

Linda Boggs: An "out of the box" administrator

By Erin Long-Kytonen ('03)

If you're having trouble finding Linda Boggs in Walla Walla, then you might try checking the roof.

At least, that's where you would have found the Blue Ridge Elementary School principal after students met their reading goals last year. Boggs had promised to spend a day on the roof if Blue Ridge students read 250,000 pages for the year. When students met the challenge, she

of those challenges involved a curriculum that didn't address specific needs of a student population in which 90 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch and 77 percent spoke English as their second language.

Despite the 40 percent Hispanic population, for example, all classes were being taught in English. The school now offers a transitional bilingual program that lets students receive instruction in Spanish through third grade. Students transition into English and, in most cases, are

bilingual by grade five.

Under Boggs' guidance, scores on the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning) have increased from 11 percent of students showing satisfactory academic performance to current scores that are as high as 60 percent. "What it says is that, overall, they're learning. That's what's important," Linda Boggs notes.

Rest assured, a hallmark of life at Blue Ridge is that every moment is spent learning, and teachers are responding to Boggs because of her receptiveness to new and creative teaching methods.

Susan Hansen, Blue Ridge physical education teacher, approached Boggs with a teaching plan based on research that examined the connection between movement and brain function. The result was the introduction of a curriculum incorporating principles of literacy into physical education activities.

And it's working. Boggs insists that the success at Blue Ridge could not have happened without the talents of her colleagues. "We have the best teachers at Blue Ridge," she says, "It's the person at the front of the room who really makes the difference. My philosophy is to hire good people, and then get the heck out of their way!"

Other educational professionals recognize the strength of Boggs' staff, as well. "It's a really special group there at Blue Ridge," says Irene Gonzalez, executive director of teaching & learning services for the Spokane School District.

It's a group that voluntarily attends staff meetings hosted by Boggs that extend into the late evening. They don't stop for summer, either. Until this past summer (due to lack of funding), Blue Ridge has offered summer school for everyone who wants to attend; the cost was only \$10 for the entire summer, with transportation and lunch provided. Nearly the entire student population had enrolled for the summer sessions.

"The entire school was basically operating year-round," says Gonzalez. "Students could have the same teacher during the summer as they did during the school year. That's powerful."

And not only are they learning, they're having fun while they do it. "Students love coming to school," says Susan Hansen, PE teacher. "From the moment students walk in the door, they are surrounded by adults who are committed to providing a positive learning environment."

Honored and humbled by the recognition she has received, Boggs says what is particularly moving is that the nomination process began with her peers. Irene Gonzalez, who was then principal of nearby Green Park Elementary, began the nomination process with two Blue Ridge teachers, followed by letters of support from staff, parents and members of the community, which were submitted to a panel that reviewed 18 participating regions in the state. Boggs won her region and was chosen as the state winner after a team of representatives conducted a site visit at the school.

While the recognition of Linda Boggs as Washington's National Distinguished Principal reflects the high regard her colleagues hold for her, it's also the result of mutual admiration at Blue Ridge — where every person feels appreciated.

How could they not? She deliberately leaves stashes of paper at strategic locations around the school so that when she sees good deeds — on the part of students, teachers or staff — she can scribble a quick note of praise and leave it on the appropriate desk, bulletin board, lunchroom counter or maybe even the roof.

That's what has Blue Ridge teachers, parents and students alike shouting from rooftops about their principal, who brings new meaning to what it means to be "distinguished."



moved her office - complete with laptop computer, phone, wading pool and secretary — to the school's rooftop, where students could see her during recess.

From visiting classrooms via electric scooter to giving haircuts during assemblies to infusing comic relief into staff meetings, Boggs might not be what you'd call a "conventional" administrator. But her creative spirit and enthusiasm have helped to bring dramatic improvement at her school — results that have led to her recent recognition as a National Distinguished Elementary School Principal of the Year.

Her trip to the top began with a different kind of uphill climb. When she first came to Blue Ridge as principal in 1991

— after earning a B.A. in reading in 1984 from EWU and master's degree in school administration in 1988 — she was met with some hefty challenges. Some

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