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Dr. Owings Honored Regionally by Principal Association

MARCH 12TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Dr. Owings Honored Regionally by Principal Association

Poplar Bluff, MO - Poplar Bluff Middle School Principal Dr. Brad Owings was named ‘distinguished principal’ of the Southeast Region during the 31st annual conference of the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals held Saturday, Feb. 29, at Osage Beach.

A principal of 17 years, Owings was hired in Poplar Bluff in 2015 at the former 5th and 6th Grade Center, and led the transition the following year to the Middle School which—with 1,200 students at the time—was the largest upper elementary school in the state, according to education officials.

The move to the former High School campus involved bringing fourth grade teachers in from the district’s lower elementaries, helping to develop procedures and schedules for the reconfigured grade span and planning the logistics of traffic patterns for parents, all the while having hired 15 first-year educators.

“I have often been amazed at the number of students Dr. Owings knows by name” and frequently “knows their story,” wrote Middle School intervention teacher Kris Sittig in a nomination letter for the award. She continued: Owings shows the “same respect to his secretarial, maintenance and school cafeteria staff” as he does faculty.

Cultivating a positive climate is the most important job of a building administrator, wrote Owings in his nomination essay, and a leader does so by providing teachers with

“autonomy, mastery and purpose,” he stated. His personal mission, he went on, is to equip staff members with “everything they need to be the best version of themselves,” and create a “culture of continuous learning for adults.”

“It’s so easy to get caught up in the ‘busy-ness’ of being a principal that we lose sight of the real work,” which is relationship-building, Owings noted as a professional challenge.

“Dr. Owings possesses a broad working knowledge of both the pedagogy and the business of education,” said R-I Superintendent Dr. Scott Dill in a letter of support, adding that Owings is an “asset to the profession” and believes in students “at his core.” The superintendent elaborated: “He believes in their potential and sees for them a future brighter than they, themselves, can often envision.”

On a personal note, Owings is married to sixth grade Middle School teacher Holly, and together they have four children. Dave Elledge, co-pastor of The Bluff Church, where the family attends, stated that Owings “seems to have found a wonderful balance” between home life and his career. “Dr. Owings is seen in our community as an administrator who truly cares for his students, his teachers and staff, and the Poplar Bluff community,” Elledge commented.

While Owings has recently accepted a job offering in Southwest Missouri for the 2020/21 school year, his successor—to be recommended for approval by the Board of Education during the next monthly meeting—will be left with a solid foundation once he or she takes the reins in July. Gains were made in both English language arts and mathematics, along with all subgroups on state assessments from 2018 to 2019 at the Middle School.

The three best practices that the outgoing principal—who received his doctorate in 2010 from the University of Missouri at Columbia—listed are vital in helping all students find success are: School-wide Positive Behavior Support, Response to Intervention and Professional Learning Communities.

Over the past few years, the Middle School has ‘rebooted’ its PLC model, collaborating in teams to track data on student progress using common formative assessments; established common RTI time so each grade level can provide differentiated instruction for students struggling or in need of extension activities; and started the SW-PBS process, reinforcing student expectations.

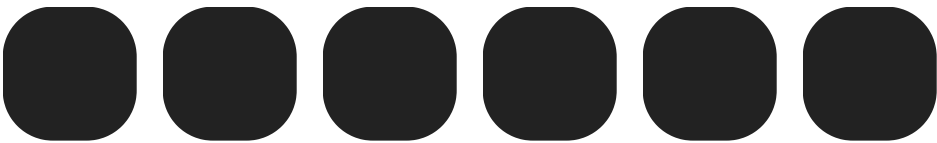
Pictured: Dr. Brad Owings, Middle School principal, is recognized among colleagues on Saturday, Feb. 29, during the MAESP Distinguished Principal banquet at Osage Beach.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Over 100 Books Given Away at Book Bingo

MARCH 11TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Over 100 Books Given Away at Book Bingo

Poplar Bluff, MO - More than 100 children’s books were given away to students participating in the fourth annual Book Bingo hosted during Read Across America week on Thursday, March 5, at O’Neal Elementary School.

“Every kid leaves with a book,” noted Ashley Robertson, O’Neal librarian, who helped organize the event. The books were paid for by Mossy Oak Properties/Mozark Realty, which also supplied a free Mules T-Shirt for each participant. Chartwells provided the

snacks and beverages.

