



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
Oregon Small Schools Association

Spring 2009

The Road Less Traveled



By: Al Meunier
OSSA Executive Director

A road less traveled certainly describes a journey to the Eastern Oregon village of Helix. Helix is located north of Pendleton, Ore., in the middle of wheat country.

It is served by a two-lane road that does not go on to other communities. You do not pass through Helix unless it is your destination. Many families in the Helix area have had multiple generations graduate from the high school.

The Helix School District has one administrator, and the majority of classes are held in one building that serves 175 students. The current administrator is Darrick Cope, who is a former teacher in the District. Like all administrators in small districts, Mr. Cope does everything, from dealing with the Oregon Department of Education to crawling up on the school's roof to examine structural issues.

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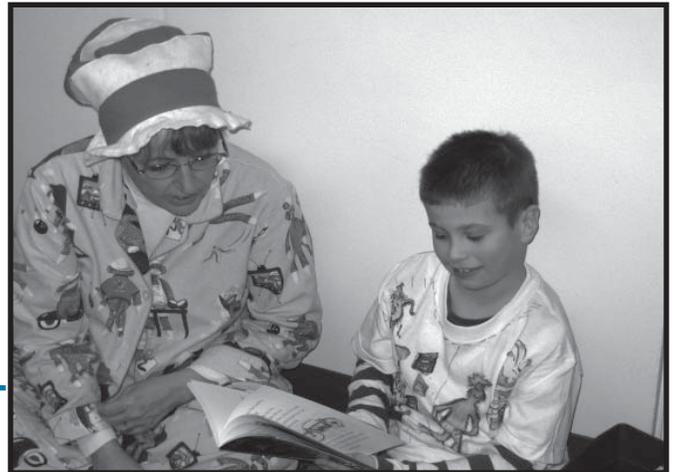


Communities keep small schools strong

By: Brad Yates
OSSA President 2008-09

It has been my pleasure to serve as the president of the Oregon Small Schools Association over this past year. Small schools and the communities they represent across Oregon provide their students with some of the greatest education possible. Students from small schools are not only challenged by many, multi-talented teachers and staff, but their whole experience is nourished and embraced by their local communities.

Small school communities are very actively involved in the educational process of their students. Whether it is providing a donation to a bake sale, time donated to redo a sports field, reading with early readers or packing the gym for the Friday night ball game, small school communities constantly come through to support their local schools.



Kindergarten teacher Judy Hugenberger reads with a Gates Elementary (Santiam School District) student during a read across America celebration.

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OSSA members top U.S. News & World Report best schools list

Fifteen Oregon Small Schools Association member districts were honored as some of the best schools in the state of Oregon, as ranked by U.S. News & World Report earlier this spring. One of those schools – Corbett High School – was ranked among the Top 100 schools in the nation.

Corbett High School was ranked 96th in the nationwide Top 100 schools by U.S. News & World Report. No other Oregon school made the Top 100. Corbett was also the only high school to receive a “gold” ranking by U.S. News & World Report among all 31 of the Oregon schools honored.

Fourteen other OSSA member schools received “bronze” rankings by U.S. News & World Report for being among the best in Oregon. These included: Bandon Senior High School, Burnt River School, Condon High School, Crane Union High School, Dufer School, Elgin High School, Falls City High School, Harper School, Jordan Valley High School, North Lake School, Pacific High School, Pine Eagle High School, Powder Valley School, and Spray School.



Corbett High School's championship Decathlon team is just one example of why the school was ranked in the Top 100 schools in the nation and the best school in Oregon.

U.S. News & World Report analyzes more than 21,000 public high schools in 48 states and ranks those schools that demonstrate some key principles: That a great high school must serve all its students well, not just those who are bound for college, and that it must be able to produce measurable academic outcomes to show that the school is successfully educating its student body across a range of performance indicators. Data from the 2006-07 school year was used.

A three-step process determined the best high schools. The first two steps ensured that the schools serve all their students well, using state proficiency standards as the measuring benchmarks. For those schools that made it past the first two steps, a third step assessed the degree to which schools prepare students for college-level work.

For a complete list of the state's and nation's top high schools, log onto www.usnews.com.

Umatilla After School Programs



“Senior citizens love working in our after school program as it provides a bit of extra income and a chance to work with students,” said Umatilla Superintendent Heidi Sipe. A senior community member works with a student in an embroidery class in the photo at left. Umatilla offers a variety of classes each term. This term cooking, Spanish, Lego engineering, life sports and clogging are offered.

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In these times of “worldwide” economic crisis, with local mills and businesses letting employees go, the schools provide communities with a place to gather and, somehow, forget about the problems of the outside world. As the Superintendent of Santiam Canyon School District, we have experienced this first hand with our girl’s basketball team.

