



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the

Oregon Small Schools Association

Spring 2011

OSSA welcomes new executive director



By: **Michael Lasher**
OSSA Executive Director

Greetings! My name is Michael Lasher and I'll be taking over the duties of OSSA Executive Director from Al Meunier, who is retiring (again). Al has been a wonderful mentor to me and I'm honored to follow in his footsteps. So that he won't get bored next fall, we constructed a plan to visit all regions of the state to strengthen the connection OSSA has with all who toil to make Oregon's small schools successful.

It is important that we celebrate excellence in Oregon's small schools, and a marvelous way to do that is with an article in *Small Talk*.

Our first trip together included some of the districts in the northwestern part of our state where we met with Gaston School District Superintendent David Beasley and High School Principal Mike Durbin. Both gentlemen were effusive about the impact of the Positive Behavior Instructional Supports (PBIS) system and the effects on reducing discipline issues at the secondary level. We've included an article in this issue of *Small Talk* that I hope gives you a flavor of what they've learned and how it might be able to help your district administrators find the time to be the instructional leaders they want to be.

Also in this issue, you'll find stories on some of

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Social contract corrects student behaviors



By: **Joyce Garland**, Sheridan School District
2010-2011 OSSA Teacher of the Year

The best changes in my classroom seem to be those to which I am initially most resistant. Last August during in-service, I adamantly opposed our district-mandated three-day training which we had been told was to help us make better connections with our students – a problem, I assured myself – I had never had.

The first day of Capturing Kids' Hearts™ (CKH™) training, I was skeptical and rude. Our trainer, Jeff Thorpe, a former high school teacher and coach, was obviously used to dealing with such abhorrent behavior and simply ignored me. But somewhere in the middle of day two I began to pay attention. Obviously, I cannot recap the entire training, but I can tell you what CKH™ looks like in my classroom:

- Prior to the start of class, every student is greeted with a handshake and smile at the door.
- Two students take a contract rating sheet off of the wall and prepare to rate our success in honoring our social contract (which was created by the students and myself and hung on the wall in the front of the room – we have one for each



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- class).
- When class starts, I signal “time out” and the room becomes silent.
- I Start “Good Things” (we spend a few minutes discussing the positive things that are happening in my students’ lives).
- Students hold each other accountable to use their best listening skills (agreed to in our social contract) with non-verbal cues (pre-determined and previously taught).
- The positive energy from good things puts the brain in its best state for learning and we move on to the day’s lesson.
- Any undesirable behavior is corrected quickly by referring to our social contract (which rarely happens any more because the students correct each other with nonverbal cues before I have to intervene).
- At the end of the class period our contract raters share their assessments of our behavior.
- I then “launch” the students with a funny story, joke, or heartwarming tale.
- The launch leaves the brain in a positive mindset, preparing students for their next class.
- I repeat the process for each class.



I know this utopian classroom sounds surreal, and if I didn’t see it for myself every day I wouldn’t believe it either. Also, the classroom didn’t get to this level of functioning without a lot of effort and training. However, as I near the end of my ninth year of teaching, I can say without reservation that this is the first year when I have built a relational capacity with each student and I (who traditionally ruled my classroom with an iron fist) have never had such an easy time managing my students and their behaviors. Ninety percent of behavior correction comes from the students themselves. This leaves me with more time to teach, and frankly, a much more receptive audience. Of all the programs I have seen come and go, I can say unequivocally that finally someone got something right.

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the achievements our OSSA member schools have made this year, as well as a couple of programs that engage kids in more outside-the-box ways (such as through an automotive class and through painting birds).

As this legislative session winds down, our OSSA Board of Directors will begin to develop a strategy for the next year’s legislative session. As you know, the Governor continues to push for structural changes in the way education and early childhood programs are delivered in Oregon. While we can all get behind “improvement,” the devil is in the details. OSSA is committed to maintaining funding and autonomy for Oregon’s small school districts and it is important for all of us to remain vigilant.

The OSSA Board also is interested in reviving the Small School Summit as a professional development opportunity for small district and rural educators. Stay tuned for more news on our progress.

Over the next year, I look forward to meeting more and more of you who are members of OSSA and expanding the ranks of our membership. If you have ideas, suggestions, or concerns about any issue effecting your school or district, please feel free to contact me. I would love to hear from you.

For the benefit of Oregon’s Small Schools,

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Perrydale science teacher wins \$5,000 grant

The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation awarded Perrydale High School science teacher Cara Benfield a Teaching Award grant of \$5,000. Benfield was nominated by Perrydale High School Principal Sheila McCartney. In addition to the \$5,000 grant Mrs. McCartney was awarded a \$1,000 check to be used to support student achievement at Perrydale.



