

Mapleton focuses on Student Success Act forums

By JARED ANDERSON
SISLAW NEWS

Mapleton School District is in the process of gathering opinions on how it should spend over \$200,000 in funds provided by the Student Success Act, which was passed by the Oregon legislature last year in an effort to improve a variety of issues within the state's school districts, from class sizes to the mental health of students.

Upcoming meetings will be held on Monday, Feb. 24, at the Deadwood Grange, with food being served at 5:30 p.m. and discussion beginning at 6. On Tuesday, Feb. 25, the discussion moves to Maple-

ton High School, with snacks again being served at 5:30 with discussion starting at 6.

"We're hoping for people to come out and give us important input and feedback to help the district serve our students better," said Mapleton Superintendent Jodi O'Mara.

The district has already been holding meetings throughout the month of February, the first of which was held on Feb. 12 — a student-only discussion where the students were able to speak freely regarding how they thought SSA funding should be sent, and their feelings on the school in general.

See MAPLETON page 9A

MAPLETON from page 1A

That meeting was followed up by a community meeting in Swisshome last Tuesday.

"There were 12 community members and three district staff that attended, which we were thrilled to have come give us input," O'Mara said, adding that the district has been eager to gather community input on not only SSA funding, but the school in general.

The meeting was held in a series of "world cafe" roundtables, where small groups of individuals would discuss various questions that were given to them.

"All of the conversations were around what we need to do to support our kids and our

staff and build our community," O'Mara said. "It was really heartwarming. Everyone had such great and diverse ideas."

A wide variety of topics were discussed, from introducing new programs in the school to strengthening existing ones, such as the "Beyond Me" program.

"Career Technical Education (CTE) was a big conversation, bringing back woodshop, bringing in people from the community that have those skills that they can teach the kids," the superintendent said.

Creating a sustained CTE program is something the district is working on. Right now, only one class is offered, introduction to business, though

the district has had difficulties finding other instructors.

"When we lost our woodshop teacher four years ago, we have not been able to find someone to replace them," O'Mara said.

One of the difficulties is finding individuals who can be certified to teach CTE, which can be a complicated process.

"In order to get a teacher certified in CTE, they have to either already have a teaching license, or be a tradesperson who has a certain number of years of experience in that field," O'Mara said. "And then Lane ESD works with us to get them certified and to follow the program of study to get certified."

For nearby Siuslaw School District and the majority of schools in Oregon, getting someone to go through that process is challenging. For a rural district like Mapleton, it can be impossible.

Instead, the district is looking at alternative ways to build a CTE program.

"We're actually working with Lane Community College and Lane ESD on a CTE revitalization that is in the works to have programs of study that are about two or three weeks long," O'Mara said. "They actually come to your site and teach a program of study, like becoming a mechanic."

The students could travel to the places of business to take part in a truncated apprenticeship program, or they could take classes at districts like Siuslaw which already have an established CTE program.

For most schools, finding the time to travel for such programs would be an issue, but for the four-day a week Mapleton district, this could be a perfect opportunity for students to take part in the programs.

In both the student and community discussions, one

of the biggest points of interest was the institution of Friday school.

Last year, Mapleton teacher Lou Burruss, along with High School Principal Brenda Moyer, began opening up the school on Fridays. Initially, they began showing up on Friday mornings to work on prep, but the day soon grew to be an opportunity to help students.

However, the unofficial day has had some drawbacks. Resources are limited, with no bus service to the district on Friday and an inconsistency as to when staff decide to come in. While the limited staff is able to tutor certain subjects, they don't have the knowledge base to help students with every class the high school offers.

The district applied for a grant to bolster the program, but were denied. However, SSA funds could be used for Friday school.

"I think it's a good opportunity for kids to come in and either get help on the work that they missed in the week, and also just to make it fun," said junior Heather Wierichs. "Do extra schooling stuff, but outside of school. Like field trips, I think. I think Friday should be outside school where we go and do something, but make it a learning experience, too. Not just to have fun, you know?"

A majority of the 20 students who attended the forum were supportive of instituting Friday school, as long as the issues could be worked out.

"It's absolutely doable," O'Mara said afterward. "But if we had Friday school with our SSA dollars, it would be every week. And I could probably go out on a limb and say this would even be during professional development Fridays. That's how important we're hearing that it is."

