a way to teach computer science from the start of education.

Becker said that she believed building from the bottom up

was the best way to start the education of coding, which is why they began in the elementary school.

"It's connected with a site too that's common sense media, which is cybersecurity," explained Becker, "So it's good focus, good instruction and good foundation."

Active Classroom

Active classrooms have been sweeping Beulah for the last several years. Teachers are seeking out ways to facilitate their students' extra energy in a proactive way. Beulah Education Foundation allows teachers to apply for their Innovation Grant. Teachers can then receive funding to pay for these classroom additions.

Teachers noticed that the activity level of kids has become greater. Through the grant classrooms purchased items that help reduce energy and increase student focus.

Teachers made purchases of a stability ball (weighted to reduce rolling), standing desks, rocking stools (for under a seated student's feet), and a stationary pedal (also sits under the students feet while in a seated position).

"If you look at the class you think 'geez, they're moving a lot' but it's a controlled movement and their attention is more



Elementary students learning how to code.

towards me than the ball I feel," said Laura Seibel, a middle school teacher at Beulah.

Before integrating the active classroom items teacher's felt their students were chatty and easily distracted. However, once the new active classroom commenced there was a noticeable good change in the students' classroom demeanor.

Innovation Cafe

The Beulah Middle School dedicated an entire room to becoming the "Innovation Cafe."

Becker was looking to "freshen up" her classroom and thus the cafe was formed.

It is a space where students can explore and try different things that make them think



Alex, the therapy dog at the elementary school

outside the box. Students work

EDUCATION

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on modules, robotics, and forensics while they sit in a space dedicated to innovation. Setting the room up with a cafe atmosphere, students are able to collaborate and work together easily.

The cafe has several booths, along with high top tables and couches for the students to work together at.

Not only is the space used for future technology but also sewing, legos and coloring. Allowing this space to be used however students want to use it, exploring whatever they wish.

"There's so many cool things we can do and let kids discover, and maybe find what their niche in the world is going to be," said Stacey Murschel, middle school principal.

Therapy Dog

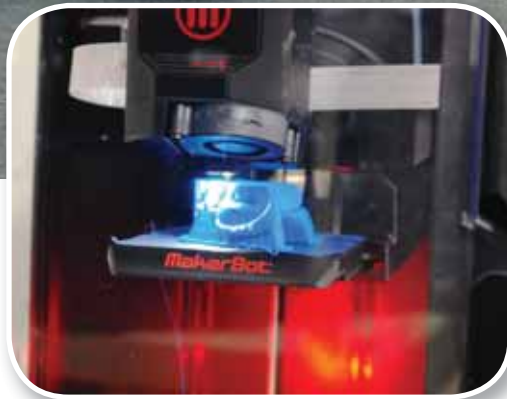
Beulah Elementary School made the addition of a dog to their staff this past year. Alex is a five-year-old Shetland Sheepdog who is assisting the elementary counselor, Heather Brandt.

He is a registered therapy dog and having him assist her in the school has been a long time dream of her's. Therapy dogs are able to help students academically and behaviorally.

She plans on having Alex take part in pet-assisted activities with the students as well as with some therapy, to allow students to calm down and learn from Alex. He has the innate ability to sense pain, illness, sadness and his response was to



Middle school student's using exercise balls as seats in their active classroom.



console, aide, and calm.

The Cutting Edge

Beulah School District continues to push forward with classroom innovation. They continue to think of ways to allow their students to create and explore themselves, while pushing their

In the high school's "maker space" is a 3D printer that students are able to print whatever they want to program.

minds forward into tomorrow.

Beulah School District is giving their students the tools they need to one day be workforce ready.

Innovation Tech Idea



Establish personal tech-life balance policies. Take a look at what you value and set some policies to help you stay connected to what's most important. For example, everyone values family time, but it is not always prioritized. You might make a family policy that limits technology at the dinner table, after 9 p.m. or while your children complete their homework. Maybe you and your partner agree to shut off technology for an hour before bed to give attention to each other.

You no doubt value your safety and the safety of those around you. So make a strict policy that texting and driving is an unacceptable practice, and then stick to it. Announce to others out loud what your policies are. A clear and public declaration can lead to peer pressure, which can help ensure that you stay true to your promises.

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