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‘Conference of the year’ offers school administrators new ideas

By Jill Gosche, jgosche@advertiser-tribune.com

The Ohio School Boards Association’s Capital Conference verifies effective practices and presents new ideas administrators can implement.

“There are just all kinds of opportunities to attend seminars, to network with other board members, other superintendents, other curriculum directors, other treasurers,” said Donald Coletta, superintendent of Tiffin City Schools. “It is the public school conference of the year.”

Four board of education members and five administrators — including Coletta — attended the conference in Columbus. The superintendent said the conference is one of the largest in the country and had 16 learning tracts.

Coletta said district representatives selected their preferred sessions prior to the conference. They settled for their second choices if some overlapped so they could cover as many topics as possible, he said.

“Each person selected the sessions that they wanted to attend on their own,” Coletta said. “I particularly found some sessions in community relations and finances very interesting.”

A group of district officials worked with representatives from Bryan Middle School during a session on school therapy dogs.

A representative from Assistance Dogs of America Inc. explained the program with Magic, the district’s dog; Dawn Iannantuono, board president; Suzanne Reinhart, counselor at Noble and Washington elementary schools; Mike Steyer, Noble’s principal; and Candy Wingert, Washington’s principal.

“The rest of us were able to be in the audience and observe the presentation,” Coletta said. “We’re all very proud to have a group from Tiffin City Schools make a presentation at the Capital Conference.”

Representatives from Fostoria Community Schools presented two district projects at the Capital Conference.

Superintendent Cynthia Lemmerman said she and Pete Cardenas, board member, explained the Appreciative Inquiry program that started in February 2005.

She said the district performed culture climate surveys and put in place the strength-based program that focuses on organizational change.

Lemmerman said administrators met with more than 250 community members, parents, school representatives and students to hear their best experiences with the city school system.

“After we went through that process, we planned this three-day summit that happened in June,” she said.

Lemmerman said the school representatives showed a video that highlighted the three-day summit and shared information about the Appreciative Inquiry process while presenting at the Capital Conference.

Also, they explained the district’s strategic plan that’s focused on three topics — student achievement and success; community pride and involvement; and trust and respect.

“Those innovative team projects ... each have action plans, and many of the activities have already started,” Lemmerman said.

Lemmerman said all five school board members attended the conference.

“It really was a great honor to be asked to present at the conference, and it really shows the fact that the Fostoria school board is involved and is setting, really, the vision for the school district,” she said. “It was a great experience to be able to talk about the future and the possibilities for our school district.”

Riley Elementary School representatives also participated in the conference when coordinators and pupils displayed highlights from Project Success, an after-school program, at the student achievement fair.

Lemmerman said it was neat to see pupils explain to adults what goes on during the program.

“We were excited,” she said.

Four seniors and their World War II scrapbooks represented New Riegel High School at the Capital Conference.

Casey Kotch, social studies teacher at the school, said her American History students made books last year.

“They had a month to work on it. For the most part, the scrapbooks exceeded my expectations,” she said. “Some of them, they looked so authentic.”

Kotch said school board members were impressed and wanted the students to display them. The students learned they were selected from a waiting list after the conference had an opening.

“I think it showed that their hard work is appreciated — that it’s not just for a grade,” Kotch said.

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