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Yankeetown School shows phenomenal progress



Principal Jeannine Mills looks at a student's work as Mechelle Harmon teaches algebra to eighth graders at Yankeetown School.

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 27, 2016 @ 10:07 p.m.

YANKEETOWN – The 222 students enrolled at Yankeetown School this year have shown phenomenal progress in reading, math, discipline and attendance, according to records.

Yankeetown School Principal Jeannine Mills, 45, has been in that leadership role since July 1 of last year. Mills has been in the education profession for 23 years, and 15 of those years she has been in administration.

In this first half of the school year, the students have made enough progress to have reached the goal for the year. However, they are continuing daily to make strides as they continue improving their academic and social skills.

“I’m here for the kids,” she said. “That’s who I work for. They are my priority.”

Yankeetown School teacher Mechelle Harmon's algebra class paused for a moment Wednesday



(Jan. 27) to provide a photo opportunity. Seen here (front row, from left) are Principal Jeannine Mills, Dezyré Ingram, Trina Ruttinger, Kaloian Nedeltchev, Mechelle Harmon and Sonya Paricio at the very front, and (back row, from left) Hannah Snyder, Raven Langenburg, Ryan Wildey, Omarion Nesmith and Edward Valenzuela.

With that as a guiding principle, Principal Mills has been meeting with members of the community since she came to this part of Florida. She told the people about progress in the school as she and the faculty members help the children reach goals.

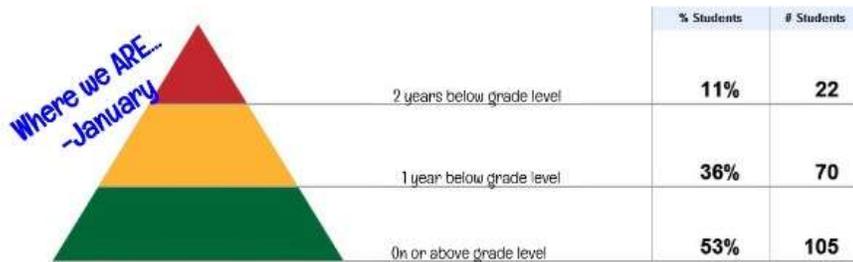
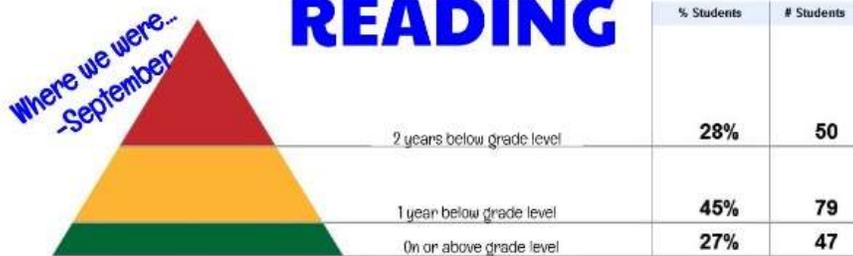
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Yankeetown School serves children in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. After eighth grade, the students can attend school in Ocala, Dunnellon, Cedar Key or Williston. Students are being given orientations to all four schools, she said, so they can make their choice.

In the meantime, before that next step, all of the students are improving in their learning in comparison with last year.

Yankeetown School has met the district, state and national expectations for yearly learning gains in both reading and math as a school and there is still another half of the school year left.

Check out our gains in READING



level performance, and this success has decreased the number of students who are reading at two years below grade level by 28 students.

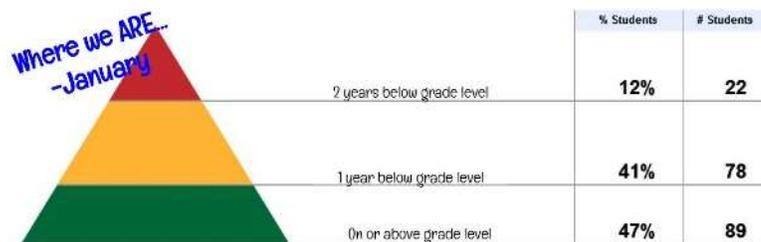
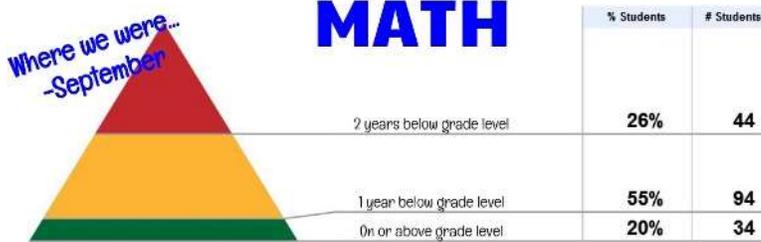
This graphic was provided by the school. The difference is reflected by less red in January than what existed in September. The figures show students two years below grade level in reading dropped from 28 percent (50 students) in September to 11 percent (22 students) in January.

READING

Using iReady, which is a national averaging of all measures of success in various academics, Mills can see a comparison between the immediate prior year and this year.

Based on iReady Reading, there have been 58 students who moved to grade

Check out our gains in MATH



Just like in reading, the red zone for students at two years below grade level is reduced from 26 percent to 12 percent.

MATH

Based on iReady Math, there have been 55 students who moved to grade level performance, and this decreased the number of students who are working two years below grade level by 22 students.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline data shows children are behaving better than the year before.

There were eight school-wide discipline referrals, from a total of 28 disciplinary referrals, because 20 of the referrals were bus referrals.

Mills said the students are learning what adults expect for good behavior in school and on the bus. Comparing last year's figures shows great progress.

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Last year, there were 118 referrals and that number did not include bus referrals.

Part of this improvement in behavior, Mills explained, is from a positive behavior support approach. Each child is awarded eight sand gnat dollars, each day. The sand gnat is the school mascot.

And students are rewarded for good behavior with sand gnat dollars. This “currency” can be used to eat lunch outdoors as a privilege, enjoy a movie in the afternoon or play basketball, for instance. Those “dollars” may also be used at The Sand Gnat Store.

There are school supplies, toys and games available at this store.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance data is also reflective of progress.

SUPPORT

The staff, students and community should be commended for the Learning gains made this first half of the 2015-16 school year at Yankeetown School, Mills said.

Mills has 38 faculty members, with 17 of them being teachers. Since she began on July 1, she hired 10 new faculty members. One of those was a receptionist, which was a vacant position. She hired a second first-grade teacher.

The population of students increased by 50 students since July 1, she said.

The support Principal Mills has seen for Yankeetown School from the community is beyond anything she has experienced in her 23 years in education.

As an example, she said the Inglis Recreational Committee donated 200-plus backpacks completely stocked with the school supplies she told them students needed.

Another super support group is the Yankeetown-Inglis Woman’s Club, Mills said. This club provides an astounding amount of support for the school, including helping to stock The Sand Gnat Store.

Another action by the Yankeetown-Inglis Woman’s Club is the provision for needy children. This year, though that club’s efforts, the Kidz Eatz program has continued. They are feeding 30-plus children a meal for Friday’s supper and three meals each on Saturday and Sunday through the school year.

Funding for this program comes primarily through Bingo at the Woman’s Club. During the height of tourist season, there can be as many as 60 Bingo players.

The women also respond when called upon for specific needs. For instance, if those children need socks, then the women donate socks.

Mills said in her meetings with members of the community, she had shared the success in the first half of this year, and she was asked to provide that information. Hence “The Stuffers” sent the information to people interested in the Yankeetown area.