While SSA funding could not pay for the entire staff to

come to Friday school, it could help bring in a limited number of teachers on a rotation throughout the month. For times when teachers would not attend, homework assignments could be set aside for students who may have missed classes.

Regarding transportation, the district could run limited bus pickup. Instead of door to door, they could run snow route locations, picking up students from a few select points such as the Swisshome Post Office and the Deadwood Country Market.

"It's all about being able to provide the best education for the students. And that can create hard decisions."

— Mapleton Superintendent Jodi O'Mara

It could also help with the CTE component.

"On Tuesday, I talked to the Oakridge superintendent," O'Mara said. "What they're looking at doing, because they're also a four-day-a-week school, is two Fridays a month, calling them CTE experience days. They're taking a bus to drop kids off so they can have a day-long experience in a business."

She said these opportunities could include visiting LCC's main campus in Eugene to tour available programs or visiting small businesses like Bf's Ice Cream in Florence to learn about the creamery.

"It doesn't take them out of core classes during the week, since it's Friday," O'Mara said. "I love that idea."

One of the biggest issues that the students felt SSA funds could help with was improving the quality of food served at the district.

"There are kids who straight up just refuse to eat the food here," said freshman Kiama Moody. "By skipping meals, you can create an eating disorder, which we don't want."

SSA funding could not be used for improving the quality of school food, though it's an

issue that the administration is aware of and working on, O'Mara said.

"That's actually one of our goals in our plan. It's something we've been working on for two years now — improving the quality of the food," she said.

Issues with meals arose just after the remodel. Before, all meals were served out of the elementary cafeteria, which forced middle and high school students to cross the campus during lunch time. Many older students didn't make the journey, so it was decided the remodel would bring food services to the high school as well.

After the remodel, more high school and middle school students were taking meals, but the budget

for food services remained the same. The school had to do more with already limited funding.

"Our step now is reevaluating what our menu is, what it looks like," O'Mara said, stating that the district was open to suggestions from the community and students.

During the student forum, the students acknowledged that even if SSA funds could be used for food services, the limited funds wouldn't be sustainable, so they began coming up with alternative ideas.

"Having a bigger Farm to Table class and growing fruits and veggies might help, or buying local," Moody said. "I know some things you can't do because you have to order mass food quantities, but maybe we can start making fresh food for the high school."

"That's a great idea," O'Mara said after being told about the suggestion. "Those are the things that spark changes and I love that."

The other big concern for the students was the block scheduling the district employees, two-hour classes offered every other day.

Another student, AJ Moso, said, "I would like to say that I



think what our school district can do is to support our students in school, is to go down on our two-hour block periods. With one-hour classes, it helps our brains think critically faster than having two-hour classes. Our brains will be less functioning in a two-hour block period so people will not want to come. So we can cut that down to one hour classes every day."

After Moso spoke, students around him clapped and cheered at the idea.

The problem that many students had with the block schedules was not only that the hours seemed to drag, but it was often difficult to get fully involved with a subject twice a week, instead of every day.

O'Mara said that the district would be willing to work on changing the schedule.

"Absolutely," she said. "The schedule changing, that's not a deal breaker. It's hard when you have class Monday first period and you don't have it again until Wednesday first period."

One of the main goals of SSA funds is to reduce class sizes, though there was debate among the students as to whether or not that was necessary. Some students took issue with class sizes being too small, while another student pointed out that the geometry class seemed overcrowded with 30 students.

"Part of that is due to the requirements for the state, and where our kids are at right now in math," O'Mara explained.

While the majority of Mapleton's classes hover around 15-20 students, every once in a while, when a group of students need to take a required class to graduation, the sizes can swell.

See STUDENTS page 10A

STUDENTS from page 9A

"When all our kids need geometry to graduate, boom, there's 30 kids in class," she said.

Hiring more math teachers is a difficult balancing act for the school. While an additional teacher may reduce the size of geometry, it would further decrease class sizes with already low numbers.

"It's not that we aren't wanting to hire more staff to support our kiddos, but right now it's hard to justify hiring a teacher when you have a class of 30 in geometry, but the rest of our classes are low numbers," she said.

Class size and resources is also an issue with special education, a concern that the students also brought up. Some of the students questioned whether or not the district even had a special education program, as some of the students they knew with special needs ended up attending different schools.

