



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
Oregon Small Schools Association

Summer 2009

The Road Less Traveled



By: Al Meunier
OSSA Executive Director

I was recently in a session with rookie principals, and one of them asked me if I could recall a time that was as difficult as the circumstances and issues that we face today. After 40-plus years in education, the answer is a resounding no.

With this in mind, it might be time for some OSSA member school districts to consider a four-day week for students and staff. Many small districts in rural parts of the state currently have a four-day week. I spent some time with Gordon Munck, superintendent of the Pilot Rock School District, a district of about 400 students. They went to a four-day week in the 2002-2003 school year.

The major areas of cost savings are in classified salaries, transportation, meal costs, heating and custodial costs. Classified employees do not work on Fridays and, as a result, many of them by contract were no longer eligible for insurance. Pilot Rock did grandfather in all existing classified employees so they retained their insurance. Once the grandfathered

Please see Road on pg 2



No child left unknown: Remember your students



By: Mitch Coleman
OSSA 2008 Teacher of the Year

I am amazed that the year is almost finished and another group of seniors will leave to find their ways in life. It is a time of uncertainty for them not knowing what college to go to or if they will even be going to college. It is also a time of great joy and happiness as a huge part of their lives are complete. As a teacher, this always gives me a sense of pride to

know that I have helped these seniors to accomplish the goal of finishing high school.

Normally the uncertainty and concern about what will happen is reserved for our seniors as just a part of the process of life. This year that concern is running throughout all of our schools in Oregon. Every day we hear about budget cuts, teachers losing jobs and school days being cut. It can be hard to keep a positive attitude and continue to give our students the best education we can. All of this has made me think about why I became a teacher. Did I want to be a teacher so I could make a lot of money and get rich? No. Did



I do it so I could write curriculum and correct papers at home? No. Did I do it so I could spend time going to meetings and filling out paperwork? No. So why did I want to be a

Please see OSSA on pg 2

INSIDE

- Wee bit o' history: Heppner basketball...Pg 3
- OSSA Awards of Excellence.....Pg 4
- Corbett strikes gold at nationals Pg 6

teacher anyway? The answer is simple: Kids.

I became a teacher because I wanted to work with kids and hopefully make a difference in their lives. All of us can remember a teacher that holds a special place in our life that we will never forget. For me it started with both of my grandmothers who were both 1st grade teachers. I always remember them talking about their kids and how much they enjoyed them and how much they were learning. It was obvious that they truly loved to be teachers and loved working with kids. Mr. Pender was one of those teachers for me who seemed to love teaching and truly was concerned about his students learning in his class. He helped me in 7th grade to see the importance of working hard and believing in myself. Jim Savard helped me in high school by giving me an opportunity to show that I could do the job and was always there to back me up when I needed it most. Without these teachers I am not sure where I would be today.

Teachers have the power to make a difference in a kid's life every day. We need to remember that all that it takes is a little time and a simple word of encouragement to make kids feel good about whom they are. Kids are walking around in our schools every day who feel that no one even knows that they are there. Their lives are not good at home, their parents are getting divorced, one of their parents has lost their job or they just don't have any friends. Whatever the reason, they are simply trying to get noticed by someone. Our concerns about budgets, jobs, days being cut and all of the other stresses that

we are having only makes their lives more uncertain. They worry that their favorite teacher may get fired and they won't know what to do.

So what can we do as teachers to help these kids? Simply be positive and talk to kids and learn who they are. Look at kids in your class and make it a goal to learn something new about one of your students each week. It seems small, but it could make a difference in their lives. Our goal as teachers should be No Child Left Unknown. The time we spend getting to know kids today may be the difference between a student being successful or

just giving up and letting life pass them by. Being able to graduate and walk across that stage at the end of their senior years or be one of those students we all know who never get through school even when we know they are plenty smart enough. In these times of uncertainty and stress I encourage you to focus on reaching out to students and making a positive difference in their lives. We have the power to

influence and motivate students to be successful and that is why most of wanted to become teachers anyway.

