

# Vermillion Kindergarten Teachers Pilot New Program

BY SARAH WETZEL  
For the Plain Talk

Kindergarten teachers for the Vermillion School District are in the process of piloting a new program, dubbed 'Sanford Harmony,' to help build social skills.

Austin Elementary School Principal Kim Johnson reported on the program at the last school board meeting.

"It fosters relationship building skills in young children and it helps them to think more about how they talk to and treat others and how to get along with others," she said. "I think the biggest deciding factor for us was that it's not a new curriculum. It doesn't take away from critical instructional time and it really seamlessly weaves into successful frameworks that are in place. It takes minimal teacher and classroom time to implement, it's cost effective."

Johnson said when contacted about piloting the program she was immediately interested.

"Gera Jacobs contacted me late last spring to make me aware of the Sanford Harmony program which I had not heard of at that point," she said. "She shared its goals and components and she invited us to participate in this pilot opportunity this year at no cost to the district."

"First of all if Gera Jacobs is coming to me with her stamp of approval and is excited and positive about the impact it can make, I know it works," she continued. "I knew I had to give it a closer inspection and show it to the teachers which is what I did. I talked to the teachers about it and they were interested. They were excited and intrigued with how it would add to what we were already doing."

Jacobs, Early Childhood Education Professor at the University of South Dakota, and Nick Shudak, Division Chair of Curriculum and Instruction at USD, also appeared before the board to give their views on the new program.

According to Shudak, USD President James Abbott was invited to the Sanford Education Center at National University in San Diego recently to assemble a team to listen to researchers and discuss the program with interested parties and identifying partners to implement it.

"So we were pleased to have been given the



SARAH WETZEL/FOR THE PLAIN TALK  
**Austin Principal Kim Johnson (R) reports to the school board with Nick Shudak (L) and Gera Jacobs (Center) about a new program for kindergarteners designed to help build social skills.**

opportunity to assemble a team," Shudak said. "It is a program that maps onto the curricula that's already being implemented with an early childhood education. So it is a focus on social interaction and social skills. It focuses on helping build relationships between students. It helps teachers do what they're already doing in their classrooms. It provides a common language for them not only in the classroom but across the buildings to help those interactions."

The program designed for increasing empathy and decreasing violence in classrooms, seems to have a good start.

"There's two main parts of it," Jacobs explained. "One's a buddy-up program where each child gets a different buddy each week and they do different activities with their buddy all week long. The program comes with these little cards that teachers can use to do these activities or they can just do what they would typically do in their classroom anyway with their math activities or literacy activities as long as the kids are working together toward a common goal or something together. So each week they get a different buddy and over the course that, if they have 20 kids in the room, over 20 weeks they'll have a week with every child in the classroom."

According to Jacobs, this helps the kids learn how to work with just about

anybody.

"The idea is you start in preschool/kindergarten and each year ideally you move up a grade to grade six," she said. "By sixth grade the kids always work with everybody in the classroom so they don't think about excluding other kids or that I would never work with a boy or I would never work with a girl, or I would never work with somebody who wasn't as smart as me or those kind of things but it's natural that they work with everybody in their class and respect everybody in their class."

The second part of the program involves group discussion according to Jacobs.

"The kids come together and create classroom goals, they discuss classroom problems, get to know each other," she said. "It's a great way to meet those speaking and listening standards."

There's even a mascot. "With preschool through second grade there's this little character 'Z' who comes from outer space," Jacobs said, displaying a green plush alien. "Character Z is not a boy or a girl. There are stories that teachers read and the children are talking to Z about how boys and girls act and how they get along and Z gives them some suggestions as well. The units are on diversity and inclusion, empathy which again is so important with our standards."

The units focus on communication, problem solv-

ing and peer relationships.

"So over the course of the year they go over these lessons," Jacobs said. "It comes with a teacher guide that walks them through the lessons and goals."

According to Jacobs, the creators of the program at Arizona State University with funding from T. Denny Sanford have high hopes for the long-term effects of the program.