"We have special education students here, whether they're receiving speech services or specific learning disabilities where they get additional help and support," O'Mara clarified afterward. "Though there are times when students are better served in other schools, there are some high needs special education students that we have placed in programs outside of our district."

The reason for this is a combination of limited resources in the rural area, and a limited number of students with special education needs.

Depending on what a particular student needs, a wide variety of resources can be needed to help students be successful.

"Sometimes they have occupational therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists or communication specialists," O'Mara explained.

But a lot of those resources aren't available in Mapleton like they are in other schools.

"The programs that we send our kids to at times are behavior programs," O'Mara said. "They are specific to support kids with behavioral needs that may be more than what we are able to support. On site, they have behavioral specialists,

counselors and clinical social workers, as well as very structured behavior plans to help manage students, with the goal of getting students back into their home schools."

While Mapleton could invest in hiring those types of positions, there are then issues with how many students would actually need those services.

"If we were to offer more programs here, one of the huge negatives is that there are no peers," O'Mara said. "Their peers are regular ed kids, instead of special ed kids. That relational piece is important."

Being around students with similar experiences is important for growth and independence. That's not to say that the district moves all special education students to other areas; the vast majority do stay in Mapleton and work with the special education teacher the district employs.

"It's all about being able to provide the best education for the student. And that can create hard decisions," O'Mara said.

Improving social emotional

needs for all students is a large part of SSA funding goals, and within the student and community discussions, these issues dominated the conversations.

"That includes ensuring that our teachers and staff are trained to support our kids," O'Mara said. "There's a catchphrase, 'trauma informed care.' It's not just where there's one major trauma that happens in a student's life, it's the constant trauma that a lot of our families deal with. Whether that's poverty or food insecurity, whether that's homelessness or a loss of job, a loss of family. We want to make sure our staff understand where our kids come from, and how we support them."

While funds from SSA are designed to create a framework to support those needs, many of the issues brought up in the student discussion were beyond what \$200,000 could accomplish — school bullying, communication with staff and what opportunities students feel they have after they graduate.

"While not all of the com-

ments and the stuff here fits into the buckets of SSA dollars, it's still important and we still need to listen to it," O'Mara said.

In next week's edition, the *Siuslaw News* will examine how students feel about those issues as we give the students the floor, letting them speak openly about their issues at the small, rural school.

"It will actually help, not just only us as individuals, it will show parents and everybody what we see behind the walls of the school," said student Phillip Burnett.

Listening to the voices of Mapleton HS

SSA forum allows students to discuss district's big issues

BY JARED ANDERSON
SIUSLAW NEWS

"Mapleton, for the longest time, has been that school that no one goes anywhere," Mapleton High School student Phillip Burnett said.

He mentioned the 1999 film "October Sky."

"Anybody ever see that movie?" he asked the four other students sitting next to him.

"Basically, it was a coal mining town. Once you graduated high school, you were a coal miner. You didn't go anywhere, you stayed there. That's kind of what Mapleton is. It's a 'You stay here' type of town. There are some that make it out, but very few."

That's when student Opal Buruss shook her head in agreement.

"A very long time ago, it was really a logging town," she said. "But when industry left Mapleton, the people that could leave, left. And the people that couldn't, or chose to stay, stayed. And lots of times those people weren't the ones with all the money, or the resources to keep going in a good direction."

Resources were the topic of discussion at Mapleton High School on Feb. 12 as 20 students sat in groups of five, discussing topics ranging from low attendance at the school to the culture of Mapleton as a town. The discussions were completely student-run, with school administrators leaving the room 10 minutes into the discussion to ensure their presence wouldn't "keep

the students from being totally honest," said Sue Wilson from Lane Education Service District (ESD), who helped organize the student discussion.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss \$205,000 in new funding from the Student Success Act (SSA). Contingent on receiving the funds is a series of community discussions to gain input on how the

body copies, and allow the discussion to mature within the walls of the school and beyond.

While some of the statements made by students can seem harsh, the kids in the room also realized that their words were based on their own experiences; while one student may have noticed an issue, it was not always indicative of the whole. The full story surrounding individual experiences is never fully known by the majority.

The one thing that was clear was that to make productive change, the conversation had to start somewhere.

