

School's success on display

By Amy Kent Assistant Editor | Posted: Wednesday, October 21, 2015 6:00 am

CLINTON — When Whittier Elementary School earned Blue Ribbon recognition from the United States Department of Education, Principal Brian Kenney said it was a collective “we” effort to get there.

During this week’s Clinton School Board Committee of the Whole, school board members got a glimpse of what that “we” really means.

Not only did Kenney have an opportunity Monday to boast about the elementary school’s achievement, but teachers and parents joined in to explain their impact on students, something Kenney said is key to success.

“The transparency with our teachers, they’re not afraid to say what’s working in your classroom, I’m not getting it done. My kids are not performing at the level that your kids are. What is it that you’re doing that I’m not? I see those things all the time,” Kenney said. “Back when I was teaching, you taught by yourself. You might have been on a team, but it wasn’t this discussion of instruction, and I would have loved that opportunity to bounce ideas off one another. It’s something that we should never take for granted.”

The technical name for the approach Kenney referenced is the Professional Learning Communities the Clinton School District now utilizes in classrooms. It’s a topic the district and school board have discussed, and endorsed, at length this school year, and something those executing the program — the teachers — have embraced wholeheartedly.

To showcase some of the work they do on a daily basis in the PLC at Whittier, four second-grade teacher leaders presented a series of statistics supporting the benefit of the PLC system.

Kristie Lueders, second-grade teacher at Whittier, explained the data not only shows PLC leaders what students need additional attention, but also allows the students to monitor their own progress.

“The students get to see their progress because they have this little flower that grows on the screen whenever they get points or do well on their test,” Lueders said. “We also have a part that we can go in and check their progress as well.”

What school board members also learned during Monday’s presentations, is parents involved in the Parent Teacher Association, also play a crucial role in Whittier’s success.

That role especially comes into play when promoting the district to community members, said Kenney.

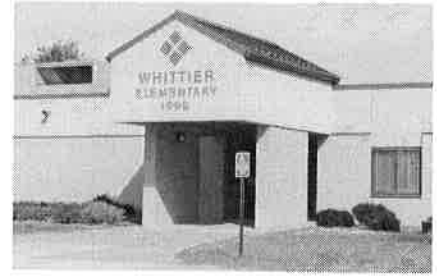
“They don’t take nearly enough credit. We’ve got a large PTA, but we’ve got a small group who do a lot,” Kenney said. “It’s not just nice to have a partnership with our parents, it’s critical to our kids’ success.”

While school board members appreciate all the positive news coming out of Whittier, Eric Gettes, board president, said it hasn’t always been that way.

He added that’s what makes Monday’s presentation and the success of the last three years, even more impressive.

“It wasn’t that long ago that I had some parents talk to me about not always feeling welcomed at Whittier and it sounds like you’ve made a big effort to make that a more welcoming, collaborative environment,” Gettes said.

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Amy Kent/Clinton Herald Whittier Elementary School was recently named a Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education.