



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
Oregon Small Schools Association

Fall 2009

The Road Less Traveled



By: Al Meunier
OSSA Executive Director

Brad Royse has been the Superintendent at Enterprise School District for eight years. He originally came to Enterprise from Ontario to be the principal of Enterprise High School. As with all small

districts in eastern Oregon, Enterprise suffered 10 years of declining enrollment. The drop in students was due primarily to the decline of employment in the timber industry. With the support of parents, the Enterprise Education Foundation and the community, the District managed to maintain its quality staff and excellent programs.

While space will not allow us to feature all of the excellent programs at Enterprise High School, I have selected art and writing. Through the Enterprise Education Foundation, the Wallowa Valley Arts Council, and a grant from the Ford Family Foundation, we have been able to maintain and, in fact, extend the art program for students. Wallowa Valley Artist of the Month puts local artists and craftsmen in classrooms to share their talents with students. The program has allowed kids to try their hands at weaving, pottery, painting, and sculpting.

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Enterprise students pose during Living History Day.

Three letters from Teddy

By: Mitch Coleman
OSSA 2008 Teacher of the Year

I can hardly believe it has been a year since I found out that I received the honor of being named Small Schools Teacher of the Year. Time seems to fly by more and more every year I teach. I often wonder if I am just going through the motions and if I am taking the time to reach out to each student and give them the time they need to be successful. I know that allowing students to see that you care about them as individuals can be the biggest reason for them to achieve greater success. I am reminded of a story someone gave me many years ago.

“Three Letters from Teddy”
Elizabeth Silance Ballard

Teddy’s letter came today, and now that I’ve read it, I will place it in my cedar chest with the other things that are important in my life. “I wanted you to be the first to know.” I smiled as I read the words he had written and my heart swelled with a pride that I had no right to feel.

I have not seen Teddy Stallard since he was a student in my 5th grade class, 15 years ago. It was early in my career, and I had only been teaching two years. From the first day he stepped into my classroom, I disliked Teddy. Teachers (although everyone knows differently) are not supposed to have favorites in a class, but most especially are not supposed to show dislike for a child, any child. Nevertheless, every year there are one or two children that one cannot help but be attached to, for teachers are human, and it is human nature to like bright, pretty, intelligent people, whether they are 10 years old or 25. And sometimes, not too often, fortunately, there will be one or two students to whom the teacher just can’t seem to relate.

I had thought myself quite capable of handling my personal feelings along that line until Teddy walked into my life. There wasn’t a child I particularly liked that year, but Teddy was most assuredly one I disliked. He was dirty. Not just occasionally, but all the time. His hair hung low over his ears, and he actually had to hold it out of his eyes as he wrote his papers in class. (And this was before it was fashionable to do so!) Too, he had a peculiar odor about him which I could never identify. His physical faults were many, and his intellect left a lot to be desired, also. By the end of the first week I knew he was hopelessly behind the others. Not only was he behind; he was just plain slow! I began to withdraw from

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him immediately.

Any teacher will tell you that it's more of a pleasure to teach a bright child. It is definitely more rewarding for one's ego. But any teacher worth her credentials can channel work to the bright child, keeping him challenged and learning, while she puts her major effort on the slower ones. Any teacher can do this. Most teachers do it, but I didn't, not that year. In fact, I concentrated on my best students and let the others follow along as best they could. Ashamed as I am to admit it, I took perverse pleasure in using my red pen; and each time I came to Teddy's papers, the cross marks (and they were many) were always a little larger and a little redder than necessary. "Poor work!" I would write with a flourish.

While I did not actually ridicule the boy, my attitude was obviously quite apparent to the class, for he quickly became the class "goat", the outcast -- the unlovable and the unloved. He knew I didn't like him, but he didn't know why. Nor did I know -- then or now -- why I felt such an intense dislike for him. All I know is that he was a little boy no one cared about, and I made no effort in his behalf.

The days rolled by. We made it through the Fall Festival and the Thanksgiving holidays, and I continued marking happily with my red pen. As the Christmas holidays approached, I knew that Teddy would never catch up in time to be promoted to the sixth grade level. He would be a repeater. To justify myself, I went to his cumulative folder from time to time. He had very low grades for the first four years, but not grade failure. How he had made it, I didn't know. I closed my mind to personal remarks.

First grade: Teddy shows promise by work and attitude, but has poor home situation.

