

Grant to make big school small

Federal funds help Poudre create anchors for students

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In three weeks, the halls of Poudre High School are likely to be as crowded and lively as ever.

But with the help of a federal grant, school administrators hope to keep students from getting swept away in the sea of humanity by giving them an adult and small groups within the school to use as anchors.

Poudre School District officials Monday received a \$394,904 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to implement "smaller learning communities" within the 1,900-student school.

The three-year grant will be used to continue programs already aimed at groups of students that need extra attention, such as those in special education or learning English as a second language, said PHS principal Sandra Lundt.

But it also will be used to broaden the use of small groups throughout the school so every PHS student is affected.

Under a pilot program that will begin with the fall semester, every sophomore will be assigned to a teacher who will serve as an adviser and mentor. Each adviser will be responsible for about 19 students, Lundt said.

The adviser will meet with the student every week — sometimes individually, sometimes in a group — and keep track of how the student is doing academically and personally.



Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

EDUCATIONAL BOOST: Poudre High School Principal Sandra Lundt, right, and Assistant Principal, Athletic Director and Project Director Rich Yonker, center, thank Rep. Marilyn Musgrave on Monday after being present-

ed with a \$397,904 Smaller Learning Communities grant at the school. The grant will be used to bolster programs aimed at students who might need extra attention and to create small-group learning opportunities.

The small-community approach is expected to be especially beneficial to students who are "in the middle" and don't get as much attention as students at the high and low ends of the academic scale, Lundt said.

Students in the International Baccalaureate program or in special education are already connected to a strong core of teachers, she said.

"The kid who walks in the door and is a B-C student or C-D student has a tendency to get lost," she said. "It really is our goal to give those kids a significant connection to high school."

Research shows students who have significant adults in their lives and connections to their schools achieve better academically, Lundt said.

The grant does not include additional staffing for the school. But it will clear the way for training staff, writing curriculum and planning, Lundt said.

Eventually, academies will be formed for students in their junior and senior years built around areas of interest such as mathematics, science or

performing arts.

The grant was years in coming as PHS staff researched the concept and wrote grant requests to the Department of Education.

Art teacher Lorri Fowler, who helped write the grant, said

much of what the grant will fund is already being done at PHS. But the funding will make a difference, she said.

"It gives us credibility, it pays for training, and there's more accountability to make sure we do this in the timeline we said we

would do it," she said.

The grant was delivered to beaming PHS officials by Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo. As a former teacher, Musgrave said she knows many students can "fall through the cracks" at large schools.

The grant will help school administrators deal with that problem by getting students the attention they need, she said.

"It harkens back to an earlier day in education when classes were smaller and educators had more time to focus on individual students," she said. "So this grant is wonderful."

