



Comet Community Connection

Caston Elementary School
“Growing Leaders”

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Learning Across Grades . . . First Graders and Kindergartners Learn Together in Harmony



Kindergarten & First Graders in Mrs. Sarver's class congregate to work on a lesson at one of the learning centers in the classroom.

When Mrs. Sarver, was approached last Spring and asked about teaching a split level class of K and 1st grade students, her response was a hesitant “sure?” Faced with the dilemma of fewer teachers to meet the increasing demands teaching rigorous standards to each student, we had to start thinking outside the box. But what can we do? Faced with this challenge, Mrs. Douglass, Principal began searching for answers. What were others schools in the same

situation as we are doing? Research indicated that some were combining grade levels when numbers did not warrant a full section of students in order to keep numbers of students in classrooms lower. “This caught my eye, because this was exactly the concern we had with both our incoming kindergarten and 1st grade classes. Just two sections at each grade level would mean class sizes would be larger than we wanted, but we couldn’t justify three classes at either of those grade levels with the numbers we predicted and cuts being inevitable,” stated Mrs. Douglass.

With this idea in mind, a summer planning project began. How do we make this work? How do we overcome scheduling challenges? How do we communicate this idea to parents? How do you teach the curriculums of two grade levels at one time? Again, we looked at other schools already doing this type of programming, and we looked at the standards and what kids needed to be able to do. What did our kindergarten students already know how to do, what did our 1st graders still need to accomplish, how could activities be differentiated to meet the needs of kids at different grade levels? These were all questions to be answered.

This approach is not a lot different than what should be done in every classroom — we know all kids are not at the same place in their learning continuum, we know they learn differently and at different speeds, and we know we need to address special needs of kids daily. Truly, having different grade levels is just a concept to overcome in our thinking when we look at the process of teaching kids! In education, we have to get over the idea that “this

What’s In the News at Caston?

- The **Community Health Council** will hold their annual planning meeting on **October 24th at 4:30 PM in the school library.** We welcome new members! This council purposefully plans for projects and initiatives in the school community that promote healthy students and families.
- **P. 2—NOTICE TO PARENTS OF CASTON STUDENTS—AHERA Report**
- **P. 3 — New enVision Math Program — Scratching your head?**
- **P. 4 October Events**
- **5th & 6th Grade Boys & Girls’ basketball teams** will be combined this year. We will have an A-Team and a B-Team for each of these groups. The Boys and Girls will play the 6th grade schedules, with the exception of the Boys’ B-team which will also play the 5th grade tournament at Caston on the schedule in lieu of the Midwest Conference Tournament which the A-Team will attend. Practices for both Boys’ and Girls’ teams will start next week on October 10th! Information was sent home with students this week for those students who had an interest in joining the team. Wes Rigney will coach the boys and Samantha Schanlaub will coach the

Cont. Learning Across Grade Levels

is what 1st graders do" or "4th graders start here" or "we don't do that until 3rd grade" and approach it as "this is what each student needs to learn next."

Students in Mrs. Sarver's classroom can be seen throughout the day doing activities as a whole group, at small stations, or broken into their respective grade levels for separate activities. They go to specials with their respective grades by joining the other classes. "We've tried to do things within the class and within the scheduled day to give the kids their own identity as a kindergartener or a 1st grader," stated Mrs. Douglass. "There are times throughout the day that it's just one grade level in the classroom. They also accompany their own grade levels for fieldtrips and attend special programs when their grade levels have them. We also wanted to see this group bond as a class, so they do a lot of things throughout the day together."

The K-1 split class requires a lot of planning for things to work like "clockwork." This has been no easy task for Mrs. Sarver, who has spent countless hours organizing and preparing for two years of curriculum. Miss Huffman comes into the room in the morning and team teaches during reading time. Mrs. Hubenthal and Mrs. Albright are also in the room part of the day assisting. Mrs. Sarver also makes excellent use of volunteers in the classroom to help with many of the activities; her own mother, Jan Moss, being one of her regular volunteers.