Second grade: Teddy could do better. Mother terminally ill. He receives little help at home.

Third grade: Teddy is a pleasant boy. Helpful, but too serious. Slow learner. Mother passed away at end of year.

Fourth grade: Very slow, but well-behaved. Father shows no interest.

Well, they passed him four times, but he will certainly repeat fifth grade! "Do him good!" I said to myself.

And then the last day before the holiday arrived. Our little tree on the reading table sported paper and popcorn chains. Many gifts were heaped underneath, waiting for the big moment. Teachers always get several gifts at Christmas, but mine that year seemed bigger and more elaborate than ever. There was not a student who had not brought me one. Each unwrapping brought squeals of delight, and the proud giver would receive effusive thank-you's.

His gift wasn't the last one I picked up; in fact it was in the middle of the pile. Its wrapping was a brown paper bag, and he had colored Christmas trees and red bells all over it. It was stuck together with masking tape. "For Miss Thompson -- From Teddy," it read. The group was completely silent, and for the first time, I felt conspicuous, embarrassed because they all stood watching me unwrap that gift.

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Students in K-12 can present their efforts in the annual county-wide Youth Arts Festival.

In many schools, students first get the basics in a writing program. Students in Enterprise can take advantage of Fishtrap, a local non-profit organization focused on writing and literature. Located just across the street from the school, Fishtrap sponsors story-telling workshops where kids read their stories on the local radio station. The Writer in Residence program brings a published author to the county for nine weeks. The program works with all students to improve their writing skills. For high school students, Fishtrap offers college preparation classes in literature, writing composition and poetry. Fishtrap managed to bring Mike Rich, a famous Enterprise High School graduate, home to work with students. Mike Rich is a successful screenwriter whose first movie, "Finding Forrester," was named in honor of his high school English teacher.

Since the photos with their article feature students participating in a living history unit I would be remiss not to mention that Enterprise is located in the ancestral home of Chief Joseph, the famous Nez Perce Chief.

In closing, I think that the following parent testimonial about Enterprise School District is appropriate as it could apply to a lot of the small schools in our state: "When we moved our family from Northern Virginia in 1999, we loved the community but we were uncertain about the schools. We knew rural schools across the United States, and especially in Oregon, were struggling with budget cuts. But we have been impressed by the community support, the caring and dedicated teachers, and their willingness to embrace new ideas. My kids are getting a personally rewarding education that will provide a strong foundation for their future."

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Response To Intervention model sparks positive results

By: Jeff Davis, Superintendent, Central Curry School District (Gold Beach)

One of the challenges in a small, rural, remote school district is the ability to offer to our students the same opportunities that larger districts can offer. Whether it is course offerings, increased activities, or implementation of Advanced Placement/honors programs, the challenge has always been how to increase opportunities for our children.

In 2006, the Central Curry School District took a long, hard look at its K-5 reading program. A group of dedicated teachers met to discuss what we currently were doing and what we could do to improve our DIBELS and OAKS results. After looking at data, the decision was made to combine our efforts and launch into a program that would group students into three groups, at or above grade level, strategic interventions and intensive interventions. Each group met for 40 minutes everyday with a licensed staff member. Paraprofessionals were distributed to the larger groups to assist the teacher with implementation of core reading curriculum. Mary Lee, a veteran 4th grade teacher, decided to go back to school to earn a license as a reading specialist. This was key to changing the reading environment at our elementary school. We had a specialist who had a passion for teaching reading.

Once this was in place, our next move was to apply for an OrRTI (Oregon Response to Intervention) grant. We felt we had most of the requirements in place, including looking at data to drive instruction. In the spring of 2008, we applied for and received the grant. This meant that we were to spend the 2008-09 school year getting training and planning for implementation the following year. We also moved from a “targeted” Title 1 school to a “school-wide” program. This allowed the flexibility to create a schedule that would meet the needs of each student.

Tigard-Tualatin School District, which oversees the OrRTI program, provided excellent support and training to our staff. In our region, we are partnered with the Roseburg School District,

which provides support in southern Oregon for schools who are implementing the RTI model.

The RTI model is meant to identify students who are reading below grade level and providing research-based interventions to bring their abilities closer to their peers. It initially was meant to be a process used prior to referring students to special education for a specific learning disability. However, we are finding that RTI is good teaching methodology that uses data to drive instruction.