"It's important for us, as a small, rural school district, to honestly listen to the voices from our community — parents, students, families and community members," O'Mara said. "I am so excited to hear how we can better serve our students. Only through these open, honest and thoughtful conversations can we truly create a better learning environment for our students and our community."

Absenteeism and Graduation
Mapleton junior JJ Neece opened up the discussion at his table by getting introductions.

"I am AJ Moso, I'm a junior and I attend Mapleton High School."

"My name is Trinity Holmes and I'm a senior at Mapleton High School."

"I'm Landon Peck and I'm a middle schooler."

See STUDENTS page 5A

STUDENTS from page 1A

"I'm Kiana Moody, I'm a freshman at Mapleton High School."

JJ began with an opening question, provided by Lane ESD.

"Over the past six years, an average of 25 percent of Mapleton students were chronically absent," he read. "Among the six graduating classes, an average of 20 percent of Mapleton students did not graduate on time. Among the last six third-grade cohorts, an average of 27 percent of Mapleton students demonstrated proficiency on third-grade ELA state testing benchmarks."

Some of the students seemed surprised by Lane ESD's numbers.

"So the question is, 'Based on your school experience, what is causing low attendance and late graduation, and what can our district do to help support all students to attend and succeed?'" JJ asked. "That's kind of an open question"

He asked Trinity if she had any initial thoughts. While she was unsure on attendance, she did have an opinion on late graduation.

"In my grade right now, I'm the only one who passed the math, reading and writing for the state testing," she said. "So everybody has to do work samples. Part of it is, they just don't know how to do that. And they also just click through on the state testing and stuff, so I know that's part of it. Also, my sisters didn't know the months of the year until sixth grade, because I taught them that. I think they need to prioritize more things, and go over more things, if that makes sense."

Later, JJ pressed Trinity for clarification on state testing.

"They just click through it, and then they just have to do work samples," she said. "That's also partially why they are not graduating. Some people get mad they don't know how to actually do the math."

Kiana added, "Depending on what grade you're in, they give you a paper in the mail to opt out of state testing. I don't know if that's a state thing or just the school or whatever, but I know the kids that do opt out of state testing aren't prepared for the state testing they missed."

She knew this from her own experience, having opted

out of the state test one year.

"The next year the test had changed, and I had no idea what it would be like. It was totally different and I feel like I did a lot worse. I feel like if you didn't have the option to opt out of testing, it would just be better."

Throughout the conversation, AJ was carefully writing his response on a worksheet.

"Okay, so I can say something while he's thinking," JJ said. "Since you didn't talk about the attendance, I think I have something for that — block schedules. I know a lot of the kids here didn't like that. We could change it from a block schedule to four days of the week, one-hour classes. I know it kind of sucks to have block schedules. Two hours, every morning, the same class, every other day. It gets old. I feel like kids get bored and that's why they don't come."

In the last issue of the *Siuslaw News*, O'Mara stated that the district is always open to changing the schedule, and that they will work with the students on finding the best one to fit their needs. It's a sentiment the students will most likely appreciate, as all of the students at the table agreed the schedule needed to change.

That included AJ, who read his written statement so other tables could hear him.

"What I would like to say is that I think what our school district can do is to support our students in school, is to go down on our two-hour block periods," he stated. "Because with one-hour classes, it helps our brains think critically faster than having two-hour classes. Our brains will be less functioning in a two-hour block period so people will not want to come."

Students at another group, who overheard AJ, began to

clap and cheer at the suggestion. He turned to them, asking, "You like that?"

The students laughed, agreeing.

Behavioral, Safety and Social/Emotional Needs

After an allotted time was given on the first subject, the students were asked to switch moderators to help the students hear a variety of viewpoints. At JJ's table, Landon and Kiana remained, while ninth-graders Mason Flansberg and Evelyn McMaster joined the group.

The topic of discussion for this round had to do with a survey that asked students if they agreed with the following statement: "Staff at this school are meeting my behavioral and social/emotional needs."

According to Lane ESD, for Mapleton's elementary students, 39 percent said sometimes and 56 percent said always. For middle school and high school students, 14 percent said almost never, 50 percent said sometimes and 30 percent said always.

The second statement: "I feel safe and welcome at this school."

