

## **From the desk of:**

**Sherry Nichols**

September 27, 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Welcome back to the school year 2009-2010. The students and staff are very busy with the beginning of the year activities and lessons. Students and teachers have settled into the classroom routines and successful learning strategies. I am blessed to have the opportunity to work with such a dedicated staff with both teachers and support staff looking for ways to help students be successful in school. I am additionally blessed to have a chance to work with the students of South Fork once again. If you remember I taught at South Fork for 15 years, before leaving to gain additional certifications. I truly believe we have the best students at our little county school. South Fork staff is able to give individual help, because we are small and because we care so much for the children.

Looking back over the summer activities, the South Fork Middle School was very busy with summer school, summer camp, and swimming lessons. Thank you to the Tribal TANF program of supporting the summer camp activities and the summer school program. What a wonderful way to keep our kids busy and learning during the long summer months. The Kern Valley Aquatics Program or KVAP, was extended more than four weeks all through July due to such a grand success in offering swimming lessons to our Kern Valley families. KVAP took a short break at the beginning of August and then started up the fall swim program late August and all through September. Kern Valley residents sponsored free swimming lessons to the valley kids and families. South Fork School is grateful for the donations to the KVAP swimming program.

As our school year began, we have a few changes in teacher assignments. Mrs. Mixon is teaching our only Kindergarten class. Mrs. Conner is teaching a First grade class. Our additional First grade class is being taught by Ms. Olive and Ms. Carroll. Ms. Olive teaches the First graders in the morning and then works as the Principal of Tucpan Community Day School in the afternoon. Ms. Carroll teaches two periods of Middle School Title 1 class in the mornings and then teaches First graders in the afternoon at the Elementary School. Another teacher that is splitting his time between two schools is Mr. Mixon. He teaches two periods of Middle School PE in the morning and then finishes his day at the Elementary School teaching PE to First graders through Fourth Graders. He is really enjoying his "little guys," but is also stretching his teaching skills this year quite successfully, I might add. The other changes in schedules for teachers include Mrs. Carver and Mrs. Morgan. Each teacher is now teaching a period of PE at the Middle School. The PE classes began the school year with swimming instruction. What a good way to keep our students safe in our valley with all the opportunities for water sports at the lake and rivers.

The Middle School is also fortunate to have three days of training in Safe Schools Ambassadors or SSA at the end of September. The training cost is \$7,200.00. All of the cost is being covered by a grant from Kern County Superintendent of Schools and the work completed by Daryl Theisen. We are one of just a few schools in Kern County to be offered the training and grant monies. Safe Schools Ambassadors helps keep kids safe from many types of bullying. All of the sixth graders and 31 of the seventh and eighth graders will be trained. What a wonderful experience for our Middle School students.

We continue to support our Wellness policy. There are some differences that you will continue to see in the types of food sold, the food served at lunch and snack and the types of foods that can be brought in for parties. In addition the number of celebrations a room can have and the types of foods that can be served will be monitored. This will be organized by the teacher. Talk to your child's teacher before sending any food to school. Celebrations are limited to once a month. Cupcakes, cookies, etc, are pretty much out and replaced with fruits and vegetables. The Physical Education will emphasize healthy choices, body movement, and healthy living habits.

The Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) will continue to support increased student attendance at school. All of the K-8 valley wide public schools will be participating in this helpful program. The idea is to help families get the help they need to have their children at school every school day. Fliers went out in the in the first day packets describing the attendance policy required by the State of California and South Fork School District. If you did not receive the information, please call your school office for a copy of the attendance policies. The program includes letters of notice that will be sent to parents after three days of unexcused absences and continues with visits from the sheriff's department. This program is connected the courts and a district attorney. It is a know fact that kids do better in school when they are in school consistently.

The second and fourth Wednesday of each month is a minimum day. The afternoons are used for teacher in-service trainings. The staff will continue to fine tune the current leveled discipline program, continue to develop the academic intervention programs set in place, and for professional development for the teachers. Students that are enrolled in the After School Program will receive the After School Program services on the minimum days for the extended afternoons. Otherwise, all other students will be bussed home at 1:00 pm on minimum days.

STAR testing results are outstanding for South Fork Union School District. The district's target goals were to increase by 5 points. The overall district scores were up by 44 points. A **BIG Woo-Hoo!** for our students and staff on importance students and teachers place on successful STAR scores. Because South Fork did not meet its district target goals last year, the district is still in Program Improvement or PI. The district is frozen in year one requirements for one more year. If the district is successful in meeting its target goals for one more year, then the district is no longer in Program Improvement. Thusly, South Fork remains a school district that offers choice. However, the only other public school district is Kernville Union School District, and that district is unable to accept our students at this time. The South Fork School Board, the teachers, and I will continue to develop intervention programs that will support student learning of state mandated standards.

On another positive note, the unhealthful water quality at South Fork Elementary school may soon be a past memory. The School Board Trustee, with the long time persistence of Allan Jaffe, has successfully

attained a \$495,000.00 grant to put in a new well and water system at South Fork Elementary School. The project will go into the bid process in October 2009 and, hopefully, the new well project will begin in December 2009. If the new well is successful and provides us with healthy and clean water, then the students should no longer have to use bottled water by April or May 2010. Thank you Allan Jaffe for your four years of determination in completing this grant for our students at the elementary school.

Volunteers are always needed and welcome at South Fork. WE NEED YOUR HELP! The PTC/Booster Club is down to a skeleton crew. Please call the school and ask for the secretary to give your name to the PTC president or the Booster Club president. They will contact you ASAP and get you involved. I can really say that your skills are needed at our schools. If you want to spend time with children and enjoy helping schools, we sincerely need your help. Some kids need help in learning to read or complete their math assignments. Some kids need help with playground behavior. Some kids just need a Grandma or Grandpa that would sit and have lunch with them once a week. Almost every kid could use an adult mentor to help them along in school. And don't forget our hard working teachers. Perhaps you would rather grade papers or help get art projects set up for the teachers. WOW! This is a great way to free teachers, so that they have more time to teach. We all thank you in advance for your consideration of volunteering for our South Fork kids.

Your Partner in Education,

Sherry Nichols

Superintendent/Principal