This year’s grand prize winner during the final blackout round of bingo was second grader Elena Butler, who received an eight-book hardcover series of “Dog Man” by Dav Pikey, creator of “Captain Underpants.”

Book Bingo, along with the elementary school’s popular Movie Night, was established by the Bright Futures Site Council during the 2016/17 school year in an effort to put on additional functions for families to participate in, according to Principal Dr. Amy Dill.

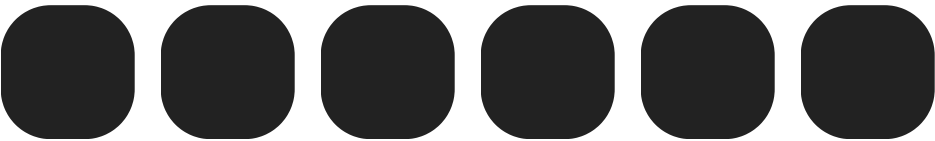
Pictured: The team at Mossy Oak, led by broker Lucas Edington (green shirt), pose with their various family ties to the school during Book Bingo night.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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PB Alumnus Returns for Black History Month

Assembly

MARCH 06TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

PB Alumnus Returns for Black History Month Assembly

Poplar Bluff, MO - A Poplar Bluff alumnus who leads intercity youth development training throughout the country shared his “tips for a successful life” on Thursday, Feb. 27, during an assembly observing Black History Month at Junior High.

“Get connected,” “stay away from messy people” and remember that “you have value,” stated Cortez Higgs, founder of The Catalyst Effect, to the seventh and eighth grade audience in the gymnasium.

The first piece of encouragement from Higgs pertained to students participating in activities outside of the school day, whether it is athletics, band or another extracurricular club

“A lot of you, if you don’t get connected or engaged, you’re going to live inside a box,” the PBHS Class of 1996 graduate said. “...You only have so much room to go inside the box before you hit the wall.

His next piece of advice was a cautionary tale about associating with the wrong crowd, and how succumbing to peer pressure can ruin one’s chances for a hopeful future.

Higgs used \$5 from his wallet to demonstrate his final lesson of the day. He captured the reaction of a group of volunteers after dropping the bill on the ground and stomping on it.

When asked if Zoe Freeman would accept the money even though he proceeded to “call it names,” the student replied affirmatively, explaining that it still “has value.” Higgs rewarded the student with \$10 for providing such an astute answer.

“Just like this money, no matter what anyone says or does to you, what they say or do to you does not determine your value,” Higgs concluded. “In spite of the mistakes you make, in spite of the issues or the families you’re with, in spite of what clothes you have, where you live – you have value.”

At the beginning of his lecture, Higgs noted that he grew up in poverty and was the child of a teenaged mother. Despite having experienced some trauma in life, he said, he went on to become an ordained minister, having studied biblical theology at Bethel College, and served as a petty officer in the U.S. Navy, among other feats.

Higgs currently resides in Newport News, Va., with a wife and four children. He has traveled to 45 schools across the country through the Department of Justice, discussing race relations and gang violence prevention.

The schoolwide assembly was spearheaded last year by paraprofessional LaRonda Mack and co-teacher Courtney Rutledge of the Life Skills class. Rutledge graduated with Higgs, and helped arrange for the visit this year. For the remainder of the program, a planning committee was formed that also had student representation.

Other features of the annual event included a performance of “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” known as the Black National Anthem, led by student Leara Hopson; a special tribute to the late Kobe Bryant; a living museum featuring the depiction of 30 black inventors by students; and a mural contest. The Life Skills students prepared a lunch for the invited guests.

Pictured: Poplar Bluff native Cortez Higgs of The Catalyst Effect receives an ovation from the audience following his Black History Month speech.

Article and photo by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Oak Grove Proves that Spelling is Not a Lost Art

MARCH 06TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Oak Grove Proves that Spelling is Not a Lost Art

Poplar Bluff, MO - Oak Grove Elementary won the 11th annual Butler County Community Resource Council Spelling Bee Championship with two classmates vying for the top spot on Wednesday, Feb. 26, at Fox Radio Network.