For the past few years our team has experienced success with 2nd and 3rd place state finishes. So this year with an experienced group of seniors, the local “coffee shop” poll had high hopes for the top prize. As the season progressed, the team produced, as predicted, and the locals packed the gym night after night. The local paper featured the team’s weekly conquests on the front page, pushing the bad news of the times further back in the edition. Much like the paper, the community seemed to push back the bad news, if only for a moment, and enjoy the success of the team.

The height of the excitement came when our girls made the successful trip to Pendleton and returned with the 1st place trophy. Congratulations to all teams and communities who had similar successes over this past season, and a special congratulations to those communities who continue to support their local teams year after year, win, lose or draw. Small schools and communities, in my book, are still the best game in town and will always persevere through good times and bad, together.

Sneak a peak inside Seneca schools



Left: Wyatt Weaver, 5th grade, and John Cook, 6th grade, of Seneca School, enjoy learning about the trombone and trumpet in the instrument exploration unit in music class.



Above: Seneca School's 7th & 8th grade class proudly displays its Recycling Center sign. The recycling project is a partnership between Seneca School and the community. Each class at Seneca School adopts a community service project for the year. Because of the economic difficulties of shipping recycled items, the regional centers have closed. The 7th and 8th graders are refocusing their efforts on educating students and community about how to reduce and reuse.



Left: Fourth grader Jonah Davis shows third graders Ely Carniglia and Collin Harvey how she is revising her essay using an online writing program. Seneca School students are excited about using technology to hone their writing skills and focus on the writing domains.

An apple a day helps Knappa students learn today

By Deeda Schroeder

The Daily Astorian

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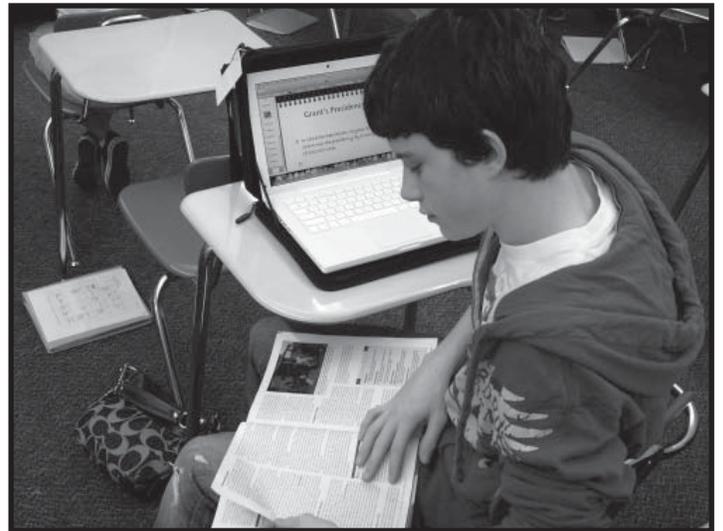
KNAPPA - Laurel Smalley looked at the 23 students in her freshman science class from the back of her sun-lit classroom. With her hands folded in front of her, she noticed something was different about how these students were learning about acids and bases, the day's subject. Smalley's class of 14 and 15-year-olds was nearly silent - except for the intermittent clicking of keys on the keyboards of their own brand new laptops.

"They're so quiet. They're never this quiet," Smalley whispered. "They're really engaged in what they're doing."

Increased engagement

It is that idea of increased engagement and focus on learning that led the Knappa School District to roll out its "one-to-one" initiative Tuesday, giving all 37 freshmen at Knappa High School their own laptops. For the next three years, every freshman will get one, until the high school has achieved a one-to-one ratio of students to the portable computers. The school will be one of few in the state with such a ratio, and possibly the only high school of its size to do so, said Rick Pass, district superintendent.

The district has historically provided ample access to technology in the high school, with desktops in each classroom and several computer labs. But now the laptops will become an integral part of every lesson. The goal is to help students boost their academic achievement.



"It's a tool to help you and me be smarter," Pass said to students waiting to receive their new white \$1,100 Apple MacBooks. "You are going to set an example for all the kids who are to come." If funding can hold out after the first four years, Pass said the plan is to give middle school students laptops next.

Planning pays off

After four years of planning and support from the Knappa School Board, parents, teachers and students, Pass was able to secure funding for the leased laptops without dipping into the district's operating funds. The \$42,021 cost for the initiative this year was paid with money from three federal grants, which Pass said are renewable. Putting the fund together in a time when many state agencies are whittling down budgets hasn't been easy, Pass said.

