Focus on Nicholas County Schools

Academic excellence acheived through year round promotions; regional spelling bee tonight

NCES Library workers

Rebekah Jones, left, and Gretchen Judge, students at Nicholas County Elementary School, work in the library. This privilege is granted for doing well in their classwork.

by Bill Godbrie

With the recent interest in the need for schools to foster and encourage academic excellence, it is natural that the Nicholas County School system should look to ways with which this can be accomplished. Various strategies and means of accomplishing this have been considered with several being implemented.

One method which has been adopt- ed on a system wide basis is the development of academic teams. These teams have been set up for students in the seventh and eighth grades and students in high school.

The grade school teams compete against teams from other homerooms in the same grade. Contests are held weekly with records being kept of each team's victories. At the end of the school year, the team with the best record will be rewarded.

According to Gerald Hammons, elementary principal, "This is the most excited I have seen them about anything. Their interest in this has been extremely high."

The high school team was developed on a more formal basis and has competed against teams from other schools on television programs sponsored by Kentucky Educational Television and WLEX television in Lexington. The members of the team were chosen according to scores on a standardized achievement test.

According to Rob Lane, high school English teacher and coach of the team, "These students are making the same sacrifice to be on this team that the athletes make. They are in my room by 8:10 each morning to practice. We use the alternate and other students as a team for the first team to practice against."

"I think the best thing that has happened to this point was competing against Scott County on television and beating them. Up until that time, I don't think the possibility of winning had occurred to any of the team members."

PLANS ARE also being made for the team to travel to other schools and have other schools come to Nicholas County to meet in competition. Currently the team has plans to meet teams from three surrounding counties with a good possibility of expanding this schedule to include other counties.

David McMillen, principal at the high school, also notes that interest in the Scholastic Bowl team is quite high and seems to be fostering an interest in the academics at the high school. It is also evident that the team has done much to increase pride among the students in the school.

Competition between these teams consists of a series of questions of differing formats which are to be answered by the team members. The emphasis of the competition is on absolute recall. Typically, the contest is divided in rounds with a warmup round consisting of questions addressed first to one team and then to the other. This is followed by a grab-bag round where the questions are asked and the team members must respond with a signal in order to have a chance to answer the question.

An electronic timing device is used to determine which team has signaled for an answer first. Points are awarded for each question answered correctly with penalties, in some contests, for wrong answers.

ANOTHER WAY in which interest in academic excellence is being encouraged at the elementary school is through participation in spelling bees. Students in grades 4-8 were recently given the opportunity to take part in a bee sponsored by Kentucky Educational Television.

The winner of this contest will advance to a district contest at Danville later in the school year with the winner of the district advancing to a state contest in Louisville. Grand prize will be a $5M savings bond.

There are also plans for students in grades 5-8 to take part in a spelling bee sponsored by the Courier-Journal. The winner of this spelling bee will advance to the state finals in Louisville and then to the national final to be held in New York City later in the year.

Plans are also being made for students in grades 5 through 8 to compete in a regional spelling bee to be held at Fleming County Middle School on March 1. This bee will include several schools and will be divided into two divisions with students in grades 5 and 6 competing in one group and students in grades 7 through 8 competing in another. The winner of each division will receive the American Heritage School Dictionary. The overall winner will also receive a $50 U.S. savings bond.

Both schools also recognize those students who do well academically by placing their names on an honor roll list. Students at the elementary school may qualify for either the Honor Roll or the Super Honor Roll. Those who qualify for the Honor Roll have grade point averages (GPA) between 3.0 and 3.4 out of a possible 4.0 while those who qualify for the Super Honor Roll must have a GPA between 3.5 and 4.0.

The high school also recognizes two levels of academic achievement with the honor roll for students scoring between 3.5 and 4.0 GPA published in the local paper each grading period while the lists of those having a GPA of 3.0 to 3.4 are posted in the building that they might also be recognized.

There are also less formal means of encouraging and recognizing academic excellence. Classroom teachers have their own unique ways of rewarding students who do well. Many reward the students with something tangible such as a sticker which may be placed on a possession of paper. Many allow certain privileges such as free reading time or letting students work in special interest centers. Verbal praise and positive comments on the report card about the student's work are also used to encourage the students to do well.

Special events and assignments are used to reward and encourage academic excellence. Students in the elementary school may participate in the Soil Conservation Essay Contest and the D.A.R. Essay contest. Winners are recognized and rewarded. The eighth grade boy and girl with the highest averages for the entire year are recognized at the end of each school year and each is given a gift in recognition of their outstanding efforts.

MEANS OF ENCOURAGING academic excellence are simply recognizing these students within the school who do well. Mr. Hammons noted that at the end of each grading period, he announces the names of all students who have a 100 (perfect) average in their classwork. He also stated that anytime a teacher feels that a student has done well or group of students have done well, he makes a special announcement concerning this accomplishment.

When asked to comment on the academic achievement of the students, Hammons noted, "The most important factor in doing well in school is attendance. Those students who are regular in their school attendance find it much, much easier to do well in their lessons than those who habitually are absent.

"When parents ask to me about how their children are doing in school, the first thing I look to is the child's attendance record. If they are regular in attendance, they are usually working to their potential in school work. If they are not working up to their potential and they are irregular in attendance, I am certain this is the reason."

Hammons also mentioned several other activities that are being used to encourage the students to develop an interest in learning. Among these are the use of learning centers which are developed around an interest of the students, the use of educational television and National Geographic specials, and the purchase of the enrichment materials for use in the classroom. Students at the elementary school also participated in the St. Jude Math-a-thon earlier in the year. The Math-a-thon was an opportunity for the students to increase their math skills and raise money for St. Jude Children' Research Hospital.

