

SHS Word of the Week

*Skyline High School
Idaho Falls, Idaho*

Wordplay took on a whole new meaning this spring for students at Skyline High School when school administrators introduced the new community-sponsored Word of the Week program.

The idea emerged at an Academic School Improvement meeting. Teachers were in search of a way to improve students' verbal SAT scores, but they wanted to move beyond the 'typical teen speak.' Skyline faculty and administration decided to involve the Idaho Falls community in a major vocabulary lesson by asking local businesses to sponsor a Word of the Week.

Every week a new word was presented at the high school. Its spelling, pronunciation, part of speech, and usage were posted on a sign hung in every classroom. Teachers encouraged students to use the featured word as much as possible during normal lessons.

Word of the Week community sponsors agreed to give students discounts on their services if students mentioned the word at the register. For example, Starbucks upsized students' drinks for free if they mentioned the word "alacrity." Hollywood Video, Arby's, Coca-Cola, and Office Depot/United Way also joined in on the fun. Some of these franchises asked students to use the vocabulary word in a sentence while others asked for a definition.

To test their cumulative knowledge, at the end of the year students took a Word of the Week quiz. Students who received top marks were awarded prizes, such as a digital camera, free movie tickets, Sonic gift card, or iTunes gift card. The contest was sponsored by Coca Cola and the school's Renaissance Club. More than 70% of the students who took the quiz won a free soda.

Some teachers thought some words (e.g., "licentious") were too racy for the contest. Over all though, most teachers supported the program whole-heartedly. Administrators listened to teachers' concerns and developed a

more rigorous vetting process for words.

Students found the program to be an enjoyable way of learning those daunting, archaic SAT words. "It expands our minds using words we would not normally be exposed to," one student said.

Teachers and school administrators reveled in the cooperative atmosphere the program created. "The best part about our Word of the Week program is that students, teachers, staff members, and community members all are learning and using the words together! It's a lot of fun watching adults and students incorporate words into their daily lives both in and outside of school," principal Trina Caudle said.

The program cost \$300 to implement. Administrators used district funds to cover the cost. They plan to continue the program next year and expand the number of community sponsors involved. Skyline High would also like to solicit students to help create the word list.

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