How is it working? The true evaluation will be at the end of the school year when we can make comparisons with the traditionally grouped classrooms, but so far the class seems to be doing quite well. "I was impressed with how quickly the students learned procedures at the beginning of the year!" said Mrs. Douglass. "The first graders had a chance to be leaders from day #1 and showed the kindergarteners how things were done — kids really relate to their peers and are excited to try to do things just like them." "It also impressed me to see a math lesson within the first couple weeks of school where the kindergarten students were echoing the 1st graders

as they were counting to 100 by 10's — seeing the kids learn together like this is exciting. It's where we need to be going in education — we need to help kids grow not only in academic skills, but in life skills. Older kids working with younger kids is a natural way to instill responsibility and leadership . . . these are the kinds of things that carry you further in life than reading, writing, and arithmetic ever will." While much of the school year involves some trial and error as we work through the process of having our first K-1 split class, I can already see that there are many examples of this being a "win-win" situation for both our kindergarten and 1st graders who are lucky to be a part of this class. "If smiles on kids faces are a good indication that things are working well, our split class gets a big thumbs up — I haven't walked into the room yet to find the kids not grinning ear to ear!" stated Mrs. Douglass.

The K-1 split class currently has 7 Kindergarten & 8 First grade students for a total of 15 in the class. The other two kindergarten classes have from 16—20 and the other two 1st grade rooms house 20—21. The room being used is room 102 (the old art room) which is located close to Kindergarten and 1st grade rooms. Through screening and previous instruction, the teachers identified kids they felt had learning characteristics that would lend to success in this class. Parents were notified this summer of the intent to place their child in the K-1 split class, and were given an opportunity to request a traditional class if they felt this would be better for their child. Of the parents notified, 15 of 16 responded positively to the invitation. An evaluation will be done at the end of the school year to seek input from the parents of the children in the class in an effort to make improvements for future years that there may be a need for a split grade classroom.

NOTICE TO PARENTS OF CASTON STUDENTS

The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, known as "AHERA" requires we report to you each year on the status of the asbestos in the Caston Educational Center.

The areas which contain asbestos materials are the classrooms with the original floor tile. Areas that have new tile, such as the elementary Gym Lobby area, room 216, room 244, and the nurse's office have vinyl composition tile, which do not contain asbestos products.

The condition of the vinyl/asbestos flooring and other areas are monitored on a regular basis as required by AHERA regulations.

Also required by AHERA the seventh of the three-year inspections was conducted during the summer of 2009, by an EPA certified inspector. The next inspection will be conducted during the summer of 2012.

Copies of all inspection reports and the school's Management Plan are available for review in the Office of the Superintendent of Schools. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Superintendent's Office.

New enVision Math Program = Challenges For All!

"If $8-5 = 3$ then does $5 = 8-3$?"

We adults look at this and make sense of it, but imagine being a 1st grader and facing this problem! Well . . . that's the reality of enVision math!

This year, with the adoption of enVISION math, not only are the kids scratching their heads, but so are teachers and parents! Why the change? This seems to be a question asked by many, especially those who've grown accustomed to Saxon Math over the past 16 years and believed the program was serving our students well.

Indiana, along with 47 other states, adopted the new Core Common Standards for math. All students will be tested on these standards starting with the 2014-15 school year. This year our Kindergarten students are being taught the core standards, while the other grade-levels are phasing in the core standards alongside the Indiana Academic Standards and temporarily bridging the gap. The core standards heavily emphasize problem solving and Algebra readiness.

Every student must now pass a rigorous exam in Algebra to graduate from High School. Unfortunately, many Caston students at the HS level are struggling with this! Additionally, in the near future rather than taking ISTEP+ in the Spring, our elementary students will be tested quarterly on a series of exams.

Schools were to adopt new math curriculum during the 2009-2010 school year. Because the core standards were not yet finalized, the Indiana Department of Education allowed schools to delay adoption for a year. We opted to wait, anticipating the textbook companies would provide more programs aligned to the new core standards. Only one company produced a new series last year specifically aligned to the new core standards — the enVision Math Common Core. We deliberated over our math curriculum — if we continued with Saxon Math, we were going to have to push the curriculum down a grade-level (ie. 2nd grade classes would have used the 3rd grade book), and we would have to supplement with additional math curriculum. Also, Saxon is very prescriptive about the sequence of the program, and the ability to "jump around" in the curriculum was limited. This concerned

us knowing how high stakes the assessments are for students.

