



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

The Road Less Traveled



By: **Michael Lasher**
OSSA Executive Director

Two exciting ideas are under discussion by the Board of the Oregon Small Schools Association, and I'd like to share with you how they could benefit administrators in small and rural districts throughout Oregon.

The first idea is a mentoring and referral program for new small school administrators. Whether the issue is employee negotiations, parent concerns or dealing effectively with a board, we've all faced problems we wanted to discuss with someone who already has been down that path. Sometimes it's a regional dilemma that requires an objective listener for testing an idea – or for talking you off a ledge. Who do you call? How about an OSSA-approved mentor?

OSSA envisions developing a cadre of experienced administrators who would be available for consultation on a variety of challenges. They won't offer legal advice, nor is this a replacement for OSBA services. However, we all know that "how" we do the job is usually more important than "what" that job is. Attorneys can give us legal advice, but they are largely clueless when it comes to the nuance of how to roll out change in a small district. That's where we believe an experienced mentor would prove invaluable.

We'll be sending out a member survey to get your reaction, but whether you like or hate the idea, please feel free to drop me an email or give me a call.

Please see Road on pg 4

The Four-Day School Week

By: **Dr. Donald Kordosky**
OSSA 2015 Administrator of the Year



The enterprise of public education in Oregon and elsewhere is constantly changing. Trends, fads and mandates come and go. The latest pedagogy is introduced, researched, implemented and then forgotten. Much of what happens in public education is based on what politicians and policy makers see as a "quick fix" and in the best interest of society.

The current national evolution from a five-day school week to a four-day school week is not a "quick fix." For many small Oregon districts the four day week is traditional. Other districts in Oregon that are considering the four-day week (I have been contacted by several in the last couple of months) find political turmoil and angst amongst their stakeholders as soon as the topic is discussed. In my district, even years after implementation, some stakeholders continue to view the four-day school week with disgust and blame any district performance shortfalls on the four-day week.

Most Oregon school districts originally begin a review of the four-day school week as a strategy to address financial shortfalls. Not all school districts go to a four-day week because of money. Some rural districts adopt because of the substantial travel to/from school for their students. Other districts make this change because research shows it may be in the best interest of students.

Initially I was completely against the four-day week. Now I am a complete supporter of the four-day week because it has been proven, through research and professional experience, to be better for students, families and staff.

Please see Four-Day Week on pg 2

INSIDE

Untapped Resources.....	Pg 3
Crow High School at Math Competition.....	Pg 4
OSSA Board Members	Pg 4

Positive attributes of the four-day week over a five-day week include, but are not limited to:

1 Teacher attendance during available instructional hours increases when districts move from a five-day school calendar to the four-day week. Teachers are the key to student learning, and having the regular classroom teacher in the room instead of a substitute teacher is better for kids. In Oakridge, OR, the number of available work hours missed by teachers decreased significantly (21.8%) after the move to a four-day school week. This was a substantial increase of regular teacher classroom presence during instructional hours (not replaced by a substitute teacher). This provides for more consistency for students and increased student achievement.

2 Student attendance typically increases. Most districts that implement a four-day week see substantial improvement in student attendance per available instructional hours (they spend more time learning, but less days at school).

3 Parents have found that the elimination of half days in five-day week calendars (typically due to teacher work days, curriculum days, grading days, in-service days, etc) has made finding childcare easier. That is a paradox, but parents have found that it is easier to find childcare on Fridays than on the plethora of half days that typically occur with the five-day week. On the five-day week model, schools often send kids home so that teachers can do necessary but non-teaching tasks. *On a four-day week you bring teachers in on Friday, while not decreasing instructional hours.*

4 Student seat hours can increase, if that is the desire of the district. By eliminating all of the non-teaching activities on Fridays (lunch time, passing periods, transportation time, recess) and increasing hours during Monday through Thursday, you actually increase learning time by students. In the four-day model, if there is a holiday on Monday, you attend school Tuesday through Friday.

5 Student discipline decreases. The commonly assumed reason for the

decrease in student discipline is that students are more actively engaged in more strenuous and rigorous classes than in a five-day week. Keep in mind that student seat time typically increases in the move from a five-day week to a four-day week, so claims that student discipline incidents decrease because they are in school one less day is not a viable argument against the four-day week.



6 Student engagement increases during class time. Teachers commonly reflect that when schedules change from a five-day to a four-day week, students work harder, are engaged more and learn more. Teachers who have experienced both types of calendars consistently assert there is increased intrinsic motivation for teachers to cover material in fewer days with more instructional time, and students adjust to increased expectations by becoming more engaged.