Due to the unique talents that Benfield brings to Perrydale, the grant money will be used to broaden her teaching practice to enhance the learning of all her students. One of the most exciting things she will get to do is attend the National Science Convention.

Sheridan Japanese High School Students win Battle of the Books

The Sheridan Japanese High School team of three freshmen and a junior won the Battle of the Books competition on Saturday April 23 in McMinnville, Oregon.

Lena Morrow (junior), Camille Gluskoter, Tabitha Mueller and Patrick Mueller (freshmen) received a first-place win over Amity, and qualified for the upcoming State Finals competition.

The 6th-8th grade team of Hanna Brandt, Bridgett Zahniser, Kaitlin Gilbert and Carli Topping finished third place over the Leslie School.

The 4th and 5th grade team was eliminated in the first round. The team members, Wyatt Topping, Emmy Martin, Lucca Hamina and Hanalei Steinhart all vow to return next year for a win.



Why become a member of OSSA? The benefits are well worth it!

Advocacy:

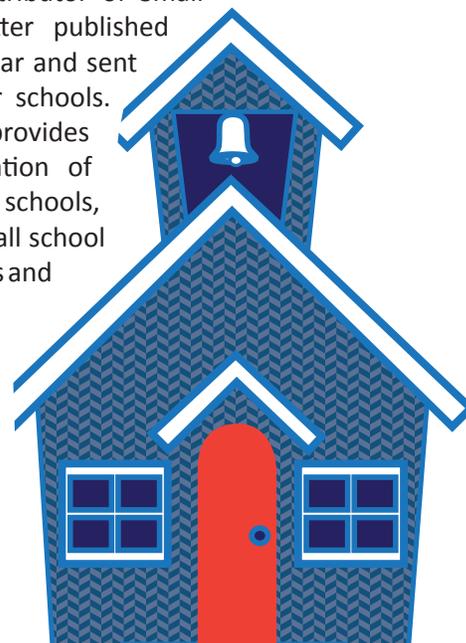
- OSSA is an active advocate for small schools at the Oregon Legislative Assembly, and has its own lobbyist in Jim Green.
- OSSA provides an opportunity for member districts to meet and lobby their legislators at the February OSBA and Eastern Oregon Leadership Institute day.

Convention/Conference Sessions

- OSSA sponsors Educator Institutes each year.
- The OSSA honors an Oregon Small Schools Association Teacher of the Year from one of its member schools annually. This educator is honored each November at the OSSA Breakfast at the Oregon School Boards Association Annual Convention in Portland.
- OSSA provides breakout sessions at the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators' Seaside Conference annually, as well as at the winter Superintendent's Convention.

Networking

- OSSA is the distributor of Small Talk, a newsletter published three times a year and sent free to member schools. Small Talk provides general information of interest to small schools, and features small school programs, events and achievements.
- Meet other small school administrators from around Oregon to share best practices, lessons learned and ideas.



Join today! www.oregonssa.org

Umatilla High School Automotive Program teaches life lessons

By: Leslie Lovell
InterMountain ESD

Crystal Gomez is taking the automotive class at the high school because she wants to be able to fix her own car if needed. Other students in the class say they take it because they would like to make a career of driving and working on cars. While the end goals may be different, there is one thing all the students in the class have in common – they are learning important life lessons.

Volunteer leader Dick Skoubo makes it clear to the students that this is a serious class, with serious consequences if they don't listen and do as he tells them. Beginning with nine students, the class is now at seven because Skoubo didn't feel that two students were taking the class seriously enough.

"Working on cars is hard, serious work, and you have to think about safety with everything you do," Skoubo said. The remaining students have no doubt that Skoubo means business now when he tells them to do something, and why.

District donors gave the program \$500 as seed money to start spring term. Skoubo, who ran the fleet service for Qwest for many years, volunteers to lead the students two hours a day, but puts in many more hours on his own to help move the work along on their project, as well as lets the students use his personal tools. The car they are working on was donated by the Umatilla Police Department.



So far, the class has redone the rotors, taken the transmission out, replaced seals and spark plugs, and changed the filters. Skoubo figures there is about another \$2,000 needed to be able to finish the car, mostly for the interior work, so that it can be auctioned off to raise money for a class next year. The class is currently looking for opportunities to raise the money.

Skoubo said that one of the things early on that brought the class together and gave them a new perspective on their project was the students attending a hot rod show in Portland on a field trip. He said it was a great team-building trip, and opened the students' eyes to what could be done with their own project.

Gomez says her favorite part of the class is working with the team of students participating, while others say that is the hardest part. Some are surprised by how much hard physical labor is involved. But all agree that this is one of the best electives at the high school, and hope to see the class continued.

