

Catherine Martin named Teacher of the Month

By RACHEL COLEMAN

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Despite conflicts that cropped up later in the evening, the beginning of Monday's USD 480 school board meeting offered an upbeat return to school days for the six board members present. New board member Crystal Clemens did not attend, for medical reasons. Four students from South Middle School put the board through the paces with math and reading exercises.



Their visit to the board was part of the "Good Things" presentation introduced by superintendent of schools Paul Larkin last year, before his promotion to the current post. For the 2013-14 school year, "Good Things" has returned, now under the direction of deputy superintendent Renae Hickert.

"This is our official start to Good Things, so we're going to start by introducing you to our Teacher of the Month," Hickert said.

Chamber of Commerce spokesman Jack Jacob did the honors, and shared that while the Chamber received six outstanding nominations of teachers “who were doing amazing things outside their schools, tonight’s teacher of the month went far beyond that.” Catherine Martin, math teacher at South Middle School, was instrumental in bringing the robotics program to students at the Mid America Air Museum’s summer program, and will continue to do so at South, he said. She also serves in her church and has put significant energy into helping set up Christian fellowship opportunities for single adults in the community.

Martin’s principal, Gib Rito, continued in the same vein.

“Her commitment is an example to us all,” he said. Martin “spent several weeks of her summer vacation to continue educating students and returned to work at SMS ahead of time to set up her room and the hallways ... it looks amazing.”

Through her enthusiastic attitude, Rito said, “she has served as a wonderful example to every teacher in her department, and you can see Miss Martin is touching the students’ dreams. Her positive attitude is contagious.”

Some of Martin’s influence showed up in the student portion of the “Good Things” presentation by SMS students Janice Bell, Nayeli Galan, Mariana Juarez and Banshi Patel, along with teachers Martin and Taryn Lobmeyer. The girls demonstrated the SMS “I Block,” which is the school’s method for individual intervention for students of all levels. Students participate in MIRP — Monitored Independent Reading Practice — and math practice.

Board members observed as Bell and Galan read a short magazine article aloud, with a teacher prompting them to observe and retain information. Across the room, Juarez and Patel handed yard sticks to board members Nick Hatcher, Delvin Kinser and Chris Jewell, and Larkin.

“You guys are going to measure each other’s height in centimeters,” Juarez instructed. Using white boards and erasable markers, the men teamed up to measure and record their heights, after which Patel told them, “don’t erase it. Now you’re going to round it to the nearest meter.”

“It’s been a while,” said Hatcher. “Do we have to use fractions?”

“Math,” said Jewell. “My fave. Not.”

The girls giggled, and then Juarez said with a wide smile, “now round it to the nearest tenth.”

Meanwhile, across the room, Matt Friederich, Tammy Sutherland-Abbott and Steve Helm listened to Bell read the article. After she read the title, Martin stopped her to ask, “Is this article fiction or nonfiction?”

“Non-fiction,” Bell replied.

“How do you know?” the teacher asked, and when Bell hesitated, she prompted, “What’s the difference between fiction and nonfiction?”

“Fiction is fake,” Bell said, “and nonfiction is real.”

After reading the article, Bell discussed its content with the board members, who asked more questions about how I-Time functions in their days. When Galan described I-Time as a chance to check in each day with her regular teacher, Friederich asked if it makes a difference to her, personally.

“What happens if you’re having a bad day?” he asked.

“It helps,” she said.

“That’s good,” he replied.

The demonstration session lasted nearly 15 minutes, marked by laughter from board members and students alike. Board members thanked the students and teachers for their participation, and sent them off with a round of applause.