For elementary students, 28 percent said sometimes while 72 percent said always. For middle school and high school students, 14 percent said almost never, 32 percent said sometimes, and 46 percent said always.

"There is a question on it," JJ said. "Based on your school experience, what might be causing people to answer this way, and what can our district do to better support the emotional well-being of our students?" So is there anything anybody has to say right off the bat?"

After a moment, Evelyn spoke up.

See FORUM page 6A

FORUM from page 5A

"I guess family issues and trust issues. Just trust issues in general," she said. "Because if you don't talk to your family, usually you don't trust adults or anything like that. You get trust issues and you don't know how to feel."

JJ asked why students in the elementary school felt more safe and emotionally secure than middle and high schoolers.

"Because they're little and don't have anything to be afraid of," Landon said.

Evelyn added, "They're innocent and they don't really understand. They don't really understand the concept of life, they just think everything's nice and pretty and colorful and great. But in high school and middle school, you're in reality and have so much more pressure. In elementary, they're easy on you, you don't have much homework. You aren't that stressed out. Middle and high school, it's more stressful, especially because here's people judging you. People judge you a lot."

As the discussion moved on, Evelyn later clarified her comments.

"In middle school, you feel like you're getting judged a lot just because you're trying to fit in and change. Especially moving from middle school to elementary. In elementary, you don't really care what other people think about you. But in middle school, you're kind of looking around at people and especially high schoolers. You see that they're more mature, so you try to change into that. But you're scared that people are going to judge you and leave you because you're changing and stuff."

JJ asked if students were more judgmental in middle school.

"I feel it's more judgmental," Evelyn said. "I feel like most of the girls try and be perfect and stuff and they want to fit in. 'Cause in middle school you want to fit in because you're new to it. But in high school, it's kind of like, 'Eh, who cares at this point.'"

JJ asked Mason if he had something to add.

"I feel like the older you get, the bigger the change gets between things," said Mason. "Like your opinions. There's a really big change. There's a lot of stuff going on with, like politics and stuff, that some people are really interested in and some people really aren't. And there's a really big change going on."

JJ looked to clarify the comment. "So what you're saying is that as you get old, you're exposed to more things in life, and you start developing opinions from experiences in life, really. Would you say that results in a higher stress level?"

"Sometimes," Mason said.

"Why would that make you feel, not unsafe, but not emotionally supported?" asked JJ.

Mason replied, "Cause some people kind of feel like their opinion is the one that they need to stick to."

At that point, the discussion moved toward trust between staff and students.

"I think that trust ties into the emotional stability of students," JJ said. "Not stability but meeting emotional needs. You have to have a relationship with the staff member for you to feel emotionally stable or safe."

Kiana shared her point of view. "There used to be staff members that students felt comfortable with, but now there's a bunch of new staff members. So it's going to take time for the kids to get comfortable with them. I mean, there's a few that have been here for a couple of years. But even at that, there's still no built up trust between them. We don't really know them personally, either."

She said she felt frustrated, adding, "I don't know what I was trying to say with that."

"You were just trying to say, new staff members means a new buildup of trust. It's harder to trust new people," JJ said.

As moderator, JJ said he felt that the students hadn't really answered the question directly despite the discussion thus far, so he read it again.

"We didn't talk about how

we can fix it," Kiana pointed out.

Landon said, "We could train teachers to be more understanding, I guess."

Kiana then spoke about mandatory reporting of incidents, and how sometimes a small issue could be "blown out of proportion" during some incidences while, at other times, more pressing issues were sometimes downplayed.

"I think that this not only contributes to the safety of the school," Kiana said. "From my personal experiences, when you go to the staff about an issue that you're having with — let's just say other students — nothing really gets done. It's kind of like a slap on the wrist, 'Oh, they'll do better next time.' They give them multiple chances, but it's never really fixed. I feel like that's what causes some kids to not feel safe at the school and might feel pressured and not emotionally comfortable in the school."

JJ respectfully asked, "What do you mean by problems? Like, when you go up to a staff member and tell them a problem, do you mean bullying?"

"For the most part, bullying," Kiana said. "Mapleton isn't really known as the bullying school, because nobody really says anything about it. But I know that there is bullying happening because everybody knows that if you go to the staff about it, nothing is going to happen. So then people try and stop it within

themselves."

"And it gets worse," Landon added.