"Opportunities like Automotive Technology strengthen student learning by combining a highly engaging atmosphere with real word application," said UHS Principal Scott Depew. "With higher academic demands and complex school structures, many students in schools like ours are searching for classes like this because they meet their motivational needs and provide relevance to their work. We are very fortunate to have found some outstanding volunteers willing to invest in the lives of our students."

Contribute to *Small Talk!*

Have something you'd like to see in *Small Talk*? Send your story ideas, articles and photos to OSSA Executive Secretary Edie Allstott.

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Student Paintings Featured at Cornell Lab of Ornithology Gallery

By: Phil Kahler

Tualatin Valley Academy

Artwork produced by Tualatin Valley Academy students were featured at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO) gallery in Ithaca, NY. The art show opened in September and continued through December 2009. Student paintings on exhibit were sold to raise funds for TVA's art and science programs.



Above: Nathan Jump, a 7th grade student, uses his fingers to work paint into the texture of his Roadrunner.

This unusual combination of art and science added a deeper dimension to the show by encouraging viewers not only to enjoy the rich visual experience, but to become informed about species conservation. You may view photos of all nineteen student bird paintings and learn more about the BirdSleuth science program at http://www.tvja.org/science/art_class_bird_paintings_2009.htm.

Mrs. Kahler's art students are currently creating textured paintings that feature local bird species. This new collection of paintings will be completed by June 2011.

The quality of student artwork submitted by our students for publication in the previous year's *Classroom Birdscope* caught the eye of Jennifer Fee, CLO's BirdSleuth Project Leader, who commissioned our students to create paintings of birds currently being studied by CLO scientists. Nineteen students in grades 7-10, directed by Toni Kahler, TVA art instructor, took on the task with great enthusiasm.

"I was so excited when I found out I would be drawing, texturing and painting the Yellow-headed Parrot," said Melinda Swanson, an 8th grader. "I couldn't wait to make the bird my own on the canvas."

Student participation in this project influenced their perceptions and attitudes toward birds and science.

"The experience was very cool," said Chelsea Fritzler, an 8th grader. "I had never heard of the Superb Starling until I started working on this project. I think it is a beautiful bird, and very unique. Now I care about birds, and actually notice them!"

Kiana Villegas, a 7th grader, said, "When I found out that scientists were studying these birds, I wondered what they did all the way over in New York. I would love to go and study birds with them."



Right: Kim Cheung, a 9th grade student, shows her Blackburnian Warbler in progress.

Imbler wins 7th straight FBLA title

Hamden Forkner, a prominent Columbia University education professor, created the highly successful Future Business Leaders of America program in the late 1930s. The late professor also created Forkner Shorthand, known to many as “speed writing.”

Speed writing, which peaked in popularity in the 1960s, is not taught at Imbler High School today but Forkner’s legacy is alive at IHS in a big way.

Look no further than the IHS trophy case for proof. Imbler High School is dominating FBLA at the 1A level in Oregon in a manner that would have impressed Forkner. Imbler added to its eye-popping legacy at the recent state FBLA convention in Portland, winning its seventh straight 1A title.

Imbler again won in decisive fashion, topping runner-up North Lake High School of Silver Lake by a comfortable 54 points. Still, the story of this year’s Imbler state title has a dramatic twist.

Imbler’s FBLA chapter was initially listed as second in the final 1A standings, 107 points behind North Lake. Some people sensed something was amiss, however, and urged officials to recalculate the scores. The officials did and three days later named Imbler the 2011 Class 1A champion.

“It was disappointing at the time (immediately after the state convention) but now we are pretty excited,” said FBLA advisor Jennifer Teeter, also a business teacher at IHS.

Teeter attributes the scoring error to a new software program used to tabulate team points.



Imbler has won state each year since it moved to the 1A level, which is for schools with 105 or less students. Prior to switching to 1A, Imbler was a 2A school. Imbler placed second to Elgin its last four years at 2A prior to moving to 1A. This means Imbler, under the leadership of Teeter, has placed in the top two at state 11 years in a row.

“It is pretty special,” said Imbler Superintendent Doug Hislop of the Imbler FBLA program. Hislop said one of the best things about FBLA is that the skills students develop while participating in it carry over to all subjects in the classroom.

“It is cross curricular,” the Imbler superintendent said.

At state Imbler’s chapter members placed in the top 10 in 22 individual and team event categories. Imbler’s top individual finisher was Jaden Bales who placed first in the Help Desk competition. Its top student team was the duo of Athena Pierce and Katie Arnzen, who took second in Digital Video Production.

