

One size doesn't fit all

Phonics or whole-language?

Through the 20th century there were many debates over how children learn. In fact, throughout my career I have personally dealt with the swinging pendulum in regards to educational techniques and philosophies. Eventually, thanks to the expansion of educational research regarding effective instructional methods and resources, it was recognized that children need balance.

Take the phonics versus whole-language approach to reading. This became the "Great Debate" throughout the 1990s. With the availability of current research we learned and recognized that a more balanced approach to literacy was needed. Children need systematic instruction in letters and sounds so they can automatically decode words; they also need to have the joy of reading fostered, as well as assistance in constructing meaning from informational and narrative text.

Kyrene has not been immune to the pendulum swing in its approach to education. Until recently the reading programs used in its schools were piecemeal and fragmented. Schools applied programs



The Kyrene Beat

by Dr. David Schauer

Superintendent of Kyrene School District

and methods based upon preconceived notions about what worked best with students. A systematic program of instruction, which would ensure that every student, regardless of school or grade level, would have similar learning opportunities, was not in place.

That has changed. After a major curriculum revision and a comprehensive resource adoption process, the current program provides a standards-based approach to literacy instruction based upon educational research. The implementation has

been challenging because it required many teachers to become familiar with different instructional strategies, and they had to learn how to use completely new resources.

In the end, this change has assisted overall with individual student learning needs and achievement. Because there is a systematic approach to instruction, teachers are able to utilize materials and adjust to student needs. Kyrene School District understands that "one size doesn't fit all," and teachers continue

to seek supplemental resources that will best work for a child. The district is committed to providing the necessary resources and support to ensure that all students will make continuous progress in literacy development and growth.

Education has definitely become more scientific in the 21st century.

Dr. David Schauer is superintendent of the Kyrene School District. He can be reached by e-mail at dschau@kyrene.org.

SCHOOL NOTES

Arizona PTA scholarships

The Arizona PTA has established a scholarship program with the major purpose of aiding able students who have the desire and potential to at-

tend college.

The organization is currently offering \$250 scholarships per semester that can be renewed each semester with proof of registration and current grade point average of a minimum of 2.65. Students shall be eligible to receive no more than \$2,000 in four years from the Arizona PTA scholarship fund. The scholarships are based on financial need.

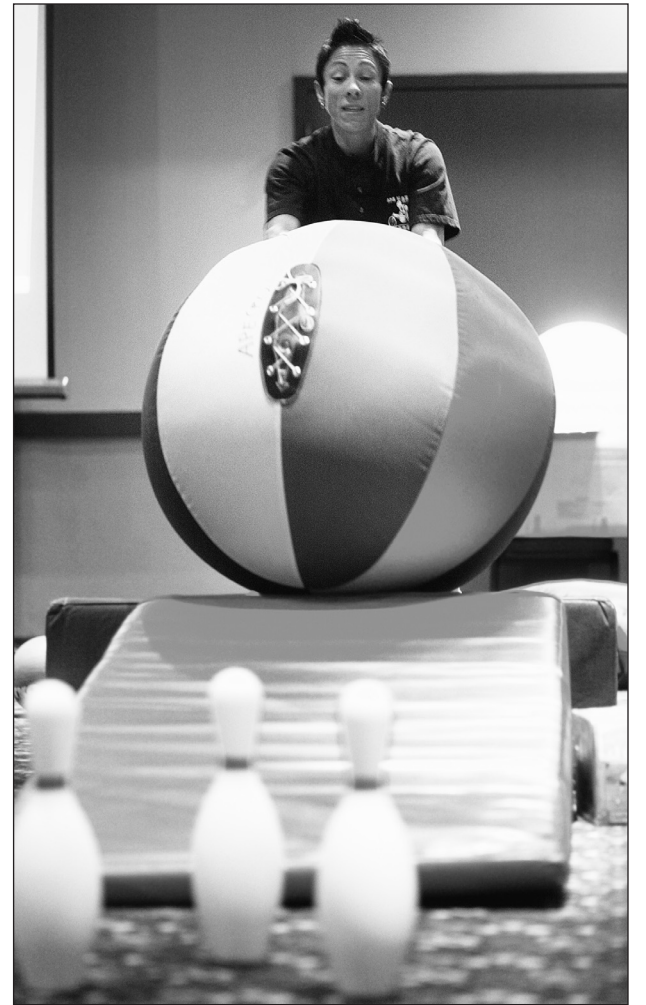
Students wishing to apply must have a minimum grade point average meeting college requirements of a 3.0 and must be considered to be an Arizona resident by the school they are attending. Ap-

plications for the scholarships may be downloaded from the Arizona PTA Web site, www.azpta.org. Any submitted application must be sent to the Arizona PTA office and postmarked by Feb. 15.

Registration reminder

Friday, Feb. 9 is the last day to register for President's Day Camp at Sureno Elementary School for the early bird rate of \$25 per day, per child. After Feb. 9, the rate is \$35 per day, per child. Additionally, Feb. 9 is the last day for online and phone registration; after that, only fax and in-person regis-

more Schools, see page 15



U. Frank Williams Jr./AFN

Elise Sheldon, an adaptive physical education teacher in the Mesa school district, demonstrates various activities.

Educators

From page 13

across the state to discuss how best to teach P.E. to special needs kids.

"Different students have different needs, like kids with autism have different sensory needs," said Rachel Shea, also of Mesa Unified. "So you need to be able to get more in-depth with them."

Products and services ran the gamut from aquatic activities for special needs students to games designed to hone such students' hand-eye coordination while providing exercise. One of the presentations, It Rocks, was a demonstration on a game to be used in conjunction

with climbing walls in gyms. A sort of vertical Twister, the product paired colored patches on the ground with colored patches affixed to a wall, and encouraged students to follow the colors while stretching and working out.

It Rocks impressed the Kyrene School District's only adaptive P.E. specialist Susan Foreman. She said she would take a lot from the conference back to her district, including It Rocks.

"We just had a meeting for our climbing walls, and part of that meeting was to get climbing walls for all our elementary schools," Foreman said.

The point of the conference was to find ways to best serve special needs students, through certification processes, adaptive exercises and any other available means.

It was also, Shea said, to make clear that special needs kids can do anything any other kid can.

"It's nice to get out there that these kids can do what anyone else can do, as long as we adapt to them," she said. "They're just as able."

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