



# Small Talk

the official newsletter of the  
**OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION**

## Message from Board President



By: **Michael Carter**  
 OSSA Board President

### The Pursuit of Happiness:

Everyone wants to be happy. Our founding fathers recognized this in the Declaration of Independence

when they wrote: "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The pursuit of happiness is something all humans seek and strive to obtain.

As school leaders we want our students, staff, and community to be happy and to have a positive sense of well-being. So what brings us happiness? There are certain practices/habits in the research that emerge in individuals who self-identify as being happy:

- They practice optimism
- They are physically active
- They savor life's pleasures
- They try to live in the present moment
- They devote more time to family and friends
- They practice gratitude

So now we know some habits or practices that lead individuals to happiness but are there any short cuts to happiness? Can we buy happiness? What is that price? We have heard since we were children "money can't buy you happiness."

... Money can't buy happiness...If this is the case why are we so obsessed with it?

Danny DeVito in the movie the Heist said, "Everyone needs money. That's why it's called money."

In one study researchers asked individuals making \$25,000 how much money would it take to make them happy. How much money? What do you

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## Developing a Positive School Culture

By: **Tony Smith**, OSSA 2019 Administrator of the Year



Creating a positive culture within your building, is the most important job of a school leader. I have been at St. Paul Middle/High School for 14 years as a teacher, athletic director, and principal and during that time I have seen our culture ebb and flow based on who the leader of our school is. During the past five years we have been fortunate to establish an amazing culture that has resulted in numerous awards and recognition like being the highest ranked 1A/2A school in the state by US News and World Report and achieving a 100% graduation rate the past two years. It wouldn't have been possible without a focus by our leadership team on the development of a positive culture.

So how did we do it? First of all, we have an amazing staff, superintendent, and very supportive school board and community. We have many of the ingredients that make success possible. The things we did within our school could easily be replicated in other places. It starts and ends with a tireless work ethic and a pro-active attention to detail. Dealing with several small issues on a daily basis is much easier than dealing with large problems occasionally. Small issues don't normally make it into the newspaper nor do they come in front of the school board. Large problems may become an issue if we aren't pro-active and work to resolve them.

Be Present - The administrator must be present. I don't mean just show up every day, but be present in the school - in the halls during passing periods, roaming at lunch, and at all evening activities. During these activities, the administrator needs to be observant in order to reference actions with kids and staff the next day. A positive comment to a student or staff member about their performance in and out of school goes a long way in establishing the kind of relationships that are necessary to build culture. Simple things like knowing every student's name, who their other family members are, and what their parents' names are - little things that are vital to culture. People have to know you care about them before they will care about what you know.

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## OSSA pre-conference at the Oregon Law Conference

Small School related sessions to be held on December 4, 2019 from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. during the Oregon Law Conference at The Graduate Hotel (formerly Eugene Hilton) in Eugene, OR. Attorneys will share information on conducting investigations, the bargaining process, accounting for Student Success Act funds, working with school board and much more.

*Please join your OSSA Board for "heavy snacks and refreshments" and plan to stay for the board meeting from 6-8:00 pm after the Pre-Conference on December 4th.*

think the average answer was? (\$50,000)

When you asked the same question to people making \$100,000 a year, you expect them to say I am double happy because I make twice the happiness threshold! Instead, what they actually said, on average, is if they made \$250,000 a year then they'd be truly happy.

You might think that means there is no set monetary amount that brings happiness, but that's not entirely true, either. The researchers discovered there is a set amount, and it's \$75,000. At least that is the set amount Nobel Prize winning economists discovered when they studied 1,000 American households. They reported wellbeing with income of \$75,000, at which point it levels off. Beyond that, there is no observable increase in happiness with higher income.

As educational leaders we must remember that happiness is a state of mind, a choice we make, a practice or habit.

We need to be thankful for what we have and remember compared to most of the world we are truly blessed. On my desk I have the following reminders that help me remember what I have:

- If you have food in the fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of the world.

- If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare change you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.
- If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive the week.
- If you can read this article (message) you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read.

So as we all work to pursue happiness remember the takeaway is simply this: We are inclined to assume circumstances, play the biggest role in our happiness, when research suggests they play the smallest role. What's more, we grossly underestimate the extent to which changing our behaviors, rather than our circumstances, can significantly increase our well-being. What we believe would make a huge difference in our life actually, according to scientific research, makes only a small difference. So as we work to develop our school district's budget and plan for the future don't worry, be grateful for what we have, and look inside yourself for the true source of personal happiness and well-being.

Have a great rest of the school year and remember to savor the ride along the way.