I hope the rest of your year goes well and you all have a wonderful spring and summer. I look forward to meeting more of you throughout this coming year. I hope you attend your high school's graduation this year and look for at least one student you can remember helping along their way to this wonderful moment in their life. Without good and dedicated teachers like you, where would we be anyway? Not sure I want to know.

“Our goal as teachers should be No Child Left Unknown. The time we spend getting to know kids today may be the difference between a student being successful or just giving up and letting life pass them by.”

employees are no longer employed, then the savings in insurance costs would be substantial.

The majority of student activities are scheduled on Friday, so the school time that students miss for travel is greatly reduced. Pilot Rock did find that community use of buildings increased, so the savings that were anticipated in heating costs did not occur.

Fifteen Fridays per year are reserved for staff development activities. This has been a positive factor as now faculty members have planning time available. The instruction time with students has actually increased. All students are in class until 3:30 p.m. each day, and the lengthened periods allow for more uninterrupted direct instruction time.



After a few initial problems, the barriers to the change were all eliminated. Staff love the schedule, and parents, after some initial concern, are now some of the strongest advocates.

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Wee bit o' history:

By: Mark Deuel, Oregon Hoops History

Heppner basketball revives town after 1903 tragedy

Sports are often used as a diversion. Something else to think about for a few hours until reality hits again. It can be therapeutic. It can be healing. For towns bound together by tragedy, the gymnasium on Friday night is a chance to get together with an extended family that extends from Main Street to the fields and farms outside of town. For Heppner, Ore., no doubt the healing process from a devastating June day in 1903 was helped along by the sports teams of the Heppner High School.

At the turn of the century, Heppner was a booming shipping center, and by 1900, the town had over 1,000 citizens, two banks, nine saloons and two major hotels. [1] The growing city became the victim of one of the worst natural disasters in Oregon state history when a devastating "wall of water" shattered the city and the way of life. On June 14, 1903, after an afternoon of rain and storms, an enormous and deadly flood punched the town and in an instant knocked it to its knees. The flood passed in two hours but left behind a trail of destruction. Nearly two-thirds of the homes were gone, the business district was wrecked. Main Street was littered with trash and homes that had floated from their lots and came to rest. Telegraph and telephone lines were decimated and the railroad line from Lexington to Heppner was destroyed. The only way in or out was badly damaged and nearly un-navigable wagon roads. [2]

Help from other communities was quick to arrive but Heppner lost many residents who moved soon after the flood. The 1910 census counted 880 people, a substantial drop from the 1900 census counting nearly 1,400. By 1990, the town was back to its pre-flood count of 1,412. [3] The healing must have been slow. Recovering possessions and in the worst case, dead family members, is an unthinkable and tragic task. The children and babies, who survived that horrible event, became key figures on a basketball team that helped their parents recover from that day.



Heppner High school, with a student population of 87 students, had a few years of success before reaching the state tournament in 1921. The team returned five lettermen, including center Jared Aiken, who was on the championship team of 1918-19. *[Editor's Note: No information was given on this championship won by Heppner. Often, papers would declare their town the champions*

even though no formal league or championship tournament was created. Heppner probably won the majority of its games that year and probably beat a mix of neighboring towns that had teams, club teams and alumni teams.]

Heppner opened the season with 24-16 win at home over Lexington on Jan. 15. They followed the opener with a close win at home over Pilot Rock, 17-15. After the game, the girls of Heppner "entertained at the school house in honor of the visiting team." [4] I found many stories like this, where after the game, both teams would gather at the school and have parties and gatherings and rehash the game over punch, pie and cookies. It's an incredible show of sportsmanship and pride. I have not experienced this in my many years of sport, as a player or as a coach. I think we would do well to get back to this but I fear that we are moving in the opposite direction instead.