Teachers commonly reflect that when schedules change from a five-day to a four-day week, students work harder, are engaged more and learn more.

7 Teacher vitality and morale increases tremendously. Teaching is an extremely difficult job. It is common for teachers to spend long nights and weekends assessing student work and preparing lessons. Any teacher worth their salt does not work only "to the contract" work hours, but does everything possible in non-working hours to increase learning opportunities. On a five-day week, many teachers work late on Friday nights grading and assessing the week's student work. Saturdays are often spent preparing the next week's lessons,

leaving Sundays to reinvigorate and spend time with their families. Teachers start the school year each September bright eyed and bushy tailed, ready to face the challenges of a new school year. On the five-day model, by February teachers are exhausted. The four-day week provides three days each week for teachers to reenergize, complete needed work AND spend time with their families. This simple fact improves teacher morale, decreases teacher turnover and improves teacher vitality. This leads to happier and more energetic teachers, resulting in improved education for students.

8 All of the non-instructional teacher activities that occur on Fridays (the typically eliminated fifth day) can become student instruction throughout the remaining four days. Each school day is comprised of many activities that have no direct positive correlation to student academic achievement. The time we pay teachers when they are not teaching includes time before school starts (usually about thirty minutes), time after school (usually 45 minutes), and passing periods (typically 6 passing periods of five minutes each for 30 minutes). *All of this "non-instructional time" on Fridays is eliminated and that time can be changed to instructional time on the other remaining four days.*

Although my district did not change to the four-day week for cost savings, there can be a substantial savings that can be applied to other student service needs. The four-day week decreases costs in custodial service, bussing, food services and instructional aide time, while maintaining or increasing seat time.

The efficacy of the four-day week is controversial, to say the least. Substantial change in public education intended to improve student adversity often comes with political adversity. The strong leader understands that and moves ahead with improvements despite anticipated political fallout.

This summer the Oakridge School District will again be reviewing the effectiveness of the four-day school week for the third time.

Untapped Resources

By: *Kimi Romey, OSSA 2015-2016 Teacher of the Year*

For a teacher, the road to the classroom is often fueled by the desire to share content and skill with the next generation, so that young minds can flourish, allowing each student to achieve his/her potential. Commonly cited reasons to become teachers are to impact future generations, to make a difference, to ignite the fire of learning and to give back. In the pursuit of a teaching certificate, we focus on what we can give to students, but do we stop to ask what skills, interests and talents they already bring to us?

One of the most underappreciated resources in schools might actually be the students themselves. We revel in the successes of students at science fairs, athletic events and theatrical performances. We cheer when they churn out great art and achieve high academic marks. We even encourage them to share their school-honed knowledge with each other, but do we take the time to find out what skills or interest areas they already possess? Each one of those creative and interesting humans has something unique to contribute apart from what we give them in school.

Recently, I have had the opportunity to explore that untapped resource, which now results in me, every Wednesday, walking into school with a guitar strapped to my back. An English teacher laden with a musical instrument is bound to draw some attention. As I make my way to my classroom, I invariably get asked if I play, to which I answer an embarrassed, "no." I didn't play until two months ago, when I had a casual conversation with one of my musically gifted students, Cody, to whom I expressed my lifelong desire to learn to play the guitar. Motivated

by my interest to learn a skill in which he is quite talented, Cody then made it his mission to find a guitar for me and started providing weekly lessons during my prep period. Throughout this process, I have not only been able to learn more about this very talented student, but I have also felt the same insecurity and frustration that many students experience. I've also realized how valuable it is for a student to be recognized by his teacher for a skill he's honed through his own interest and effort.

This shift in teacher-student roles was not a natural or entirely comfortable one. We are supposed to be master teachers -- highly qualified and having



all of the answers. The authority usually resides in the front of the classroom, but this is not the case during my guitar lessons when Cody is the highly qualified teacher. The confidence gained through the recognition of an adult, especially one in an authority position, can create as big an impact, or bigger, as any praise for success on a test or school project. By teaching teachers, students can learn that their interests and personal pursuits are valuable to others who truly cherish learning.

