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KENDRA VEIRS PHOTO

Mrs. Melva Geiser instructs fifth grade students in a separate part of the school room, while sixth grade students study their lesson in a different area under the guidance of para-educator Ms. Esther Ryan. The fifth/sixth grade combined classroom is in its first year at Arnold Public School.

Transition to Combined Classroom Going Smoothly

By Kendra Veirs

After teaching sixth grade for the past six years in Arnold, Mrs. Melva Geiser is the first teacher in the school's history to teach a combined elementary class - both fifth and sixth grades. This decision was made in April of 2009, after budget woes forced the school board to make cuts.

Mr. Gary Halstead, the previous fifth grade teacher, moved to the third grade teaching position, leaving Mrs. Geiser the challenge of merging the

two grades together during the 2009-2010 school year.

"The transition has been easy for me," said Mrs. Geiser, who has 12 years of previous experience teaching a combined first/second grade classroom in Thedford.

"I also haven't seen any major stumbling blocks for the kids," she said.

Now half-way through the school year, Mrs. Geiser sees the combined classroom as very beneficial to both grades. The sixth graders continually

get a review from both seeing and hearing the fifth grade lessons. The fifth graders often get a preview of what's to come when they see and hear some of the sixth grade lessons. In some of the subjects, the fifth graders touch on the same lessons as the sixth graders.

"I have heard the fifth graders say, 'Oh, I remember when the sixth graders were talking about that,'" she said.

Mrs. Geiser said the grades were each their own group at

the beginning of the year and now have blended together more and more. Learning has even become more fun, as the students love the math quiz games they get to play together, with each team consisting of both fifth and sixth graders.

Many wonder how such a combined class works and after observing the classroom, one can see that she and the para-educator have it down to an exact science.

For example, each morning the sixth graders begin their lesson in math. Mrs. Geiser teaches all lessons. The fifth graders are reviewing and working at their desks. After the half-hour is up, the sixth graders work on their math lesson at their desks, while Mrs. Geiser teaches the fifth grade math lesson. The fifth graders then work on their lesson, and Mrs. Geiser teaches the next subject to the sixth graders. This "flip-flop" continues for every subject that is taught separately.

"It is really beneficial to the students," Mrs. Geiser said. "This way there is always

someone to help them if they seek it."

This is because while each grade is taking their turn at their desks, the para-educator is checking lessons, and guides them through their seat work.

"The competent, caring, para-educators are the glue that keeps the combined classroom together," Mrs. Geiser stated. "Without a para, I don't think it would be running as smoothly."

Mrs. Geiser referred to the para as very versatile. The para steps in and fills Geiser's shoes after each lesson, in all of the subjects. The para has to answer questions the students have in all subjects also.

Ashley Meyer was the fifth/sixth grade para during the first semester. After moving to the second grade to student teach at the beginning of the second semester, Ms. Esther Ryan stepped in. She is a certified PE/Health teacher, who has had teaching experience in Missouri.

"I was visiting over the summer and decided to stay in Arnold," she said.

Mrs. Geiser also gives credit to Dynette Oberg, who steps in and subs and makes a difference.

After having one semester of the fifth/sixth grade combined classroom experience, Mrs. Geiser has been able to fine-tune some of the teaching.

The English/writing class was combined during the second semester; however, that is the only subject that can be handled in such a manner.

"Both grades are covering the same trait. Each student works at his/her own ability, so it works with this subject," she said. "It doesn't work in the other subjects. Part of the reason is because state standards dictate exactly what must be taught in a certain grade."

Also, a subject such as math has big differences between what is learned and built on in fifth grade and sixth grade, she said.

Overall, Mrs. Geiser is very pleased with the transition and how the classes have combined.

"It has been a challenge and exciting. Sometimes it can even be a little crazy," she concluded.



KENDRA VEIRS PHOTO

Band students, from left, Haley Jacobson, Mariah Strasburg, Stone Phillips and Ian Beshaler display their Western Nebraska Honor Band certificates.

Arnold Music Students Take Part in Western Nebraska Honor Band

Four Arnold High School band students were selected to participate in the third annual Oregon Trails Honor Band on Monday, January 11, in Gering. Ian Beshaler, Haley Jacobson, Stone Phillips and Mariah Strasburg and 72 other students from Western Nebraska made up the Honor Band, directed by Dr. Jay Gilbert and sponsored by Doane College of Crete. Arnold was one of 16 schools participating in the honor band this year. Six hours of rehearsal culminated in a final concert at 5:00 p.m. Mountain Standard Time.

Cassandra King was selected to participate in the Women's Choir at the annual Honor Band and Choir Festival at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The Honor Festival was held on the University campus on Monday, January 25. The Festival Concert took place at the Health and



KENDRA VEIRS PHOTO

Cassandra King (left) recently participated in the Women's Choir at the Honor Band and Festival Choir at UNK. Susan Medina (right) will soon take part in the eighth grade Kearney Middle School Honor Band.

Fitness Center at 6:30 p.m.

Susan Medina, eighth grade, has been selected to participate in the Kearney Eighth Grade Middle School Honor Band on Saturday, February 6,

at Horizon Middle School. After rehearsing for several hours, a concert will be held at 4:00 p.m., at the Horizon Middle School gymnasium.

School Board Approves Interlocal Agreement

Will Share Superintendent With Callaway

By Janet Larreau

The Arnold School Board approved an interlocal agreement and contract to share Superintendent Pat Osmond with Callaway school at a special board meeting held on January 11.

During discussion, Arnold Superintendent Robert Brown said that in past years, interlocal agreements were outside the expenditures lid, but now are within the limit.

"Both boards have had the opportunity to go over the agreement and contract, and the wording is agreeable to both districts," said Brown. "Pat (Osmond) did a nice job of amending the agreement."

According to the agreement, Osmond will split his time between the two schools 50/50. Arnold and Callaway will each pay one-half of Osmond's wage expense. Callaway will carry all insurance coverage for the superintendent and will be reimbursed one-half of these expenses. For professional dues and development and all incidental expenses, Arnold will reimburse Callaway on a monthly basis for one-half of the expenses.

Osmond will operate under the policies and rules of each school and will be under the

supervision and direction of both boards.

Evaluation of the superintendent will be conducted separately by the two boards, although a joint evaluation may be conducted at the request of either of the boards or the superintendent.

The initial shared superintendent's contract will be for two years and will begin on July 1, 2010 and end on June

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Chamber Appreciation Supper is Sunday

A reminder that Chamber will host an Appreciation Soup Supper this Sunday evening, January 31, with serving from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. There will be entertainment after the supper and a silent auction will raise money for the Rialto Theatre projector fund. Items for the silent auction can still be donated by contacting Becky Dailey.

Sign Up Now for Chili Cook-off

The Chamber-sponsored Chili Cook-off will be held Saturday, March 13. Deadline for teams to register is February 22.

Forms may be picked up at First State Insurance, or contact Pat Turley at (308) 440-8946 or Jody Bailey at (308) 201-0269.