Heppner won its third straight game to open the season over "the crack basketball team from Wheeler county high school at Fossil." [5] On Feb. 4, Heppner met Lexington for the second time that season. Lexington took the game 20-12 and it showed that the "Lexington boys have been doing some practicing and that our boys need a little more." [6] The article appeared on page 8 of the *Heppner Herald*, and was untitled. Clearly, Heppner's press was not fully into Heppner's chances just yet.

Next came a road trip to Condon on Feb. 10 and Fossil on Feb. 12. Condon's slick floor could not deter Heppner, which bolted to a 17-2 halftime lead. Condon couldn't make up much ground in the second half, outscoring Heppner 15-11 for a final scored of 28-17. Fossil gave Heppner all it could handle two nights later. The second half proved to be a nip-and-tuck affair, as Heppner scored a field goal and a free throw to win the game 22-19. [7]

On Feb. 18, Condon visited Heppner for its return game. Condon led early, but halftime woke Heppner up. The 24- 2 second half explosion more than cemented Heppner's status as an elite team in the league. [8]

Heppner continued its strong play a few days later with a dominating performance in Hermiston. Not many details were available on the game other than the fact that Hermiston were good sports in the 34-12 loss and they said that "Heppner was the cleanest team that they had played this year." Nevertheless, the clean playing Heppner team was a team to be reckoned with in the district. The win over Hermiston was Heppner's seventh victory of the season and puts "them in line for the state tournament at Salem." [9] Hermiston returned to Heppner for the second meeting of the two schools on March 5 and again Heppner won, this time 24-10 to run its record to 8-1 on the season.

Please see Heppner on pg 5

OSSA 2008-09 Awards of Excellence

Judy Hugenburger, Connie Brown – Gates Elementary, Santiam Canyon School District

Exceptional Kindergarten Program:

The Gates kindergarten program provides an exceptional education to the students. This full-day program has students able to read, count to 100, write numbers to 100, county by 5's, 10's, 20's by the end of the year. The teachers have developed a program that is outstanding.

For more information contact Jack Thompson at 503-897-2191 or at jack.thompson@santiam.k12.or.us

Jordia Blumenstein – Pacific Crest Community School

Exemplary Program: Service Learning: In three years, Ms. Blumenstein has developed a service learning program at Pacific Crest that challenges students and serves the community. The program links needy organizations (non-profit) with the school so that students complete important service combined with academic challenges. In three years the school of 80 now:

Awards of Excellence

Gates Elementary
(Santiam Canyon School District)

Pacific Crest Community School

Echo School District

Butte Falls School District

McKenzie School District

Vernonia School District

- Serves eight organizations (SMART, JOIN, Community Warehouse, Rebuilding Center, Habitat for Humanity, Multnomah ESD, OMSI, Oregon Humane Society) ongoing and 12 others every 22 months
- 4500 hours per year are given
- 100% of the staff is involved.

For more information contact Rebecca Lukens at 503-234-2826 or at r-lukens@comcast.net

Echo School District

College Credit Program: The Echo School District college credit program has been in existence for several years. This program encourages Echo high school students to take college classes. These classes are in addition to dual credit or expanded options classes. The district provides financial assistance to students to take college classes at BMCC. Students sign up for the class and parents pay initially. After receiving a grade of at least a "C", the students receive a 90% tuition reimbursement from the school district. In addition to the financial incentive, students are

released from school during the day if necessary to take the class. In the last five years, we have had several students complete at least one year of college before high school graduation, and numerous other students get a taste of college classes via this program.

For more information contact Rob Waite at 541-966-6206 or at rob.waite@echo.k12.or.us

Staff, with particular thanks to Mary Casey & Sarti Powell – Butte Falls School District

Developing, implementing and running the district-wide RTI program: In the spring of 2007, the district performed benchmark testing of every student and found that only 22% of them read at grade level. The staff worked hard to develop plans to address the needs of every child and created a reading intervention model for each child not reading at grade level.