In short, our program has all students in core reading groups for 90 minutes. Each and every student is reading the same grade-level text as their peers. We are using *Treasures* as our core reading text and a combination of *Triumphs* and *Treasures* for interventions.

Tier 2 students are those who need strategic interventions based on their DIBELS scores. One teacher provides an additional instruction for 30-45 minutes for these students. Another teacher takes Tier 3 students, our lowest readers, and provides intensive interventions during the 30-45 minute time period. Progress monitoring takes place every 2-3 weeks to see if the interventions are working. If students are progressing, the intervention remains; if students are not progressing, the intervention is revised or changed. Only after several attempts at finding the right intervention do we then refer students for special education testing. Again, this only applies for those students who may have a specific learning disability.

Small schools can and should look hard at the RTI model. It can be done by educating staff and including them in the planning and implementation of the program. We are beginning to see results after one month of implementation. Our belief is that we have a program that benefits all students and will increase their ability to “read to learn” once they have “learned to read.”

AEPA helps districts save money, time

When Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe found out she had a 13-week timeline to complete the construction of a new 13,000-square-foot modular building and modernization to the entire main building, she was a little concerned. But that concern didn't last for long thanks to Umatilla's contracts with the Umatilla-Morrow Education Service District's Cooperative Purchasing department.

The Co-Op participates in the Association of Educational Purchasing Agencies (AEPA), which is a school procurement vehicle. AEPA works to secure multi-state volume purchasing contracts with benefits that are measurable, cost-effective and continuously exceed members' expectations. The UMESD is the Member Agency representing Oregon in AEPA.

“Because the UMESD has already done the bid work through the AEPA and other processes, we were able to work within our tight timeline and build a project with reasonable costs,” Sipe said. The Umatilla School District was able to use the AEPA contracts and UMESD vendors to secure the building, Mondo flooring, site work, playground equipment and furniture.

One of the advantages of utilizing the UMESD's AEPA contracts is that the bidding and purchasing process/requirements is streamlined through one single locally and nationally recognized legal purchasing solicitation if they go through AEPA, said Bob Reese, Purchasing and Marketing Specialist for the UMESD. These bidding processes and requirements oftentimes can be quite costly. And with the lowest national pricing available, the UMESD's AEPA contracts provide customers the most cost-efficient deals available, saving districts thousands of dollars and time each year.

Currently, the UMESD provides services to 12 school districts in its two core areas of Umatilla and Morrow counties, plus services through AEPA contracts to schools all around Oregon. There's an online store for districts to use as a one-stop shop for supplies, which reduces the cost of their procurement times.

Spray teachers interweave marriage, family & careers

By: Lee Farren

Special Contributor to Small Talk

A complementary pair

"He's an early bird," Connie Knapp says, speaking of her husband. "I'm allergic to mornings. Ed gets up at 5:30 to exercise, has a glass of lemon juice with maple syrup and comes to school around 7:00 a.m. I get up and come right to work at 7:30. I have coffee here and I keep cookies in my refrigerator, along with an occasional apple."



Ed and Connie Knapp talk about their careers, their marriage and Spray School in Ed's social studies classroom. Photo by: Lee Farren

"Connie is really tech savvy, more so than I am," Ed says. "When I have a tech issue I can't resolve she shows me how to do it."

The two teachers are the only married couple on the staff at Spray School. Connie teaches art, woodshop, grade school Spanish and health and coordinates the Spray High School careers program. Ed teaches social studies, Spanish and photography at the high school, and coaches junior high volleyball, basketball and track.

"I do my things, he does his things," Connie says. "We both wear many different 'hats' here, and they don't often overlap."

"We complement each other," Ed says. "Connie is artistic and mechanical; I'm more verbal and intellectual. Creativity is not my strong suit; I'm a pretty linear guy. She gives me creative ideas, and I help her stay focused and moving forward."

The couple met at church while students at Southern Oregon University in Ashland and married a few months later. Ed taught fulltime in Nevada, then in Fossil and finally Spray. When their son and daughter were small, Connie taught as a substitute. She started teaching at Spray School fulltime in 1990, commuting from their home in Fossil. Ed joined the Spray teaching staff in 1996. They have been married for 31 years.

"I think it's awesome to teach in the same school," Connie

says. "Ed is very intense about his job. He puts in long hours, but we see each other every day. We have lunch together and visit as professionals. We talk about his job and my job, and we both understand what we're talking about."

