

News Writing

2013 KSPA REGIONAL CONTEST

Assignment

You are to write a 250- to 300-word news story based on the facts and quotes below. The writer should determine which information is relevant and important to the story, and which quotes should be used directly and which need to be paraphrased or left out altogether. This story will be published on your school news site tomorrow, so you should focus your lead on the most timely and important news.

Students may write in pen or pencil. Students may use dictionary, thesaurus and AP Style manuals. The use of personal listening devices (i.e., iPods, phones, etc.), recording devices and computers is prohibited.

Background

Fifteen percent of Aspera Unified School District freshmen received at least one F on their report card during the first semester.

When you combine John Brown High School with Ad Astra, that's about 400 freshmen total, so 15 percent of that is 60 freshmen.

School spokesperson Jack Klugman said the numbers were split about evenly between AAHS and JBHS.

Administrators at both schools and in the district offices say that number of failing students is a sign that the district isn't doing enough to help students go from their smaller middle schools to the district's two large high schools, JBHS and AAHS.

They also claim that improving the transition from middle school to high school is one of the top things the district can do to boost graduation rates. The graduation rate in 2012 was 89 percent. It was 91 percent in 2011, 90 percent in 2010, 93 percent in 2009 and 93 percent in 2008.

Ad Astra High School this week unveiled a plan. The plan will divide the large school into separate sections the principal, Emmylou Harris, calls "Learning Communities." Harris said these LC's will allow freshmen to build bonds with teachers.

Description

You are a member of Ad Astra High School's newspaper staff. Your editor has assigned you to write a news story using the information provided.

School Info

Name: Ad Astra High School
Location: Aspera, Kansas
Mascot: Box Turtles
Enrollment: 850 (grades 9-12)
School Colors: Green & Gold
Yearbook: The Honeybee
Newspaper: The Star

Contest Info

This is a carry-in contest.

Please attach your assigned contest number in the upper right-hand corner on the back of your photo.

Do not put your name on the entry. If you do, your entry will be disqualified.

Students are not to request help or advice from anyone other than the KSPA Executive Director. All work must be that of the contestant.



Ad Astra also will overhaul its guidance department. Counselors in the past have had students all in a single grade. Now they will have a mix of students from each grade.

Ad Astra will create a ninth-grade center in two floors of the Commons Building.

All of these plans will take effect in August 2013, at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year.

Ad Astra freshmen won't jump right into block scheduling next year. They will have some 45-minute classes in the first semester. Middle schools have 45-minute classes. Instead, freshmen will transition from 45-minute middle school classes with a hybrid schedule that John Brown modeled last year. The hybrid schedule allows students to take both yearlong and semester-long courses.

Ad Astra conducted a survey of alumni and learned that graduates feel they lack study skills when they enter college. So the administrators will turn an existing course into a freshman seminar that teaches these skills. Students will learn how to manage their time, how to take notes from a textbook, how to write a resume and how to memorize information. Students will put the skills to use in their ninth-grade core subject classes, which will all have an emphasis on study skills and reading and writing.

Both high schools currently assign guidance counselors by grade level. Next year, counselors will be paired with students alphabetically with a mix from each grade.

Quotes

School Board Vice President Astrud Gilberto

"I love this plan. It addresses things that have been nagging at me for years."

"The counselor switch will spread out the freshman caseload between counselors. And it will allow counselors to better connect with families since siblings will share the same counselor."

"This is good for the entire community."

School superintendent Gary Chalmers:

"We want to prevent these kids from sliding in the beginning."

"The planners really did a great job of hitting all the key parts of high school improvement research."

Principal Emmylou Harris

"The ninth-grade center will create a small-school feel that boosts social and academic interactions among freshmen and teachers. It will also reduce ninth-grade travel throughout the building."

"I was sickened when I saw last semester's grade reports. We've been seeing too much of this in our school and in our district. It's high time we did something about failure. If these kids can just say 'no' to drugs, they can say 'no way' to F's."

"I like the idea of the hybrid schedule since a 90-minute class can be tough even for adults. I have no idea how a student could not succeed with this setup. It is so exciting."