The plan was put into effect in January of 2008. Staff members gave up office space, others gave up prep periods, the master schedule was re-written, a classroom was converted into a reading room, and everyone went to trainings to help students improve in reading. Students who were not reading at grade level were taken out of electives and placed in small group instruction.

By January of 2009, we had 56% of our students reading at grade level. We are looking forward to our benchmark results that will take place in May. Our hope is that in just 15 months of instruction our 22% will be up to 75% at grade level!

For more information contact Tim Sweeney at 541-865-3563 or at tsweeney@buttefalls.k12.or.us

Staff and Students – McKenzie School District

Substantial improvement in academics and behavior: McKenzie School District has seen substantial progress in the past few years. Their OAKS test scores have gone up by an average of 17 points in the elementary and 8 points in the middle and high

Please see Awards on pg 5

Awards ... continued from pg 4

school. The number of students on honor roll has increased, while the number with D's and F's has decreased. We have an increase in students taking Advanced Placement tests. Behaviorally, the number of student referrals for behavior has decreased by 30%. Additionally, the bullying has disappeared and a Kindness Gang of student council members helps model kind behavior on campus. There has been an increase of high school students donating time to community projects and helping with school improvement projects.

For more information contact Sally Storm at 541-822-3338 or at SallyS@mckenzie.k12.or.us

Beth Kintz – YTP Specialist – Vernonia School District

YTP – Print Shop/Balloon Co./Concessions/Job Club: YTP is the vehicle that Vernonia School District uses to accomplish some amazing goals. Through these school-based businesses, students earn paychecks and are completely self-supporting. This year they were able to help with bringing in important speakers for the student body, buy food for Vernonia Cares Food Bank, take field trips to various career related job fairs, and provide important services for our community. The students have learned important life skills (independent living, finances, comparison shopping, job search, etc.) as well as earning important graduation credits and certificates (food handler card, driver's license, etc.)

For more information contact Greg Kintz at 503-429-3303 or at gpkintz@juno.com

Heppner ... continued from pg 3

Once again, a district without a tournament had some conflict over who would be their representative at the state tournament. Just like Rainier the year before, the debate was over who would represent the district that consisted of teams from Hood River to Pendleton, according to the *Herald*. Heppner was in line for the trip to Salem. Not knowing if Pendleton and Hood River high schools were actually in the district, I believe that the debate might have been over Heppner and Lexington since the two schools split the two games during the season.

On March 8 Heppner finally got notice that it was selected to attend the 1921 state tournament. For Heppner, it was a big honor. "All honor to Heppner Hi!" proclaimed the *Heppner Herald*. The paper credited the team with putting the town on the map and specifically mentioned the work of Professor John Heard, who coached the team to an incredible season. [10]

But one problem remained: finances. According to the Heppner yearbook, "our school finances were rather low and it looked as though the team would not get to go, but the business men of Heppner offered to finance the trip and the boys were able to go after all." [11] Once in Salem, the team drew its opponent: Southern Oregon's Marshfield, champions of Coos County for the third straight year and winners of eight games in a row.

Right away, a familiar problem greeted the small school teams. Accustomed to playing on their smaller floors, the spacious floor at the Salem Armory was foreign to the boys from Heppner. Ultimately, even if Heppner had hosted Marshfield on its own floor, it would have been a tough game to win. Marshfield handled Heppner easily, 44-19. The *Heppner Herald* claimed "if we could only have that Marshfield bunch on our own floor for a game, we'd show 'em." [12] While it didn't capture the championship, Heppner made a decent showing at Salem and, more importantly, had a great time in doing it. According to the paper, center Jared Aiken "brought home the highest individual tally scored in the state." [13]

The year 1921 was a banner one for Heppner activities. The debate team was also a noteworthy group and as debating was a significant activity in those days, the town was equally as proud of their debaters as they were the hoopsters. The basketball team gave the town a thrilling ride during the basketball season, undoubtedly helping to heal wounds left open by that horrendous day in 1903 when the town was nearly washed away.