"And you get in trouble for stopping the situation," Kiana said.

"Yeah, and it's like if the school's not going to do anything about it then ..." Landon said, trailing off. JJ looked at Mason.

"Mason, you gotta talk man. What do you think about bullying?" JJ asked.

After a pause, Mason simply said, "It sucks."

JJ tried to get him to open up more, asking him to explain more.

"There's more stuff going on between people, like family member issues or something going on outside," Mason said. "They're bringing it in and being mean to people to make them feel better."

JJ nodded. "So you think kids take their life outside of school and bring it into school, and then take it out on other kids?"

Mason nodded his head.

"Okay, I get what you're saying," JJ said.

At that point, the students took a break to move onto the next topic — an in-depth conversation about academics.

In this Saturday's edition (Feb. 29) of the *Siuslaw News*, the students will voice their thoughts on student/teacher relations, and how each one is responsible for making learning successful at the Mapleton School District.

The voices of Mapleton HS *Part II — Forum allows students to discuss district's bug issues*

By JARED ANDERSON
SIUSLAW NEWS

On Feb. 12, a group of 20 students at Mapleton High School gathered to discuss the state of the school district. The discussion was completely student run, with the students separated into groups of five to go over a variety of issues, from absenteeism to the behavioral and emotional needs of students.

The purpose: students were to weigh in on how the district should spend over \$200,000 it will be receiving from the Student Success Act (SSA), a piece of legislation passed by Oregon lawmakers late

last year. One of the stipulations of receiving the funds is that districts across the state hold public meetings to give input on how the funds were spent. One of Mapleton's first meetings was held to gain student input in an open, honest and non-confrontational way.

In the past two editions of the *Siuslaw News*, the results of those conversations have been looked at, from Mapleton student's feelings on Friday school, to the state of school lunch. There were also a number of issues that could not be directly fixed by the funds, including topics ranging from school bullying to state testing. In this final part of this

series, the students give their feelings on the relationship between students and teachers in the district.

By the time the students had gotten to that topic, they had already been through two rounds of discussions. Each group was led by a student, in this case junior JJ Neece. On the topic of academics, he was joined by students Phillip Burnett, Micayla Flansberg, Opal Burruss and Stewart Clifton.

But before the discussion began, Sue Wilson from Lane Education Service District (ESD), who helped organize the student discussion and is helping the district facilitate SSA

conversations, shared an observation.

"I just have to say I love students," she said. "Two different tables acknowledged that the group here, while maybe representative of the school, maybe doesn't include some voices that probably need to be here to answer this question. And that's deep feedback."

She stated that it was the responsibility of the students involved, and of the community in general, to get the opinions of those unheard voices to the district.

"Take these questions to them and ask, 'What would you say?' And then share their voice forward."

See VOICES page 7A

SIUSLAW NEWS | SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2020 | 7A

VOICES from page 1A

You guys are leaders on this campus who have been given permission to do that. If there's someone you were thinking of when those comments were shared, you have every right to talk to them and say, 'We needed to hear what you had to say,' and then bring that back to leadership," she said.

With that, the time was turned over to the students.

ACADEMICS

The datapoint of the discussion started with the statement "The school is meeting my academic needs."

According to Lane ESD, 44 percent of elementary students said "sometimes," while 56 percent said "always." For middle and high school students, 71 percent said "sometimes" and 21 percent said "always."

The second statement read "I have access to intervention and enrichment services."

Of that, 44 percent of elementary students said "never," 17 percent said "almost never," 28 percent said "sometimes" and 11 percent said "always." Of the middle and

high students, 14 percent said "almost never," 48 percent said "sometimes" and 20 percent said "always."

"I don't think there's middle schoolers here, so we don't need to talk about that unless you guys want to," JJ said. "With the second point, the elementary students said 'never,' which I agreed with, I think, because elementary kids don't get as many opportunities. But middle school and high school is 48 percent 'sometimes,' which I don't think is very good, really."

JJ then read the question posed by the data: "Based on your school experience, what might be causing people to answer this way and how can we improve instruction, enrichment and intervention?"

The students had some questions about what words like "enrichment and intervention" actually meant, before Opal gave her thought.

"Number one, I'm not sure that this data is completely correct," she said. "Because one thing, this is a survey, and some people definitely don't answer honestly on these survey questions. I know that for a fact."