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Facilities - At some point in my career I read about the broken window theory. Cities found that vandalism decreased greatly when they fixed a single broken window in vacant buildings before more windows were broken. Picking up trash in the hallway, cleaning graffiti in toilet stalls, and making sure entries are clean and the lawn is mowed are very similar to fixing that single broken window. School administrators need to be willing to do these jobs or figure out how to get them done.

Staff Relations – When a teacher comes to you with a concern it needs to be dealt with immediately. Follow up is critical so that the staff member is aware of actions taken. The term immediately is paramount here. This simple act speaks volumes to staff regarding how much you care about them and the job they do. We keep a yellow pad on our desk that has a to do list for every day. As things come up we use sticky pads to record immediate concerns. At the

end of the day we take all the sticky pad notes that haven't been completed and create a to do list for the next day.

Everyone Participates – We told every student in our school that they needed to be out for sports and/or involved in clubs and then we worked like crazy to remove all barriers to participation. We solicited donations for participation, found carpools, spoke with parents, anything that was necessary to get a student started in extra-curricular participation. Students won't feel like they're part of the culture, part of the team, if they're not involved.

Hopefully some of these thoughts are helpful. Being a small school administrator is incredibly rewarding and has definitely been a highlight for me in a long career in education. Please don't hesitate to email if you ever have any questions. Tony Smith tsmith@stpaul.k12.or.us – Go Bucks!

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# Small Talk

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## Relationships Are Key

By: *Amber Doremus, OSSA 2019 Teacher of the Year*

To write my fall article for the Small Schools Newsletter, I traveled to a favorite thinking spot in the mountains. Clear fresh air and a view do the body good, so why not the mind? With my mini bull terrier napping at my side while I sat on a flat rock, I scribbled the following topics: Strike a Balance, ACES, and No Regrets. As it turns out, these have a commonality - Relationships. In teaching, relationships are at the root of our professional life.

### Strike a Balance

We have all over committed ourselves at times. Why? An ever growing number of school committees; summer jobs to augment our bank balance while planning for the school year ahead; professional development throughout the year; hours and hours of grading and prepping at school while the family is at home; coaching or sponsoring extra curricular activities; trying to lead a healthy lifestyle; etc. The same is true for our students. Their after school time is crammed to the minute with activities such as sports, studies, music, FFA, chores, clubs, supper, and a shower. Therefore, share your struggles of finding life's balance with students. Learning how you struggle and attempt to balance life lets students know that balance is a struggle for everyone. Not only can we teach life lessons about balance, we can also build relationships at the same time by listening to students talk about their busy lives and modeling for them how to balance their commitments.

### ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

I have noticed in my fifteen year teaching career that more and more students come to school having experienced trauma. While it seems there is little we can do as educators it turns out that we might have more power than previously thought. Teachers are likely the most stable adult in their students' lives and likely the adults they interact with the most. Children will choose to emulate SOMEONE. Typically students choose a person that they feel attached to and, dare I say, loved. For this reason, my goal is to build a relationship with as many students as possible. Just seeking common ground with a child may

be all that student needs to feel connected. Amazingly, research shows that helping a child feel connected can happen through small acts; huge gestures are not necessarily needed. At a recent start-of-the-year staff meeting a teacher conversation boiled down to "this students needs to know you care, so build a connection on day 1". Of course all students benefit from knowing we care. So let's focus on building relationships with ALL of our students everyday. And while we're at it, let's build connections with our colleagues as well. Students need to see the adults in their lives working together, smiling, laughing, and enjoying the day. Outside of a loving home, there is no better place for that to occur than at school, especially because fewer and fewer of our students experience the positive model of a loving home with supportive adult relationships.

### No Regrets

This term typically shows up as someone nears the end of their life or as a motivational speech. I have begun to contemplate this topic as a morning meditation. I say to myself, "today I will curb my frustrations; I will be understanding; I will hold myself and students to high standards; I will smile and treat everyone kindly even when I am upset." I realized that focusing on having no regrets about my daily interactions with students and colleagues means that I am automatically building relationships. When I come to the end of a school year, I want to be sure that I have no regrets about the effort I put in to knowing every student.

Over the course of the last school year I read the book Innovator's Mindset by George Couros. In his book, Couros states that three things affect education: relationships, relationships, relationships. Building relationships is rarely easy, as most right choices never are, but the reward is vast. As I conclude my year as the Oregon Small Schools Teacher of the Year, my message to all teachers is this: find a way to connect. Talk to students about a hobby, an interest, pigs, fishing, antler scoring, sewing, running, soap making, working out, comics, dancing, berry picking, YouTubers, or simply caring. Connecting with students is more valuable than any lesson you will ever teach.