The impact of this process has been not only in the learning with Cody, but in other students who have been surprised to see me do the unexpected, especially

something with the risk of failure that comes with new learning. The echoes of bad guitar filter through our small school's hallways, and many students have witnessed one of my very bad jam sessions. They seem curious to watch me struggle to grasp guitar technique, because most of what they see me do in the classroom has been developed through years of study and practice. They have seen my accomplishment elsewhere, but they seem intrigued, even a bit uncomfortable, watching me go through the same process they experience daily. Learning is hard. We are supposed to be master teachers, but students rarely see us struggle for that mastery. It has been humbling to watch them recognize that I am a slow musical

learner. When I do something well they are generous with their praise for my successes, which serves as a weekly reminder that I should acknowledge the steps of their success as regularly as they acknowledge mine.

Small school environments are ripe for such experiences. Conversations that can flesh out the hidden talents of

students happen on a daily basis. From that we need to create opportunities that allow students to gain confidence by sharing what they know. Their pursuits have value from which we can benefit not only in the knowledge, but also in the reminder of what it means to be a learner. It's a win-win situation. I get free guitar lessons, and Cody gets to be the master teacher, sharing his musical proficiency. As a participant in this invaluable experience, I am already on the lookout for my next learning opportunity . . . skateboarding? Fishing? Motocross? Golf? Maybe welding. Small schools are an ideal place for us to discover those talents and to take advantage of them.

Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

Crow High School Students Shine at Math Competition

By: **Brian Kau**, Math Teacher at Crow High School

Students at the high school in the Crow Applegate Lorane School District in Lane County, Oregon, excelled at a recent math competition.

Crow Middle/High School students competed in the 2016 Math Fair at Lane Community College in early April. The team consisted of 12 students from different levels of math -- Pre-Algebra through Calculus (Levels 1-6). Each level was represented by two students. The team members were: Grace Wagner, Dayton Ricks, Aidan Reardon, Kenton Sparks, Eli Matthews, Ethan Clark, Kody Roberts, Madison Johnson, Shawn Recca, Sarah Sutton, Teancum Jentzch and Grayson Clark.

The team competed against seven other

teams from Churchill, Creswell, Junction City, Marist, Oak Hill, Sheldon and South Eugene. Each student had three events in which they competed: Solve A Problem, the Quiz, and the Relay (calculus students only competed in the Quiz). The Quiz determined whether the students qualified for the state competition held in mid May for levels 3-6.

Two students from the Crow High School team had the high scores on the Quiz -- Grace Wagner (Level 1) and Teancum Jentzch (Level 6). They both scored a 12 on a 15-point test. There was only one other student from all the other schools that scored that high.

Congratulations to students and the team for the great work they did.



ROAD... continued from pg 1

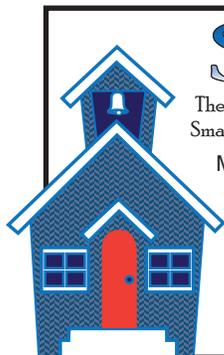
The second development we are discussing is the preliminary stages of scheduling a mini-conference in late July 2017 that would focus on overcoming small-district challenges. Some of you may remember that OSSA used to have an annual Small School Summit. This would be in a similar vein: an opportunity for small district administrators to learn from terrific

speakers and an occasion to network with one another about the rewards and challenges of living and working in a small district.

On a final note, OSSA will be developing its legislative agenda over the coming months. We'd like your input on what our priorities should be. Please look for it and respond. Collectively we are

stronger. Our lobbyist, Justin Martin, is eager to pursue the funding, regulation relief and help that we need.

As summer vacation fast approaches, I want to wish you some well-earned rest and relaxation. Please know that you're making a difference in your districts and in Oregon. And be proud that you're in a small district.



Small Talk

The official publication of the Oregon Small Schools Association. Small Talk is published two times each year in the Fall and Spring.

Michael Lasher, Publisher • Michele Madril, Editor
Printing provided by the InterMountain ESD
Mailing costs sponsored by OSBA

Oregon Small Schools Association
2001 SW Nye • Pendleton, OR 97801
Phone: 541-966-3106 • Fax: 541-276-4252
Email: edie.allstott@imesd.k12.or.us

Oregon Small Schools Association Board Members

DAVID PHELPS, 503-392-4892
Nestucca Valley School District

JANELLE BEERS, 503-864-2215
Dayton School District #8

TONY SCURTO, 541-736-0701
Pleasant Hill School District

TIM SWEENEY, 541-396-2181
Coquille School District

HEIDI SIPE, 541-922-6501
Umatilla School District

DAVID KERR, 541-576-2121
North Lake School District

DR. MARILYN MCBRIDE, 541-573-6811
Harney County School District #3

SEAN GALLAGHER, (At-Large) 541-469-7443
Brookings-Harbor School District

MICHAEL CARTER, (At-Large) 503-556-3777
Rainier School District