

By LAUREN VINCENT • Daily Leader With a genuine thank you always appreciated, the USD No. 480 board meeting Monday evening began on a positive note.

Abbey Hebbert brought a personal thank you to the board of education for sending her and her teammates to the Odyssey of the Mind World Finals Competition at Michigan State University in May.

“I know many of the schools did not get to go because of funds being tight,” Hebbert said. “I appreciate that our board sees the importance of this program and for their support of me. Thank you.”

Several positive reports were brought before the board including further information on AYP results presented by Director of Data and Testing Jill Stout.

“I am excited to say that the district, for the first time since 2004, has made AYP in all areas,” she said.

The preliminary results from AYP tests were handed out at the last meeting and have since been tweaked slightly. Yet the official results will not be available for some time.

“They will become official preliminary as of Wednesday,” she said. “That’s when the sign off is complete for all of the schools to say, ‘yes, that is adding up to what we think it should be’ and so those should be the final preliminary results. And then they will go through more of the process and hopefully we will have the official official reports in September. That’s what they’re giving us as a target.”

The programs implemented over the past several years are being touted as the cause for this increase in testing scores.

“Honestly, I think it’s a variety of things,” Stout said. “With some of the reading, I think it is part of what we have implemented this past year in Literacy First, in paying more attention to specific skills for students. But I think over all the main part is the programs we’ve been implementing over the past two or three years. Various things that we’ve been doing, we’re now starting to see the growth from those programs.”

“I agree completely,” said Liberal High School Principal Keith Adams. “That plus some incentives we’ve implemented with the students – rewards for doing well. I think that’s encouraged a few students to try harder than they have in the past. It is a combination of all these things coming together.

“I think the big part of it with the KMA class we implemented for math was the targeted instruction and reinforcement from the teachers, letting students know that they could do it, that they were capable of passing,” Adams said. “And that kind of success breeds a success mentality which spread throughout the student body.”

The success mentality is not a natural one for students to pick up, but once it is achieved, there are dramatic improvements in their learning and testing scores.

“Once they saw that they could do it from those practice tests and were at the percentage to pass the state assessment, their confidence levels were high enough where they knew going into it that they could pass,” he said.

With encouraging results from the focused math class last year, a new reading class will be put to use this year in hopes of seeing furthered progress.

“Next year we’ll have a TRA class for the 11th grades to focus on reading,” Adams continued. “The intensive is going to be for the freshman coming in. It’s surprising how many students we had, I think it was 120 or 140 – or 40 percent of incoming 9th grades – who were three grade levels or more below. And some of them were reading at the first and second grade level starting high school.”

Board member Nick Hatcher suggested perhaps a general focus change is in order.

“It always amazes me that our community focuses so much at the high school level and you’re telling me, in fact, the focus needs to be at the grade school level so they can build a basis so when they get to high school they don’t have these kinds of issues,” Hatcher said.

Adams agreed.

“Most of your academic success in high school is determined before you get there,” he said.

Along with AYP scores being met, another positive report was brought by Director of Auxiliary Services Alan Haskell, pleased to present that Food Services is closing out this school year in the black.

“The biggest difference is we definitely had more reintroduced meals so our reimbursement was considerably high,” Haskell said. “But we also feel that we have a reduce in waste and more meals made from scratch.”

A thank you was extended to the entire food services staff from the board. Member Jim Jury was especially vocal in his praise.

“A year ago we were in the red \$103,000 and now we’re ahead,” Jury said. “That has really been a credit to your department. That is the first time I’ve seen it in the black. I realize, relative to the entire budget, \$63,000 isn’t a lot of money but it certainly is significant when we’ve never really seen it before.”

EDITORS’ NOTE: Look for further information from Monday evening’s meeting, including the implementation of FOCUS Alternative School, in Wednesday’s edition of the Daily Leader. Also included will be a 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant awarded to the district and a

list of teacher resignations, hires and transfers.