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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Daily Leader

After serving as principal at South Middle School, Brandon Hyde recently took over as the head of Garfield Elementary following the retirement of former principal Dr. Travis Wilson.

The current principal is inheriting one of seven elementary schools in USD No. 480, all of which met Adequate Yearly Progress for 2009 on state assessments.

Hyde said a lot of the credit is due to some of the programs Wilson implemented, many of which Garfield is still using.

“Especially with our third grade, we’re just breaking down every single student exactly what they need, looking at what they struggle with, basically setting up an individual plan for each student on what they need to help them on the assessment test,” Hyde said.

Like many schools, Garfield is using MAPP tests and formative assessments to help students learn what they need.

“Anything we can do to get those students to see what they need to know and where we can help them,” Hyde said. “We have done well in the past.”

He said many of the teachers at the school have been in place for numerous years.

“I think when things work, you just continue doing those and add some other things,” he said.

AYP scores for Garfield for 2009 were 87 percent in reading and 77.8 percent in math, the latter of which matched the state’s standards for that category. Standards will rise for next year with an 83.7 percent target in reading and 82.3 percent in math. Hyde said these numbers are attainable for the school.

While all of Liberal’s elementaries made AYP, none of its intermediates or middle schools or Liberal High School achieved state standards. Hyde said he believes age groups play a factor in that trend.

“The kids at an elementary level want to do the best they can,” he said. “Middle schools want to do the best they can as well, but elementary kids are just at that age where they’re real impressionable with wanting to please. Please their teachers, please me as the principal, please their parents. It’s just two different kinds of kids.”

Garfield has a reading block of two hours, the second of which is small group time, according to Hyde.

“Based on where they are, what type of things they need to study, what groups they need to be in to make sure they’re getting the help they need wherever they’re at whether they’re a lower student or a higher student,” he said. “Not only are we bringing the low students up, but we’re getting the higher students to go beyond where they’re at.”

District wide, USD 480 has implemented the new Literacy First program, which Hyde said will help educators bring his and other schools’ AYP levels to higher rates.

“It’s something new that the teachers haven’t done before with the small groups and things they haven’t done in the past,” he said. “It’s a work in progress. It’s a process. We’re in our first year, second semester of that process.”

Hyde said Garfield’s teachers have started getting into the flow of using Literacy First, and progress will continue to be made as both educators and students get more familiar with the program.

“The more in-services we have, the more days go by, the easier it gets for them to do those centers and their small groups,” he said. “It is a data driven process, and just looking at that and seeing that your kids are improving is really something you can look at and expand on. It really helps to motivate not only the teachers, but the kids to be able to see that improvement.”

In addition to Literacy First, Garfield has many teachers who work after schools tutoring students.

“There’s not an actual tutoring program after school, but we work with students in smaller groups a lot after school,” he said. “They are with those kids every day, so they see the ones who need that extra help. They’re willing to help those kids whenever possible.”

Hyde said he feels programs currently in place at Garfield are things which are helping kids, and the school will continue to see improvement. He added learning about assessments starts from day one at his school.

“Just because the third grade’s the only class taking assessments doesn’t mean that’s the only group we teach,” he said. “It starts at kindergarten. Literacy First is K-12. We’re intensive from kindergarten all the way through third grade here.”

Hyde said, in this way, it is not just third grade teachers, but rather educators in all four elementary classes who are successful.

“Third grade teachers don’t get those kids all by themselves,” he said. “They get them prepared. They’ve had help from other teachers who have gotten those students where they need to be when they get to third grade.”

Hyde said students can then concentrate on third grade standards and what they need to know to take the test. He added the longer the process is used, the more success will be seen in elementaries as well as higher level schools.

“They’re going to get students who’ve been through this process, worked in small groups,” he said. “We’re going to see where they’re at for several years when they get to those spots.”

Hyde is in his first year at Garfield, and he said he has learned much in his short time at the school.

“The teachers here have been wonderful to work with,” he said. “The kids are fun. I love coming to school every day, getting high fives and hugs. It’s just a completely different atmosphere.”

Hyde said he is excited to be at Garfield.

“It’s been fun,” he said. “The kids work hard. The teachers work hard. We’re just going to keep working on improving and go from there.”

Hyde also partially credited Garfield’s AYP success to the school’s instructional coach, Stephanie Waldorf.

“She has done an excellent job of being that person who’s there for the teachers, the students and for me to make sure the Literacy First process is working and we’re getting where we need to be,” he said.

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