

Chester Elementary School Celebrates 70 Years



Two years ago, a then five-year-old Autumn Tognotti, who had just started kindergarten at Chester Elementary, asked her mom Nicholle Crowther (Tognotti), a Chester Elementary 4th-grade Teacher, “When is the school’s birthday?”. When Nicholle realized she could not answer her daughter, this simple but insightful question sparked a curiosity in Nicholle to investigate the history of Chester Elementary School. In the process, she discovered that in the 2017/18 school year Chester Elementary would turn 70 years old.

Nicholle felt this milestone offered an important and unique opportunity to honor the legacy of the school and the lives of the individuals who have passed through the halls of CES for the past 70 years.

In an effort to celebrate this milestone Nicholle pitched an idea to the CES staff and PTA to help support and fund a week-long “birthday celebration” for the current CES students to enjoy and honor the school’s history, roots, and the community, that has been involved in the school’s 70 years. With the help of many Chester community members, CES Alumni, current students, staff members, district administrators, and Nicholle’s leadership and organization, this two-year idea came to fruition this past Spring.

When asked why she felt that it was important to celebrate the school's 70th birthday, Nicholle Crowther shared, "CES is a wonderful school and a beloved part of our community that deserves to be honored and recognized. I wanted our current students to know that they are part of something bigger, that their learning here has deep roots and that they will always be connected to this small school with a big heart. I wanted them to have this celebration among their own childhood memories."

The celebration week started off with an assembly that presented a slideshow of traditions that have been at CES since it formed in 1948. These traditions include a yearly visit by Santa each winter, an annual field day in the spring where all the classes compete with one another, outdoor education, and school spirit.



After the slideshow, Plumas Unified Superintendent Terry Oestreich and PUSD school board member Traci Holt presented a banner and plaque to the school that the district office donated to Chester Elementary. In the afternoon that first day the students made birthday cards in their classes to decorate the school with. In addition to cards that the students made, alumni sent in letters sharing their favorite CES memories to go around the school. The letters included memories from the first day the school was open, old class pictures, and the ways that individuals credit Chester Elementary with impacting who they are and what they are doing today.

Throughout the entire week, a then and now scavenger hunt took place that had students compare differences in 1948 and 2018. Items included the cost of a hamburger, the most popular board game to play, average cost of a new house, and where the winter Olympics took place.

On the second day, various CES alumni visited each classroom to share their stories about how education has changed and how it's remained the same. Students were amazed to hear stories of students playing with marbles and dice in the hallways, games long forgotten these days.

That morning, Pam Birdsall a retired PE teacher for over 25 years at Chester Elementary, led a music and movement assembly for K-2nd graders. Afterward, Marilyn Quadrio, a long

time Chester local and retired teacher, presented the history of Chester Elementary School and education in Plumas County to the 3rd- 6th graders. She talked about the first school in Prattville in 1872 and how the Pioneers came to Seneca for the Gold Rush, which caused communities to form and then a need for schools to educate their children. She showed a slideshow of students from different decades, revealing the transformation of styles over the years and also how some ideas and customs transcend generations.

On Wednesday, retired teachers visited the school and read books to the students. Teachers included John Goolsby, Wendy Luna, Sue Haltom, Becky Compton, Nita Jimenez, Pam Birdsall, and Sally McGowan. Each book that was chosen was meant to relate and inspire the students. The 6th graders were read “ Oh the Places You’ll Go” by Dr. Seuss.

Thursday was Spirit Day and the students were encouraged to wear as much green and white as they could! That day each student also made something in their classes to put in the school’s time capsule. Mrs. Crowther’s 4th-grade class created a School Seal that they thought represented Chester Elementary and the 5th-grade class wrote a list of the most popular things in 2018 and took pictures of what they look like now.

On the last day, kids were treated to cupcakes and cookies, which were passed out by the Volcano mascot in the lunchroom. The day ended with a tree planting ceremony, sealing of the time capsule, and a happy birthday to CES.

The ceremony started with a flag salute and then Mr. Goolsby shared facts about what was happening in 1948 around the time the school was open. He shared what movies came out in that year, who was the president, and random pop culture facts. After everyone sang happy birthday to the school, Mrs. O’Kelley, the second grade teacher and Mrs. Tantardino, the fifth grade teacher, called classes up to share what each time capsule item was, and the Chester Elementary cheerleaders, Addisen, Emma, and Danica presented a cheer.



Mr. Goolsby then dedicated the tree to the many students, families, teachers, and staff members who have been apart of this school since its formation and the many who will

come in the years ahead. After the tree was planted, Mrs. Crowther and students from every grade read the poem "Advice from a Tree". The ceremony was closed with the school song and quotes from the birthday cards that were made.

Aletha O'Kelly a teacher at CES shared that the week "really reminded us why we are here - for these great kids and families, and that what we do really does changes lives." Many students shared how much they loved celebrating the school and will always remember the fun-filled week. Student Landin Minor shared, "I liked that there are so many people that love our school and that there are so many generations that have gone through our school." Student Madeline Blaufuss shared, "I liked how we celebrated in different ways. I like how people wrote letters to our school to let us know what it used to be like, how it has changed, and how it has stayed the same."

The week was a truly impactful, fun, reflective, educationally and historically rich time for students, teachers, parents, and staff members alike. Nicholle hopes to have another celebration at the school's 80-year mark. A huge thank you to everyone who dedicated their time, energy, and talents to make this week a success.