"We're hurting like everyone else, but felt like this was a priority," Pass said. He will be training some of the staff himself, an undertaking that should save the district thousands of dollars, he said. Teachers already have their own laptops, and they've been preparing for the switch all year.

Teacher training

Carla Wade, technology education specialist for the Oregon Department of Education, said that training teachers is essential to the success of one-to-one initiatives. "Key to each of these programs is extensive professional development to change how teachers teach and students learn. Knappa has done their research," Wade said, citing Pass' years of education and research on the topic.

Parent involvement

Parents have been asked to pitch in the \$206 cost of insurance for the leased laptops for all four years, so that students can

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bring their computers home with them in the next couple of months. Software has been downloaded onto each laptop, enabling it to be located if stolen.

Parent Mike Posey, a technician at the Big Creek Hatchery, came to the school to watch his son, Aaron, receive his new laptop. Posey was impressed by the school's dedication to technology, and said his 14-year-old is excelling in the environment. "It's really a great thing they're doing. It's really all about the children," Posey said. Aaron Posey couldn't agree more with his dad.

Class gets started

Seated in a side row in Smalley's science class, Aaron Posey looked at the white board for guidance and then navigated his own laptop to the district's Web site where Smalley had located the class materials for the day. She'd assembled a stash of tests and games for the class to try online as a way for them to show they've synthesized the material.

"It's great to be able to do more with less writing, and we can get on the Internet without going to the computer lab," Aaron Posey said.

He'd like to go on to college at Michigan Tech and earn his Ph.D. in geology, and having a laptop that he doesn't have to share with his older brother would help prepare him for that.

Tim Van De Grift, the school's technology director, installed wireless Internet throughout the building as part of the rollout. Van De Grift said he's thrilled to see the project finally go live.

Project research

"This is an exciting time for Knappa," Van De Grift said. He was a member of the district's technology committee that put together a plan to sharpen the focus on technology use in the schools. The committee worked with the school board to integrate those goals into their planning.

Kathi Shear, a school board member, said the board took its time to approve the project, wanting to consider all the research about such a transition. "Before jumping in, we wanted to be sure we had the money to do it," Shear said. "The funding is pretty solid for the next four years, but after that, with the economy, who knows?"

Computer mentor

In Aaron Thornton's health class, the freshmen didn't appear to be too concerned about the impending doom of the economy. Instead, Raven Dussick, 15, was looking forward to getting higher marks on upcoming exams. "I think the laptop will help us get better scores on tests in science and geography," Dussick said while putting together a Power Point presentation. Her family doesn't have a television or cell phones, and she said bringing her laptop home will make a big difference.

And back in Smalley's classroom, the teacher marveled at how her role had changed in a day. "We have to be willing to let them explore on their own. Instead of being in charge at the head of the class, our job is to mentor and guide," Smalley said.



CLASS ACT: Arlington High School SHOP 2008
Thank you for your support www.honkernet.net/ahs

A real 'Class Act'

The 2008 "CLASS ACT" build team (without one team member) built a 4.3L v-6 in the Arlington High School HonkerShop with help from industry and enthusiasts from all over the United States. See the group's build site at http://www.honkernet.net/AHS/departamental/Industrial_arts/2008_sandcar.htm. "CLASS ACT" was sold to fund the 2009 off-road project.

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For a current list of district
vacancies log on to
www.oregonssa.org/vacancies

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the Umatilla-Morrow ESD, which provides a multitude of services to Helix, including business services. The Helix School District has a five-member board that provides policy input and communication with the community, which is important in all school communities, but integral in a small one.

The high school enrolls 55 students in grades 9-12. Over 50 percent of high school students participate in athletics each season. Like all small schools, the school in Helix is the reason the community exists. All events that occur at the school are attended by the entire community. All fundraisers are enthusiastically supported. Even when times are tough, Helix residents dig deep to continually support its students.

A majority of Helix graduates attend four-year colleges and universities. This year Helix sent 18 participants to the regional Future Business Leaders of America contest. Helix participates in the National History Day. Under the leadership of teacher Lorin Kubishta, Helix has participated in nine of the last 10 years of National History Day. Students are able to compete in one of several categories, but because Mr. Kubishta wants to involve his students in technology, he selects the documentary category. Each year, between four and six of his students win at the state level and move on to national competition in Washington, D.C.

Helix tends to excel in all of its schools, not just the high school. For two of the last three years, Helix has been rated as exceptional by the state of Oregon.

Many of our small schools are in isolated areas and it really does take the whole village to raise their children, but communities like Helix are more than up to the task. Our small schools are special places to live and learn.



True Oregonians

North Douglas School District students celebrate Oregon's Sesquicentennial (150th birthday) by forming the state using themselves. These kids have redefined what it means to be an Oregonian!