## Legislative Update

By: *Justin Martin, OSSA Lobbyist*

During the 2019 Legislative Session House Bill 3115 was introduced. The bill proposed removal of the sunset to secure permanent funding for Oregon Small Schools Association dorm schools, which include Burnt River, Paisley, Mitchell, Spray and Ukiah. HB 3115 was heard before the House Committee on Education and passed with a unanimous do-pass recommendation to the House Committee on Revenue. Burnt River School District Superintendent Lou Lyon provided testimony about the importance of Oregon's dorm schools and Representative Lynn Findley (R – Vale, HD 60) also testified in support. In addition we worked to insert an extension of the small high school grant, which sunsets in 2020, into the omnibus education package.

Unfortunately, end of session politics and the Senate Republican walkout cost us valuable last minute opportunities in which we usually get our sunsets extended. The House of Representatives was fully on board with both proposals, but because of the late session political turmoil in the Senate we were not able to get the proposals across the finish line.

The good news is that we have already begun to work on getting both bills passed during the 2020 short session. We are working with Representative Jeff Barker (D – Aloha, HD 28) who will sponsor legislation and have been communicating with legislative leadership including Speaker Tina Kotek (D – Portland, HD 44),

*Please see Update on pg 4*

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## 2019 OSSA Scholarship Awards

- 1A **Sincerey Shoemaker**, North Powder School District  
*Attending Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton, OR*
- 1A **Emma Stutzman**, Sherman County School District  
*Attending Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR*
- 2A **Kayleana Green**, Coquille School District  
*Attending Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR*
- 2A **Rylie Houck**, Bandon School District  
*Attending Southwestern Oregon Community College, Coos Bay, OR*
- 3A **Marneli Pascacio Diaz**, Nyssa School District  
*Attending Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR*
- 3A **Jordan Reyes**, Willamina School District  
*Attending University of Buffalo, Buffalo, NY*

Each recipient  
received  
a \$1,000  
scholarship

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House Democratic Leader Barbara Smith Warner (D – Portland, HD 45), as well as the Education Committee Chairs, Representative Margaret Doherty (D – Tigard, HD 35) and Senator Rob Wagner (D – Lake Oswego, SD 19). We are continuing outreach with members of the House and Senate Education Committees as well as Ways & Means members including, Senator Betsy Johnson (D – Scappoose, SD16), Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D – NW Portland, SD 16) and Representative Dan Rayfield (D – Corvallis, HD 16).

As you know OSSA has strong coalition partners in COSA and OSBA

and Morgan Allen, Jim Green, Lori Sattenspiel and Richard Donovan have all been very helpful with legislative outreach.

We look forward to continuing our work during the 2019 interim and will keep you updated with progress.

Note: The Legislature will meet for Interim Legislative Committee Days on November 18 – 20, 2019 and January 13 – 15, 2020. The 2020 legislative session convenes on February 5th and could run until March 8th.

## OSSA names 2019 Administrator of the Year from St. Paul School District



The Oregon Small Schools Association (OSSA) is proud to announce Tony Smith as its 2019 Administrator of the Year. Smith is the Middle School/High School principal and athletic director at St. Paul School District, which is located 22 miles north of Salem.

Smith, who grew up in St. Paul, has spent 13 years at the school district. During that time, the high school graduation rate has remained strong at 95 to 100% and student participation in athletics and activities is about 90%. According to Superintendent Joe Wehrli, the district's at-risk student populations have maintained strong graduation rates and scholarship acquisition, as well.

During his leadership, Smith has led the Middle/High School through 1:1

implementation of technology for fourth through twelfth grades. He also provided design recommendations and supervised the renovation and seismic retrofitting of the high school gym and locker rooms, the remodeling of the elementary school and construction of a new gym. During Smith's tenure, the district added a girls' softball program and facilities, an additional practice field and a varsity baseball field.

"Tony is an effective motivator and has set a standard of commitment to student success that all administrators can aspire to. He is outgoing, compassionate and has a seemingly endless tool kit when it comes to motivating students and connecting with families," said Wehrli. "Whether in the classroom or on the athletic field, Tony motivates others to excel in all aspects of their lives."

Smith received his OSSA 2019 Administrator of the Year award at the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) Conference at Seaside on Thursday, June 20.

"The OSSA Board of Directors is very pleased to honor Tony Smith this year. He exemplifies the strong character and leadership that are crucial to the success of Oregon's small school districts," said Michael Carter, OSSA board president.

OSSA recognizes one school administrator each year who excels in his/her leadership position. Criteria include integrity, leadership, commitment to community, scholarship and student achievement. OSSA serves as an advocate for the benefits of rural education and small schools across the state. For more information, visit [www.oregonssa.org](http://www.oregonssa.org).

Join us!

## Oregon Small Schools Association Breakfast

During the OSBA Convention  
Saturday, Nov. 16, 2019 • 7:30 a.m.  
Mt. Hood Room  
Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront Hotel