1. DenOuden, Bob, "Without a Second's Warning" <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ohq/105.1/denouden.html>
- 2, 3, 13. Ibid
4. "Home Team Defeats Pilot Rock," *Heppner Herald*, January 25, 1921, Page 5
5. "Home Basketball Team Wins Game from Fossil," *Heppner Herald*, February 1, 1921 Page 1
6. *Heppner Herald*, February 8, 1921, Page 8
7. "Heppner Hi Leads in Basketball, Debating," *Heppner Herald*, February 15, 1921 Page 1
8. "School Notes," *Heppner Herald*, February 22, 1921, Page 1
9. "Heppner Hi Quintet Wins 7 games, Loses 0," *Heppner Herald*, March 1, 1921 Page 1
10. "Basketball Team Goes to Salem Tomorrow," *Heppner Herald*, March 8, 1921 Page 1
11. Heppner High School Yearbook, Page Unknown
12. "Heppner Ball Team Made a Good Showing at Salem," *Heppner Herald*, March 15, 1921 Page 1

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

Corbett strikes gold at National Decathlon Finals

Corbett High School represented Oregon for the second straight year at the U.S. Academic Decathlon national finals in Memphis, Tenn., April 22-25. Senior Lara Dunton led her team in scoring and won a gold medal for her outstanding performance in the language and literature event. Corbett's nine-member team finished 27th in a field of 36 state champions from across the nation, a step up from its 31st place performance in last year's competition.

The gold medal is the first national award in the two-year history of Oregon Academic Decathlon and only the third medal awarded to an Oregon student at the national competition since its inception in 1981.

Dunton scored 840 out of a possible 1,000 points on the language and literature objective exam. This led the field of students participating in her grade-point average category and matched the score of two-time national champion Kris Sankaran from California's Moorpark High School. Sankaran holds the record for the highest individual overall score in Academic Decathlon history and earned recognition as the highest scoring student overall in this year's finals. Dunton's ability to keep pace with such a strong competitor was not lost on Oregon State Director Christian Cerone.

"She's proven again and again she has the ability to score right up there with the top dogs," said Cerone. "Leading the nation in an event isn't very easy to do, especially in a program as young as Oregon's."

Along with her gold medal, Dunton placed in the top 10 in economics, music and science. Other strong performances by Corbett students included a 4th place finish in interview by junior Morgon Purvine, and 5th and 6th place finishes in math by senior Tyler Jones and junior Jacy Clare, respectively. Jones also placed in the top 10 in economics. The eight top-10 placements outdid Corbett's five top-10 scores in last year's finals, as the team devoted more time to prepare for competition throughout the year. Seniors Matthew Hammel, William Matheson, and Laura Kimes, junior Brandon Sager, and sophomore Sasha LaGreide round out Corbett's roster.

Describing her success as "the payoff for a lot of hard work this entire year," Dunton led her team to Memphis after a resounding victory in the Oregon Academic Decathlon state championship, held at Western Oregon University in February. She graduates this spring and leaves a big pair of shoes to fill on the Corbett team.

Academic Decathlon is a nationwide scholastic competition in which teams of students take objective tests in math, language & literature, art, science, history, music, and economics. They also deliver prepared and impromptu speeches, sit for professional interviews, and write a critical essay. Teams of up to nine students must consist of equal proportions of A, B, and C-level students, based on a computation of GPA. Students spent a good portion of the school year studying and researching material based on the curriculum theme of Latin America. Next year, the curriculum will focus on the French Revolution.

More information about participating in the Oregon Academic Decathlon can be found at www.orad.us, and by contacting Oregon State Director Christian Cerone at ccerone@orad.us or (503)347-5757.

