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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SCHOOL, PARENT COMMUNICATION OVERARCHING PRIORITY FOR DISTRICT

WINNEMUCCA, Nev.— Several years ago, the Humboldt County School District set a goal to improve parent communication.

Humboldt County School District Superintendent Mike Bumgartner admits that might seem like an obvious goal that every school district should have.

“And certainly it was,” said Mr. Bumgartner, “but it was being overshadowed by so many other issues that were on our plates.”

Budget cuts were unfolding in a minute-by-minute drama, personnel cuts were on the horizon, school facilities were physically deteriorating and school safety was always a looming concern.

Mr. Bumgartner said it was in the midst of these difficulties (many of them ongoing today) that district officials and members of the Humboldt County School District Board of Trustees began to understand something more and more: proper and frequent communication could help everyone not only understand, but help solve problems.

“I think the bond measure was an example of that,” said Mr. Bumgartner. “We had a problem. Nine of our 11 school plants were in serious trouble and we needed money.”

He continued, “As we communicated that to parents—to past, present and future parents in Humboldt County—they literally came running to our aid.”

Mr. Bumgartner said it provided a great lesson for him and others. “Communication was the key to solving that problem, and it is the key to solving every problem.”

Take, for another example, parent-teacher conferences.

For years, participation at conferences was good, but there were many parents who opted out of the twice-yearly get-togethers.

“It just wasn’t a priority for them,” said Mr. Bumgartner, “until we began to communicate to them that their participation was critical.”

Mr. Bumgartner said with a more clear priority, teachers and parents have extended themselves even more to meet. In addition to a set-aside of three half days, teachers regularly accommodate those who must meet at other times; some even schedule home visits.”

Now, it is completely routine for schools to achieve 100 percent (or close to) participation at parent-teacher conferences.

That one district priority also resulted in French Ford Middle School beginning conferences during this past decade. In 2010, Lowry High School also initiated conferences for the first time.

Powerschool is another example of the district’s efforts to communicate with parents. The online grade program allows parents to check students’ progress and communicate very readily with teachers.

Plus, once parents have signed up through Powerschool, the district has access to their email address, allowing them to receive communication pieces such as the monthly “Parent News” newsletter as well as weekly bulletins and other information.

The district also launched a new version of its website last May. While the site continues as a work in progress, Mr. Bumgartner said it provides excellent opportunities for information and communication.

The same is true of a two-page newspaper spread that appears in The Humboldt Sun each month. Regular articles and columns from Mr. Bumgartner have also become routine.

“As we multiply the ways we communicate with parents, we are able to do an even better job of sharing, not only our information but our priorities,” said Mr. Bumgartner.

“With everyone on the same page, our effectiveness will increase, and that will mean greater success for our students.”