Her second point had to do

with enrichment.

"Lots of times, our school has been known, and is trying to get better but it's not there yet. It just doesn't have the opportunities and options for the kids that really want to do well and succeed and go on to like, a really good college or do something much bigger than going to LCC or something," she said.

Micayla turned the conversation to how teachers communicate lessons to the students.

"I think teachers kind of put stuff up on a board and they're like, 'That's how you do it, do that, here you go,'" she said. "They need to go into depth with what we need to do and kind of like teach it to us, not just put it up on a board and be like, 'There you go, that's what you do.'"

JJ asked, "So you think teachers should have more one-on-one?"

"I think they should be better teachers," Micayla responded.

JJ turned to Phillip for his comments, to which he said, "I'm going to make sure it's not too much for you, because it's going to be a fat minute."

He addressed the academic needs question.

if like, if they do something wrong or if we have trouble with our assignment, that we should come to them and check up on it, instead of struggling through by ourselves."

JJ asked, "Do you think the assignments are too hard, too easy?"

Opal felt that a lot of the teachers in the school were on the same page when it came to the difficulty of assignments.

"I feel like there are a few teachers that are trying to push the students in their own individual ways, to do their work and the like, and are trying to step up the academic level and help the students want to succeed, succeed," she said.

However, there were some teachers that could use a little help.

"I feel like there are other teachers that are not doing that in a good, productive way. Or not trying to do that. And so I think all teachers need to get on the same page and say, 'Hey, there are some classes that we need to make advanced classes, and every teacher should be able to teach an advanced class. Like, have the ability to let the stu-

tap you on the hand. 'Oh yeah, you're okay,'" she said.

JJ pointed out, "Sometimes that's required, though."

"Well, tapping your student on the hand and saying 'It's okay,' but you're holding other students to a higher standard," Micayla said. "That shouldn't happen."

"I think sometimes different students have different needs," Opal added. "But teachers should be careful and know what those needs are and make sure they're helping the students' needs. And if a student comes to them and is like, 'This is not okay, why are you doing this,' they should have a reason and be able to explain that to us. In a way that doesn't put the other students' privacy in danger."

Phillip brought the discussion back absenteeism and graduation rates, which the students had discussed earlier in the meeting.

"I'm going to tie these together," he said. "Some of those times when students don't graduate on time is kind of because of the lack of teachers caring. Also, being chronically absent, if my stuff isn't going to be graded anyway, why should I be here?"

one subject, and they've studied that in college. So that's what they're going to learn. But an elementary teacher, however, goes through it all. So it makes enrichment a lot harder. But also, when you're an elementary kid, it's kind of like your golden days. You just have fun."

Micayla added, "Also, when I think of kindergarteners for a second, they're taking this survey, I don't think they'd really understand."

"Or take it seriously," JJ said.

"Or understand half the words that are on this," Micayla said. "I don't even know what enrichment means, and I'm in 10th grade."

The table laughed.

Stewart added that the elementary students aren't "up to where we're at as to what is happening in life."

"Experiences," JJ said, followed by "Maturity level" from Micayla.

After praising the addition of a new school counselor to the district, Opal brought the discussion back to teachers.

"All the teachers that teach at our school had to at least go through college, and then go to an extra one or two years of school to get a teacher's li-

"We have some teachers in this school, and I'm not going to name names, that simply don't grade their stuff. And it really hurts us as people that want to do sports or stuff after school. I want to be able to go home and not have our parents yell at us because, 'Why do you have an F?' What do you mean I have an F? Well it's because you didn't turn in this, that and that.' I did turn that in, though. 'Well it says here that you didn't. And you come to find out, your teacher isn't doing their job. Or they lose your work. And it's like, 'I did this, but I'll happily do it again.' And it just makes it to where you always go in there with a negative vibe."

JJ asked, "So you think organization is a big part of that too?"

Micayla quickly answered yes, followed by Phillip.

"Teachers harp on us for organization, but they don't follow through. They're kind of being hypocrites on that," he said.

Opal, whose father, Lou, teaches at the school, gave a more nuanced view.

"The teachers that we have are gonna make mistakes," she said. "We make mistakes and we lose our stuff, or we forget to turn it in. But I think it gets to a point where if you lose a ton of kids' assignments over and over, that's not right."

