



Tonya Wahl Named Educator of the Year in Arts and Disabilities

Congratulations!

Tonya Wahl, music therapist with the Wyandotte Comprehensive Special Education Cooperative, has been named 2007 Kansas Educator of the Year in Arts and Disabilities by Accessible Arts, Inc. (AAI) and the Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE).

“I am very honored to be receiving this award,” said Wahl, who has been working as a music therapist for five years. “I’ve looked back at the names of individuals who have received this award in the past, and I don’t feel worthy to be placed in the same category as them. This is really special.”

She received the award at a special ceremony during the KSBE meeting on March 12 at the Kansas State School for the Blind.

AAI and KSBE established the Kansas Educator of the Year in Arts and Disabilities in 1983 to recognize the valuable work of Kansas artists and educators who include children with disabilities

in art experiences.

As a music therapist, Wahl uses music interventions as a bridge, rather than as a “stand-alone” subject, to address academic, social/emotional, communication and physical needs of students. The students with whom she works have a wide range of special needs such as cognitive delays, Autism, Down Syndrome, hearing impairments, etc.

She often collaborates with teachers and other therapists in order to provide the best service possible for her students. For example, she may work with a student who is learning money skills or personal information. For the student, she will create a personalized song to help him/her learn these skills. Learning social skills is a need for many of her students, especially students with autism. Therefore, she often uses music as an informational carrier to help them learn appropriate social skills with other peers.

“Music can embrace many needs of a student, if music is



Music Therapist Tonya Wahl

that student’s motivator,” she said. “Music therapy is a non-threatening medium to work on academic goals and objectives.”

Wahl’s interest in the field of music therapy was piqued during her high school years. Always active in music, she was required during her junior year to study and research professions that she might be interested in for her future.

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Student Advisory Team Update

The third meeting of the superintendent’s Student Advisory Team was held March 5. At the meeting, Superintendent **Dr. Jill Shackelford** spoke to students about how important it is to her to hear their opinions. She introduced the topic of the session: the proposed extracurricular activities eligibility policy. Shackelford said since the students were the ones who would ultimately have to live with this policy, she wanted to know what they, and their peers, thought.

Susan Engelmann, executive director for high schools, provided the students with background information, including the eligibility

► **Discussion Topic:**
Extracurricular Activities Eligibility Policy

requirements for the state of Kansas. That policy states that a student must pass at least five classes to be eligible for extracurricular activities.

Engelmann told the students that the current Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools’ (KCKPS) eligibility policy states that a student can be failing no more than two classes to be eligible for extra-curricular activities. The KCKPS policy is more stringent than the state policy, and that of surrounding districts.

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Have a great
Spring
Break!



Staff Notebook will resume publication on March 27

Board of Education Highlights

At its Tuesday, March 11 meeting, members of the Kansas City, Kansas Board of Education:

- Recognized Students of the Month for March: Giovanni Castellanos from Banneker Elementary School; Francisco Andrade from Central Middle School; and Mee Vang from F.L. Schlagle High School.
- Approved the substitution of dress standards from

the Student Code of Conduct in lieu of the school adopted uniform policy that is currently in place for students at Washington High School. The “Be the Change” group from Washington presented research and data at the February 26 Board meeting supporting a recommendation that the uniform policy in place at the school be changed to reflect the

policy at other district high schools. The change will be effective for the 2008-2009 school year.

- Approved the schematic design and authorized the initiation of the design development for schools designated in “phase one” of the facilities improvement plan.
- Approved moving its Tuesday, April 22 meeting to Tuesday, April 29. The change in dates will allow

Board members to attend the Kansas State Board of Education regional meeting on April 22.

- Approved the district calendar for the 2008-2009 school year (subject to IBB negotiations). The calendar includes a returning teacher report date of August 11 and the first day of school for students on August 15.

Student Advisory

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She explained that the proposed policy currently being considered allows no F’s and no I’s. If this policy were in effect during the 2006-07 school year, approximately 2,600 of the 5,000 high school students in KCKPS would not have been eligible for athletic events, band or debate. They would not be allowed to go to school dances, act in plays, or go to any other event that was not included in the normal school day.

Students were shown some district statistics. The statistics showed that while students were improving, all but one high school had less than 50% proficiency. Last semester, 906 students had at least one I or F while 221 had five or more I’s or F’s.

The final statistic was a compilation of the number of college classes that students were enrolled in. The total across the district was 274. Students then assembled in small groups to come up with three statements or questions about the statistics.

Some of their comments were:

- Compare the number of F’s and I’s at the END of the year. We think it will be lower because some students procrastinate until the end of the year.

- Expectations are important; we will rise to the level of expectations. If the state raised its level of expectations, would the surrounding districts still field teams that are so much larger and better than those of KCKPS?
- There shouldn’t be just one standard for eligibility. Eligibility should be on a case by case basis.

Later, students were asked to state what they thought a fair eligibility policy would entail. Some of their answers were:

- “Students may have up to two I’s or F’s for no more than seven class periods after the I or F was issued. If the student continues to have the I or F after the seven class periods, that student shall be ineligible for extra-curricular activities. In addition, during the seven class period time frame, the student shall be required to attend tutoring after school and on Wednesday afternoons.”
- “No F’s and one I. If the teacher proves that the student is improving, he/she can play. If not, they should maintain a C or better average, including no I’s. All athletes are required to attend tutoring at least once a week.”

Tonya Wahl

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“That’s when I discovered music therapy,” she said. “It was a way to use music as a tool to help other people. I knew right then and there that that’s what I wanted to do.”

Wahl earned her music education degree from

the University of Central Missouri, and her masters of music education with a focus on music therapy, from the University of Kansas. She went to work for the Cooperative after college.

The Educator of the Year is selected by a committee from

nominations by peers. One of Wahl’s peers wrote of her, “She has the unique ability to use music therapy as an effective tool when working with children with autism. With her music, she can communicate with children on a level where words are not effective.”

Buy Brigade Tickets and Support the Foundation



Attend the KC Brigade’s March 24 game at the Sprint Center and support the KCK School Foundation for Excellence. A portion of the ticket sales will be donated to the Foundation. The Wyandotte High School Marching Band will perform at halftime.

Employees interested in purchasing tickets should contact **Keith Jones**, Foundation marketing specialist, kejone@kckps.org, (913) 449-2091.



STAFF NOTEBOOK

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