Journey Warren was named the 2020 champion, spelling the 87th word v-o-r-t-i-c-e-s correctly over finalist, Clint Wallace, also of Oak Grove. Representing the other elementary schools were third graders Willem Thurston of Eugene Field, Brody Oatman of O'Neal and Miley Baker of Lake Road.

Event moderator Kathern Harris of the CRC Children and Youth Succeeding in School Committee stressed that all the contestants were winners for making it to the championship upon competing in a three-week tournament at their respective schools. Oak Grove hosted an additional round in order to narrow its three-way tie down to two.

Last year Oak Grove also sent two competitors to the spelling bee, which ended in a tie between Oak Grove and Lake Road after the finalists spelled all 190 words on the list correctly over the radio. This year the difficulty of the words was increased to a fifth grade level, according to Harris, who noted that some of the tie-breaking words were used in the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

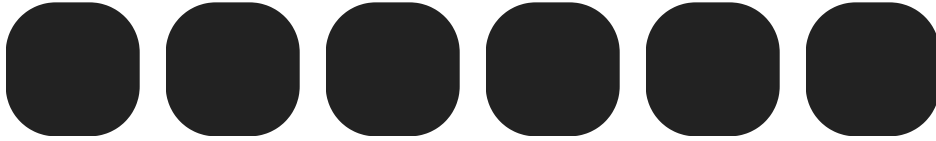
The spell-off was emceed by Dave Wyman of the Missouri Department of Transportation, who serves the CRC as a member of the Parents Working Committee. The spelling bee aired live on KYEX 88.3/98.3 FM, the radio's nonprofit station. Fox Radio has been broadcasting the spelling bee since the event's debut in 2010 to help raise the stakes and provide the students with a memorable experience, confirmed owner Steven Fuchs.

Pictured (From left) Willem Thurston, Miley Baker, Journey Warren, Clint Wallace and Brody Oatman pose at Fox Radio Network last week before going on air.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Poplar Bluff Earns National ESEA Award for 3rd Year in Row

FEBRUARY 25TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Poplar Bluff Earns National ESEA Award for 3rd Year in Row

A Poplar Bluff elementary school has been nationally recognized for its exceptional student achievement for the third year in a row.

Oak Grove was one of two federally-funded schools in Missouri and only 73 in the United States to receive the 2019 National ESEA Distinguished School award Wednesday, Feb. 5, in Atlanta. The other Missouri school was New Madrid, also located in the Southeast region of the state.

"Your dedication and hard work never go unnoticed," stated R-I Assistant Superintendent of Business Dr. Amy Jackson, congratulating Oak Grove Principal Jenifer Richardson.

“You are a remarkable leader and have worked tirelessly for many years to ensure our students’ success and teachers’ success!

Oak Grove was selected for ‘exceptional student performance and academic growth for two or more consecutive years,’ which is one of three award categories. On the Missouri Assessment Program test in the 2018/19 school year, the elementary school scored 85.5 percent proficient or advanced in math, up from 84.5 the previous year, and 81.9 in English language arts, an increase over 75.7 during 2017/18.

Lake Road was named a National ESEA Distinguished School in the same program category in 2018. In 2017, Oak Grove first earned the honor, formerly known as the National Title 1 award, for ‘closing the achievement gap between student groups for two or more consecutive years.’

In its school biography on the network website, Oak Grove attributed its recent accomplishments in part to community partnerships that include AmeriCorps, the Boys and Girls Club, its Bright Futures Site Council, the Butler County Community Resource Council and an active Parent Teacher Organization, supporting activities such as power hour, the lunch buddy program, the Jingle Jog, Math-A-Thon and more.

“The work that I’d say has driven our success is the collaboration taking place among our teachers, but it takes every single person—day in and day out—to make this happen, and you can’t let up,” Richardson said. “We have the framework in place that guides us, but we have flexibility within that framework because things are constantly changing, and you need to readjust and recalibrate for each individual kid every year in order to achieve maximum student performance.”

Since 1996, the national program has highlighted up to two selected schools per state that have successfully used federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to “improve the education for all students,” including those who are “economically disadvantaged,” according to a press release from the overseeing association.

Pictured: Oak Grove Principal Jenifer Richardson accepts the National ESEA award earlier this month in Atlanta, with support on stage from (left to right) teachers Becky Ingle, Carey Wilkerson and Gabby Bullock; R-I Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Patty Robertson; and Title 1 Director JoAnne Westbrook.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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