The other students agreed, at which point Opal pointed to student responsibility to help solve the problem.

"One thing my parents always taught me was to advocate for yourself," she said. "If you have a problem with the assignment, you need to go to the teacher and tell them and explain to them in a reasonable way. Not like, 'This is a horrible assignment, why did you assign this, this is stupid.' You have to do it in a really reasonable way. But like, I think the teachers should be explaining to us that we need to advocate for ourselves and

parents who want to succeed, succeed, and keep working. I feel like at Mapleton, for so many years, the students who have struggled have rightfully gotten a lot of attention, but the students that have wanted to succeed have not gotten the same amount of attention."

JJ nodded his head, saying, "That's a really good point."

Stewart, who described himself as a quiet person, was asked by JJ if he had anything to say.

"I still don't have anything to say," he said to laughter at the table. "Actually, I guess one thing I have to agree with is on Phillip's end, because some of the teachers don't really grade any of the work. They don't look at it and there's a teacher that has lost work and you have to redo it over and over again. It just messes with your head and it's not giving you an opportunity at all to do any sports or after school activities."

"That's a good point," JJ said.

"I said something, are you happy?" added Stewart as the others laughed.

DOING THEIR PART

"I feel like it's harder for the students to succeed in classes if the teachers aren't doing their part," Micayla said. "You're here to learn how to do something, what to do. We're here eight hours a day, every day. If our teachers aren't doing their part, how are we supposed to learn what we need to do or how we're supposed to do something without them?"

"So you're just saying it's harder for students to succeed when teachers are being lazy, or when they're not trying?" JJ asked.

Micayla thought about it for a second.

"Some teachers are like, 'You're not at school, it's okay, you don't have to do that.' You were sick, when you weren't really sick. They kind of just

"Why should I put in the effort?" Micayla echoed.

"Exactly," Phillip said. "Why should I put in the effort, why should I be here? Why should I even try? That's why Mapleton for the longest time has been that school that no one goes anywhere."

Opal shared her views on the matter.

"My dad is a teacher," she said. "Teaching is really, really hard. I think that being a good teacher takes a lot of effort. Doing the hard, hard work that teachers have to do to help students is a really hard task, and I think some teachers might not want to do that work while the others do. And I don't know how you fix that. There's a lot of teachers that are really working hard to help students succeed."

All of the students nodded their heads in agreement, acknowledging that there are good teachers at Mapleton.

"And they're really putting in the work to help students go where they're supposed to go," Opal said. "And then I feel like there are other teachers that are here to teach kind of, but not put in the work that's needed, I feel like."

"And that ties back to what you were saying before, with some teachers putting in the work for academic success, and some aren't," JJ said.

At that point, JJ asked why there were such big differences in views on enrichment services between elementary and high school.

"Do you feel like elementary students don't have as quality teachers, or do you feel like we just aren't doing very well on surveys?" he asked.

Phillip thought that it was tied to how each school is traditionally run.

"When you have only one teacher for the entire day, mostly, you can only go over so much," he said. "But when you're in high school and you have seven teachers a day, that one teacher knows just

some of the goals of the students at Mapleton, and what they want to do later on in life."

Micayla pointed out that many of the Mapleton teachers are fresh out of college.

"I see the struggle for some of them coming straight into teaching," she said. "We are still a small school, but they are trying to teach and their first years of teaching are probably pretty hard for them."

Phillip brought the whole discussion together, stating that it was the responsibility of everyone in the community, from district staff to parents and leaders, to support the students.

"With some of those teachers, they had a set of goals that they accomplished," he said. "Some of those teachers had somebody that was probably backing them up the way through. Well, it's kind of hard for students to do the same thing when we don't have adults backing them up. When the students don't have the backup up to get to their goals, it kind of feels like the adults are being selfish, in a way."

At that point, the students broke up into different groups again, this time speaking on topics from Friday school to school lunch, conversations which have been discussed in previous articles in this series.

At the end of the two-hour-long discussion, district staff brought pizza to the students, praising them on the thoughtful discussion. When asked if the students felt comfortable having their names and words printed in these articles, all said yes.

When asked individually if they thought they had their voices heard, Phillip said, "It will actually help — not only us as individuals, but it will show parents and everybody what we see behind the walls of the school."