

CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

COMMERCE ISD E-LETTER • OCTOBER 18, 2013

Foundation awards over \$31,000 with balloon fanfare

Commerce Schools Educational Enrichment Foundation Board members traveled to each campus on October 17 to share good news with teachers receiving grants.

Fourteen grants were awarded totaling over \$31,000.

In addition to trips to the Caldwell Zoo, Perot Museum of Nature and Science, Dallas World Aquarium, Dallas Museum of Art and the Austin Capitol, students at CES have an enhanced sound system in a classroom. Apple Air will streamline science instruction at CMS and a writing camp at CMS and writing staff development at ACW will put the focus on that skill.



Second graders celebrate upon hearing they go to the Dallas World Aquarium thanks to the Commerce Schools Educational Enrichment Foundation.



CSEE Foundation Board members visited CES to award teacher grants. Shown left to right are Janet Duncan, Beverly Pirkey, Janet Peek, Jack Pirkey, Bill Fuhrmeister and CES teachers Stephanie Pullen and Misti Gardner.



CMS teachers celebrate grant awards at the pep rally. The robotics team, Writing Camp, science department, and the sixth grade ropes challenge received funding from the Foundation.



Learning the ropes for a successful middle school experience

Losing any confidence they might have had as fifth graders, students entering middle school may find themselves lost and looking for a place where they fit in. Patrick Just, Commerce Middle School principal, and Roger Greer, assistant director of Outdoor Adventure at Texas A&M University-Commerce, discussed this problem and determined that they could collaborate to provide an opportunity for students to step out of their comfort zones and face new challenges as a team.

The result has been the Sixth Grade Challenge Course where all sixth graders, with parental permission, are lead in small groups through team-building activities and challenges to develop leadership, decision making and communication skills, according to Greer.

“It helps reinforce the Commerce Middle School Honor Code with the 4 R’s: Respectful, Responsible, Reasonable, Ready,” Greer said.

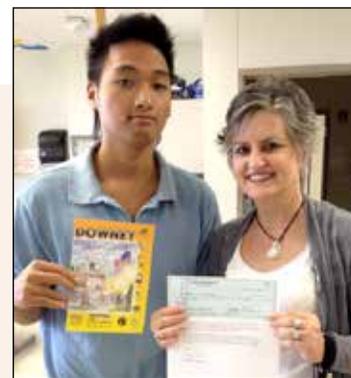
Principal Just explains it like this: “Kids coming into CMS have a hard time knowing who they are and where they fit in. The Challenge Course helps them face their personal fears and work



with people outside of their normal circle of friends. We believe the experience will have a lasting impact on the students.”

Just and Greer were brought together by a suggestion from Dixie Stachowiak, a local business owner and Commerce Leadership Institute director, who thought that a ropes challenge for teens would be an excellent way to enhance their leadership skills. It would mirror the opportunity provided to each Commerce Leadership Institute class, which is sponsored by the Commerce Chamber of Commerce.

Thanks to the Commerce Schools Educational Enrichment Foundation funding for next year’s sixth grade ropes challenges has been secured.



CHS Senior, Bach Tran was chosen as the 2013 Grand Prize Winner of Downey Publishing’s “Art for Education” Contest. His artwork will be on the front cover of the 2013 – 2014 Hunt County Telephone Directory and he received a \$500 gift card. In addition, the Commerce High School Art Department was awarded a \$500 school prize!

This is the fourth year in a row that one of Mrs. Lytle’s art students has won the grand prize award. Last year’s 2012 winner was Cristian Cabrera, year 2011 was Jobanet Flores, and year 2010 was Tyron Alex with Zahraa Al fashkhi winning honorable mention.

Mobile Dentists bring smiles to 90 students

A total of 90 students across the district visited the Mobile Dentists Smile Program for teeth cleaning and exams. The dentists and hygienists do x-rays, cleaning, fluoride treatments and sealants.



Going all out for communication this year

Surveys of Commerce ISD staff and parents taken at the end of the school year showed communication needed to be improved. This year, teachers and staff are stepping up communication efforts using technology to connect with parents and students.

In addition to the district website, Facebook and Twitter, CISD administrators have used the SchoolMessenger system for the last five years to communicate news events and emergency information. Parents are contacted by every way possible during a school emergency. This includes all contact phone numbers, email addresses and text messages.

The superintendent and principals can record a telephone message and send it to the phones of all staff, all students, students and staff, or even specific targeted groups such as parents of all female sophomores. Messages can be sent to the families of all 1500 students in a matter of minutes in English or Spanish.

The system also calls parents when their child is absent to make sure there is a legitimate reason for the absence.

Commerce Middle School Principal Patrick Just gives parents a daily roundup of events when they tune in to 100.9 on their radio when dropping off or picking up their child. CMS students are also becoming involved in the newscast.

CMS teacher Shelbie Embro and Commerce Elementary School teacher Misti Gardner shared QR codes with parents so they can download an app and scan the QR code with their phone to go directly to the teacher's webpage or blog where daily assignments and due dates are listed. Embro gave out business cards and Gardner gave parents refrigerator magnets containing contact information and a QR code.

Many CISD teachers use Remind 101 to text or email parents and students with important reminders. Parents must subscribe to receive the Remind101 messages.

CMS used personal phone calls to connect teachers with parents. Staff members were assigned ten parents each to call during the first weeks of school to reach out to parents with a personal welcome.

Parent Elva Resendez reported to CMS Principal Patrick Just that most of the students in her class of about 40 university students were astounded when they heard Commerce parents received a personal phone call from a school.

"I have a few parents in my class who live around Commerce and they wanted to know what 'school district is this?' Obviously, our attitude in CISD can certainly be our competitive advantage," Resendez said.

CISD Superintendent Blake Cooper said that parents expect more information from schools these days and he has pledged to meet their needs.

"We hope that the next end-of-year surveys show we are meeting the needs of our parents and staff by providing information to help them be successful at school and in their jobs," Cooper said.

All communication efforts stepped up

- Emails
- Phone calls
- updated websites
- KETR radio
- The Commerce Journal
- SchoolMessenger calls
- District newsletters
- Facebook
- Twitter

Back-to-School Tiger Bash

Families representing all campuses gathered at CHS on September 23 to the annual Back-to-School Tiger Bash. Hot dogs were served as parents and their children gathered in the cafeteria to learn information about Title I programs and the new HB 5 affecting high school graduation requirements and achievement testing.



CHS held its meet the teacher night during the Back-to-School Tiger Bash.



CES students and their parents learned iPad apps to strengthen reading skills at the Back-to-School Tiger Bash.



Elementary students visit CHS pep rally



What a treat it was for CES and ACW students to attend the high school pep rally on October 11. The thundering sound of hundreds of little feet added to the spirit of the pep rally. Clad in pink for breast cancer awareness, students and teachers joined in the fun.