The enVISION Math program was the most widely adopted program in the state. The 2012 copyrighted version (*which is the one we now have*) is the only program that was written for the core common standards for math. The authors rewrote over 100 of the lessons in the series to realign with the new core standards at each grade level. The program also utilizes technology and is very interactive with hands-on manipulatives. It's apparent that we're teaching kids to think "algebraically" starting in kindergarten—something we believe will pay off as the students progress through higher levels of math.

Skills required for the workforce of the future are going to be very different than were required of past generations. Our students are going to compete in a global society with students from all over the world. Adapting to the kind of problem solving, reasoning & technology that will be required is something that is taking most of us out of our "comfort zone."

Our teachers are trying to provide the best experience possible for our kids with the new math program. We've brought in a consultant from the company to work with the teachers already this school year, and we will continue to work hard to successfully utilize the program to its fullest potential. As students progress through the grade-levels, this approach to math will become second nature for them, and it will only get easier for our staff.

We encourage parents to ask questions, have patience with the growing pains we are all experiencing together, and support your kids at home as they embark on an educational journey unlike one we've known. Change is rarely easy, but it is necessary. We have faith that our students will be better prepared for future quarterly assessments after using the enVision program. Additionally, our kids will be better prepared to pass the Algebra test required for HS graduation, and will struggle less in the rigorous math courses that lie ahead.

Hopefully, with a "can-do" attitude and the cooperation of families working together with teachers to help our kids, our efforts will be "multiplied" and will "add up" to success for Caston students in the future!

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Caston Elementary School is . . .

“Growing Leaders One Student At A Time”

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Habit 1 - Be Proactive (*Look ahead, think it out, avoid problems*)
Habit 2 - Begin With the End in Mind (*Set Goals*)
Habit 3 - Put First Things First (*Make Priorities*)
Habit 4 - Think Win-Win (*There doesn't always have to be a loser*)
Habit 5 - Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood (*listen*)
Habit 6 - Synergize (*When we work together we can accomplish more*)
Habit 7 - Sharpen the Saw (*Have balance in your life & be healthy*)

“High Five” Expectations for Bus, Hallway, Playground, Cafeteria, & Bathrooms

1. Be Kind 2. Be Safe 3. Be Responsible
4. Be Respectful 5. Be Peaceful



CASTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S OCTOBER EVENTS

- **October 24th—Community Health Council—4:30 PM—Caston Library**
- **October 28—31—Fall Break (4-day weekend!) — Students do not attend Friday or Monday**

What Happened to Parent Teacher Conferences? Traditionally, Caston had a day set aside in October to schedule Parent/Teacher conferences. This was typically the day before Fall Break, and students did not attend on this day. We've eliminated this from the calendar, and instead plan conferences for students as needed at the time that is appropriate for the child's needs. Some students are doing well in school academically and behaviorally, and conferences are not needed for a specific reason — in this case, it is sometimes a request of a parent to meet with the student's teacher(s) to become more informed about the child's progress. Teachers are more than happy to set up a conference at a parent's request — just contact your child's teacher if you wish to do this. We are trying to involve more students in conferences, as well, this year. We want the kids to take ownership in their own learning and to be able to explain to a parent what they have accomplished in school and what their goals are. For this reason, you may be contacted to join us for a student-led conference. Again, if you would like to request that you participate with your child in a student-led conference contact your child's teacher(s). In the age of technology — we are more than happy to conduct conference calls or communicate by e-mail with parents; this may be more convenient for working parents and is a great way to talk to your child's teacher. With these modes of communication available, and with grades, attendance & behavior notes on-line in Harmony, it is becoming less urgent for many parents to have a face-to-face conference with your child's teacher. Bottom line, we desire the level of communication your desire — if you don't hear from us and you feel you wish to be more informed, please feel free to contact us at any time!