"He's hoping to change the world with this program by helping kids get along," Jacobs said. "He's hoping to decrease the divorce rate, to increase kids getting along and decrease violence against women. He really hopes that this program can help with that."

Many other schools are reportedly implementing the program in South Dakota including all 64 pre-k schools in Sioux Falls, Kindergarten and pre-k in Breresford, pre-k through fifth grade at St. Agnes in Vermillion, and special education in Gayville.

For more information on Sanford Harmony visit [www.sanfordharmony.org](http://www.sanfordharmony.org).

## 400 USD And SDSU Students Hone Interprofessional Health Care Skills

More than 400 students from the University of South Dakota and South Dakota State University spent Tuesday on the Vermillion campus of USD learning teamwork skills in the evolving concept known as interprofessional health care.

That approach emphasizes that health care professionals from different disciplines work closely together to improve patient outcomes. For example, a social worker, physical therapist and nurse confer, communicate and cooperate with the physician as a team when deciding how to treat someone.

Students and faculty taking part in the day-long exercises are from SDSU's College of Pharmacy; USD's College of Arts & Sciences, which includes audiology, speech language pathology and clinical psychology; the USD Sanford School of Medicine's medical program and center for disabilities; USD's School of Health Sciences, which includes addiction studies, dental hygiene, medical laboratory science, nursing, occupational therapy, physician assistant, physical therapy, public health, social work and health sciences major.

"The event, which started in 1999, provides the students a great chance to interact with and learn about other health professionals, and how they can work together to provide team-based care," said Joy Karges, professor of physical therapy and Chair of the interprofessional training event at USD.

"This is an important event in the development of health care professionals in South Dakota, setting standards for interprofessional health sciences education and practice," added Michael Lawler, Ph.D., dean of USD's School of Health Sciences, which is leading a statewide effort that's unique in the United States because it blends government, education and health institutions to advance interprofessionalism. For details on the effort, see the current issue of South Dakotan Health magazine.

## After Hours With Dr. Tim Schorn Planned For Next Thursday

Dr. Schorn, Director of the International Studies Program at USD, will be the featured speaker at the Clay County Democratic Party's monthly After Hours speaker series on Thursday, October 29th. The talk will begin at 7:00 PM at the Vermillion Public Library and is open to the public.

Dr. Tim Schorn, Associate Professor of Political Science, joined the University of South Dakota in 1995. He received his Ph.D. (1995) and M.A. (1990) in Government and International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, his J.D. from Notre Dame Law School (1989), and his B.A. from Mount Marty College (1986).

Professor Schorn's areas of specialty are International Relations and Comparative Politics, especially Middle Eastern Politics, International Law, and Human Rights. His current research is on constitutions and human rights in the Arab world and the law of war as it applied to Israel, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

Dr. Schorn has traveled to the Middle East a number of times and conducted interviews of members of the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian students, and members of the Palestinian private and non-profit sectors. He is regularly consulted by the area media on issues pertaining to the Middle East, American foreign policy, and international terrorism.

Dr. Schorn is a member of the South Dakota Army National Guard, Rotary International, the American Legion, and a number of professional organizations.

He is married to Ilmira Dulyanova. They have a son, Kamil, and reside in Vermillion, SD.

For more information, the media and public can contact the event organizer, Mark Winegar, direct at [mark.winegar@mac.com](mailto:mark.winegar@mac.com).

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**HAUNTED HAPPENINGS** Saturday October 24th 10:00am - 1:00pm @ the Public Safety Center (15 Washington St.)

The Vermillion Police Department, the Clay County Sheriff's Office and the Clay Area Emergency Communications Center will be hosting an open house for the public.

HOT DIGS, CHIPS & POP WILL BE PROVIDED

- Displays & Demonstrations•
- Halloween Safety Tips For Kids•
- Halloween Photos •Patrol Vehicle Tours•
- Halloween Reflective Bags & Treats Available•

Children are encouraged to wear their Halloween costumes.

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