Wearing the parent and the teacher hats

Even better, from their point of view, was having their own children in school. Lucas, who lives in Salem, owns an Internet business in Wheeler County with Connie. Amanda lives in Phoenix, Ariz., and recently competed in a half-marathon with Ed, her dad and former coach. Both graduated from Spray High School. The Knapps have also hosted a variety of international and local students in their home.

Most staff members at Spray School are about the same age, in their 40s and 50s, and for a number of years in the 1990s almost half the students were related to the staff.

"That made it really nice," Connie says. "So many of us were so involved; not just as teachers, but also as parents. You have a lot of energy for all the things you need to do and want to do. When someone gets a creative idea you can all carry it through."

Being a teacher's kid, of course, wasn't always easy. Sometimes Ed and Connie's children had to listen to other students criticize their parents, and sometimes other students felt the teachers favored their own children.

"That led us sometimes to be tougher on our own kids, holding them to higher standards so it wouldn't look like favoritism," Ed says. "Sometimes you do have to put on your parent hat and deal with things as a parent, but in general we found it was better to let our kids solve their own problems."

When school is an extended family

Teaching in such a small school – Spray has about 55 students in all – can offer some of the best of both public and home schooling.

"People home school for a variety of reasons, but a big part of it is being able to be with your kids," Ed says. "Parents make a big sacrifice to do this, to be part of their children's human development as well as their education. When you're a teacher with your kids in school you get to do both at the same time."

In addition, the staff has been together for so long that they function in some ways like a large family. They usually all eat lunch together at the cafeteria, where Ed and Connie have been known to get into minor squabbles.

"We sound like an old married couple," Ed says. "The other teachers are laughing at us. They are probably doing the same thing at home with their spouses, but we're doing it here."

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The family feeling extends to the entire student body, with students sometimes relating to teachers as though they were parents, and with each other as though they were siblings.

“One teacher’s daughter was my daughter’s best friend, and she was my student,” Connie says. “It was like arguing with my own daughter. It’s all very overlapped.”

“I think of my students often as part of my extended family,” Ed says. “One of the challenges of a small school is that the relationship can be a little blurred.”

Ed has found this to be especially true in coaching, where he often harps on students about health concerns with sharing food or deals with people borrowing from others without asking. “Like you would do in a family,” he says

Both Ed and Connie believe the family feeling and small size are part of Spray School’s success. In classes of 10 to 12 and often less, students get a lot of one-on-one attention. It is rare that a student does not finish school. “Even kids who would fall through the cracks in a larger school get a great deal of positive attention here,” Ed says.

“You can’t get lost here,” Connie agrees.

With six years to go before retirement, Ed and Connie have big plans. Both want to make these the best years of their teaching careers.

“With all the experience I have, I’m a lot more comfortable trying new things,” Ed says. “I’m hoping to make the next six years a lot of fun.”

Amity High pianist to entertain OSSA Breakfast crowd during convention

Amity High School junior Ian Cox will entertain guests at the annual OSSA Breakfast during the Oregon School Boards Association Convention in Portland Nov. 14 at 7:30 a.m. The following was written by Ian about how he started in music:

“My name is Ian Cox and I am a junior at Amity High School. I began taking piano lessons from David Ingram, a music professor at Willamette University when I was 6 years old. I didn’t exactly choose to play the piano when I was young. My brother Eli and I actually wanted to take guitar lessons, but our mom insisted on learning to play piano first. When I started, my teacher would have me practice the music measure by measure. Doing this makes a piece seem less complicated and easier to handle since it’s in smaller portions. As time passed, I started to get better and four years ago, I had a major breakthrough when I learned to play “The Maple Leaf Rag,” by Scott Joplin. This piece took me several months of strict practice to accomplish. Afterwards though, every new song I picked up didn’t seem so complicated.

“After about the second year of lessons, my teacher started placing me in annual recitals. There’s nothing like being in front of an audience and being expected to perform. It is because of these recitals, though, that I have no problem playing in public or doing anything else in front of a crowd. They have taught me to handle my nerves and to calm myself in an uncomfortable situation. When I am about to play in front of an audience, I feel the same nerves in my stomach that I have felt ever since my first recital. I calm myself by pretending that no one is watching me and I am simply playing alone, in a room.



