



BIG CYPRESS — When faced with a new situation, knowing what to expect can help ease anxiety. With that in mind, Ahfachkee School gave students a sneak peek on Aug. 16, allowing them to see their classrooms and meet their teachers before the first day of school.

Principal Lucy Dafoe told parents and students what to anticipate this year and introduced new teachers. The school-wide focus this year will be to improve math and reading levels, as well as to increase daily attendance.

“We are data driven and will use the data to get all the kids up to grade level,” Dafoe said. “We plan to do whatever it takes.”

New programs include an expanded, full-time music program, which includes choir and band for fourth- through seventh-grade students, and now the athletics program for middle and high school includes district league competition for the golf and volleyball teams. CHAMPS (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement and Participation), a classroom and behavior management program, will also be implemented to ensure each classroom provides the best possible learning environment.

Based on 30 years of research in the fields of education and psychology, CHAMPS teaches students how to behave in school and what teachers expect from them in specific situations. For example, students learn how best to ask for help, when it is appropriate to get up from the desk, how to communicate effectively and what the goal is for each classroom activity.

And because attendance numbers affect funding from the Bureau of Indian Education, the school will vigorously enforce attendance. Incentives will be given for excellent attendance, and there will be consequences for truancy. Dafoe plans to work with parents to enlist their help in getting children to school, but the school will also have case managers for students who miss too many days of school.

After Dafoe spoke and families enjoyed dinner, students visited their classrooms and met their teachers.

“I had a busy summer and am ready for school,” said fifth-grader Charlie Frye.

Sixth-grade teacher Cynthia Wilkes was ready, too.

“I expect them to come with their thinking caps on and ready to take in all the knowledge they are going to get,” she said. “It’s going to be a great year.”

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