Imbler’s chapter also received community service points for the Little Steps for Success preschool program and the American Enterprise Project it runs.

Little Steps is run one evening a month at Imbler Elementary. The American Enterprise Project introduces Imbler grade school students to the free enterprise system.

Teeter said her students are helped and inspired by the other successful FBLA programs in Union County at Elgin, La Grande and Union high schools. Students and advisers at the schools are consulted periodically.

“It is great to have neighboring schools you can rely on for assistance,” Teeter said.

This article originally appeared in the May 2, 2011, edition of the La Grande Observer and was written by reporter Dick Mason.

PBIS leads to collaboration, positive results

By: Casey White
Editor, Small Talk

The education world is full of alphabet soup – ODE, OAKS, COSA, RIT, PLC, TOSA – the list of acronyms goes on. Yet one of the acronyms gaining some real traction across the nation due to its effectiveness and positive results is PBIS, or Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports.

According to PBISnetwork.org, PBIS is a framework for assisting school staff in the adoption and organization of evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for students. What this really means is that PBIS is about school staff coming together to decide what expectations they have and how they will teach them to students. Once that is implemented, schools are able to consider strategies and interventions for students who need more instruction to behave appropriately. While most educators know that effective classroom management and preventative school discipline are essential for supporting teaching and learning, PBIS goes further. PBIS recognizes that when behavior is better, academic success is more likely as well.

The size of your school district doesn't impact the effectiveness of PBIS, says Liz Durant, School Improvement Services Specialist for the InterMountain Education Service District.

"Regardless of the number of students and staff members in a school, the make-up of the population, or the grade levels (elementary, middle, high), any school or educational setting can benefit from staff members working together to create clear and consistent behavioral expectations for students, and then acknowledge those behaviors when they're observed," said Durant. "Evidence also shows that effective implementation of PBIS in schools – regardless of size – can lead to higher rates of job satisfaction among staff members."

In turn, Durant said, this can lead to a fewer number of missed work days and increased work production. Not only that, but student behavior also has been shown to improve immensely. Evidence has shown that the effective implementation of PBIS can reduce the number of office referrals, which leads to more student learning time in the classroom and less time spent in the office.

The Gaston School District is one of a handful of small school districts in Oregon that has effectively implemented PBIS with great success. High School Principal Mike Durbin says PBIS creates a strong environment for learning, and helps make Data Teams more effective.

"(PBIS) creates such a positive climate in our school," Durbin said. The Gaston School District adopted PBIS six years ago, with the high school bringing it on three years ago. In the first year, PBIS helped to lower teacher and administrative referrals by 50 percent; in the second year they dropped another 50 percent.

"It's allowed me to be the instructional leader I always wanted to be," Durbin said of PBIS. "It allows me to be in the classroom for evaluations, implementing instructional strategies, etcetera. It puts discipline issues back with the teacher in the classroom where it is most effective."



Durbin says the key to successful implementation of PBIS in a school is teacher buy-in. Durant agrees.

"All kids – whether they're in a class of four or 40 – need to know when they're doing the 'right' thing, and adults need to reinforce those behaviors," she said. "We'll see more and more of the behaviors that we pay attention to."

PBIS, Durant added, provides the framework for all adults in a school setting to get on the same page about behavior expectations and consequences for all students.

"It's a systematic way of doing business in which staff agrees on school-wide, consistent expectations for behavior," Durant said. "Students quickly learn that it can be OK to climb up the slide during recess when one

teacher is on duty, but you can get a pink slip if you do it when another staff member is on duty. Or, you can get away with swearing in one teacher's class, but not in another's. PBIS helps eliminate those inconsistencies."

To learn more about PBIS, you can contact either Durant or Durbin. Principal Durbin will be presenting about PBIS and Data Teams at the COSA Summer Assessment Conference in Eugene on Aug. 3-5.

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OSSA Executive Director Michael Lasher contributed to this story.

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



OSSA seeks Teacher of the Year nominations

OSSA is looking for the next Teacher of the Year! Do you have an outstanding teacher in your district who goes above and beyond to help students succeed? Do you know of a teacher who uses innovative strategies for more effective learning in the classroom? Then OSSA wants to hear from you!

OSSA 2012 Teacher of the Year nomination forms are available now on the OSSA Web site, www.oregonssa.org. Nominations must be submitted by September 15, 2011. The 2012 Teacher of the Year will be announced during the Oregon Small Schools Breakfast at the Oregon School Boards Association's annual conference in Portland this November. The winning Teacher of the Year also has the honors of writing a column for three issues of Small Talk.

Past OSSA Teachers of the Year include Joyce Garland (2011), David Nycz (2010), Mitch Coleman (2009), and Lori Luna (2008).