The decision to purchase computers and develop a Computer Center, according to Hammons, has also been a factor in encouraging elementary students to do better in their studies, especially in math through the use of software programs purchased by the system to reinforce those math concepts which the teachers introduce in the classroom.

Hammons also noted that there are plans for other activities which will encourage the students to do well academically. Among these are plans to implement a Junior Nati nal Honor Society which will recognize those students who achieve academically and a Student Council for the elementary school.

He also noted that the teachers were being encouraged to use resource people to develop an interest in vocations citing an archaeologist from the University of Kentucky who had spoken to the sixth grade class about archaeology as a career. A field trip is also planned to the UK Anthropology Museum as a follow-up activity.

One teacher is having her students write to people in other states to encourage them to be more aware of other parts of the country and to improve their writing skills. Students in the sixth grade are writing to students in schools in California, Texas, New York and Illinois.

ALTHOUGH FEWER informal teacher initiated methods of motivation were evident at the high school level, there are various ways in which academic excellence is encouraged. Awards Day is held at the end of each school year during which students who have earned Honor Roll status for the entire year are recognized and those who have earned special awards receive those awards. Class Night each year recognizes senior students who have earned scholarships and special awards.

Seniors are encouraged to enter scholarship competitions and compete for financial help in completing college. During the 1983-83 school year, 19 members of the senior class were awarded scholarships to attend various colleges in the state.

Students in science and math may take part in the Science and Math Achievement Program (SMAP) at Eastern Kentucky University. This academic competition requires students to take standardized tests over math and science subjects. Winners are selected on the basis of their scores and receive recognition for their knowledge.

The top science project in the science department each year is also entered in the Morehead State University Science Fair. This student receives special recognition for these efforts. Advanced entry courses are available to those who demonstrate academic prowess. Classes are college preparatory in nature and are taught in the same manner in which college classes are taught.

"We will continue to offer the students in the Nicholas County Schools as comprehensive and academic program as any public school can offer."

According to Principal McMillen, "We hope at some point to establish an Academic Boosters Club which will do for academics what other boosters clubs have done for athletics." This concept has been tried with a great deal of success in several schools in the state.

McMILLEN NOTED the standardized testing program which is carried out at the high school each spring. Although the State Department of Education requires that only students in grade 10 be tested, in the local high school all the students are tested. This gives the school, and the student, an opportunity to check their progress and also gives the school a chance to recognize those students who are doing exceptional work.

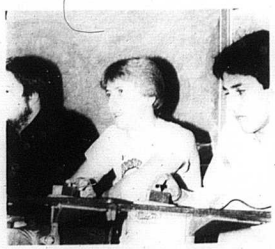
When asked to comment about the necessity and the means of encouraging students to do well in their classwork, Superintendent Donald G. Elder responded. "Everyone needs recognition, whether it be in athletics, hobbry or vocational education. For years we have recognized a need to honor and pay tribute to those who excel academically.

"Our schools are initiating some new programs this year that will encourage academic excellence and give some recognition to students who are studying harder and trying to better prepare themselves for the future.

We will continue to offer the students in the Nicholas County Schools as comprehensive an academic program as any public school can offer, provide for low-achievers and give out students the variety of experiences needed to make our programs more productive," he concluded.

Scholarship counseling

Brenda Anderson, counselor at Nicholas County High School, works with Shaheed Koury on scholarship applications.



Pondering

Joe Johnson, member of the Nicholas County High School Scholastic Bowl team, answers a question during an early morning practice session as Tim Sampson, left, and Shaheed Koury ponder. All photos submitted

Time for a change

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tion. This board was to be selected by the governor, the chief justice of the Court of Appeals, the attorney general, the secretary of state, the commissioner of agriculture, and the auditor, all elected by the people.

The 1950 Constitutional Review Commission advocated removing the office of superintendent from partisan politics, and the selection of this officer on the basis of professional qualifications. It said that under present provisions of old section 91 the superintendent at the end of two years had to begin a campaign to get elected to another office if he or she wished to remain in state government. Of more vital importance was the fact that any plan an incumbent superintendent projected had to be matured in four years or abandoned. The Commission proposed that the superintendent of public instruction be chosen with the same care and given the same tenure as the presidents of what were then teachers colleges.

The arguments of the Review Commission in 1950 still prevail in 1984. The advantages of appointing the superintendent must be assumed to be prescribed professional qualifications, the making of long-range plans, continuity of programs, and the hiring and retention of a professionally qualified staff.

The sticking point has been devising the mode of appointing the superintendent. Boards of trustees of Kentucky's universities have elected presidents with an awareness of the public good.

It must be assumed that in this enlightened age there prevails in the Commonwealth sufficient good faith, dedication and intelligence to create a selective process that will assure effective administration of the Commonwealth's educational system. Thirty three other states have been able to do this with success, and none of them has lost public control of its schools.

We are tied to the provisions of constitution written in 1891 as we prepare our educational system to face the 21st century. It is time to amend the constitution to provide for an appointed, not an elected, superintendent of public instruction. The time is ripe for a change. — (Dr. Clark is a distinguished Kentucky historian and a member of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.)

March 1 marks date for regional Spelling Bee at Fleming County Middle School!

Spelling Bee

Students in the seventh grade participate in a spelling bee. Left to right, Jessie Tanner, Rachel Herrington, Christy Thornsburg, Sherry Moore, Mary Susan Dotson and Jeff Howard.

Basics Bowl team

The Basics Bowl Team from Charity Griffith's home room is shown in a recent contest with the team from Robbie Barr's home room. Standing at right is Gerald Hammons, elementary principal.

All photos submitted

GS

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