“Lessons haven’t always been the joy of my life, but I know that I learn something new every time I go. Sometimes if I haven’t practiced enough, I dread Fridays, when I go to lessons. Mr. Ingram has always been very patient and encouraged me to stay with it though. Now I can successfully pick up a piece of music and play it or just listen to a piece and figure it out. I’m always being told by people close to me that when a person stops taking lessons, they soon get out of practice. I even had a teacher tell me once that after they stopped taking lessons, they soon lost the ability to play.

“So for now, I will continue with my weekly routine of lessons every Friday afternoon. I do so because I never want to lose my ability to play. Just playing the piano can help me relax when needed. It also makes me feel creative because there are many different aspects of expression that can change the sound and tone of music, such as the dynamics, tempo and perhaps even the mood you’re in. Some people say that every time they read a poem, they get something different out of it. For me it’s the same way with music. Every time I play a song or passage, I try to make it sound different or I discover a little side melody that I previously missed. This is why I continue to play the piano and will never stop, because it is simply the joy of my life.”

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

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As I removed the last bit of masking tape, two items fell to my desk; a gaudy rhinestone bracelet with several stones missing and a small bottle of dime store cologne – half empty. I could hear the snickers and whispers, and I wasn't sure I could look at Teddy. "Isn't this lovely?" I asked, placing the bracelet on my wrist. "Teddy, would you help me fasten it?" He smiled shyly as he fixed the clasp, and I held up my wrist for all of them to admire. There were a few hesitant oohs and aahs, but as I dabbed the cologne behind my ears, all the little girls lined up for a dab behind their ears. I continued to open the gifts until I reached the bottom of the pile. We ate our refreshments and the bell rang. The children filed out with shouts of "See you next year!" and "Merry Christmas!" but Teddy waited at his desk.

When they had all left, he walked toward me, clutching his gift and books to his chest. "You smell just like Mom," he said softly. "Her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked it." He left quickly. I locked the door, sat down at my desk and wept, resolving to make up to Teddy what I had deliberately deprived him of – a teacher who cared.

I stayed every afternoon with Teddy from the end of the Christmas holidays until the last day of school. Sometimes we worked together. Sometimes he worked alone while I drew up lesson plans or graded papers. Slowly but surely he caught up with the rest of the class. Gradually, there was a definite upward curve in his grades. He did not have to repeat the fifth grade. In fact, his final averages were among the highest in the class, and although I knew he would be moving out of the state when school was out, I was not worried for him. Teddy had reached a level that would stand him in good stead the following year, no matter where he went. He enjoyed a measure of success, and as we were taught in our teacher training courses, "Success builds success." I did not hear from Teddy until seven years later, when his first letter appeared in my mailbox:

Dear Miss Thompson,
I just wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class next month.
Very truly yours, Teddy Stallard

I sent him a card of congratulations and a small package: a pen and pencil gift set. I wondered what he would do after graduation. Four years later, Teddy's second letter came:

Dear Miss Thompson,
I wanted you to be the first to know. I was just informed that I'll be graduating first in my class. The university has not been easy, but I liked it.
Very truly yours, Teddy Stallard

I sent him a good pair of sterling silver monogrammed cuff links and a card, so proud of him I could burst! And now today – Teddy's third letter:

Dear Miss Thompson,
I wanted you to be the first to know. As of today, I am Theodore J. Stallard, M.D. How about that? I'm going to be married in July, the 27th, to be exact. I wanted to ask if you could come and sit where Mom would sit if she were here. I'll have no family there as Dad died last year.
Very truly yours, Teddy Stallard

I'm not sure what kind of gift one sends to a doctor on completion of medical school and state boards. Maybe I'll just wait and take a wedding gift, but my note can't wait:

Dear Ted,
Congratulations! You made it, and you did it yourself! In spite of those like me and not because of us, this day has come to you. God bless you. I'll be at that wedding with bells on!
Elizabeth Silance Ballard

I wish great success for each of you this year and pray that you will achieve everything that you want to achieve in your life. In this fast paced world that we live in, it seems to be harder to get by and do the things we want to do. It's easier to just go through the motions and forget that each student and person we meet is an individual and not a number in the crowd. If I could recommend anything to help I would say to worry less, love more and care about everyone that we meet. If we all did that, Oh! What a world this would be. Thank you for being you.