



**IMPROVING STUDENT  
MENTAL HEALTH IN  
THE DECLINE OF  
COVID**



**STUDENT  
PODCASTING SPARKS  
INTEREST IN  
LEARNING**



**OSSA Salishan  
Spring Conference**  
is nearly here!



**A VOICE IN WILDERNESS  
THE WAYS YOU CAN SERVE**  
R. Michael Carter

# OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

## Podcasting - Innovation Leads to Interest & Investigation

Shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic hit our world, Sherman County School Superintendent Wes Owens asked the teaching staff to explore ways to begin incorporating distance learning opportunities into classroom instruction. It was thought at the time that this would aid the student athletes who may miss class on long bus rides, and give options when the district was dealing with inclement weather. Little did anyone know that a world-wide pandemic was just around the corner.

When COVID-19 did hit the district it merely accelerated the efforts made by the teaching staff to address the needs of the kids in the district. The history and geography teacher, Kevin Stuart, initially explored the idea of making YouTube videos as a way to aid in distance learning, but shortly thereafter switched to the medium of podcasting. What had begun solely as an attempt to facilitate distance learning soon morphed into a chance for the teacher to embrace a gauntlet of personal development through frequent opportunities to dig deeper into history through research, reflection, and then learn how to effectively communicate the newfound learning in a meaningful and engaging way.

Calling it, *History Revisited With Reflection*, Mr. Stuart began with a focus on American History just prior to the signing of the Constitution and as of the writing of this article is currently in the middle of producing Part 2 of the episode on Shays' Rebellion.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this podcasting journey was to discover just how much history he didn't know, and just how frequently he struggled to effectively communicate the content. In his own words, "It was truly humbling!"

Now with 10 episodes published, representing approximately 160 hours of time invested into it, the episodes have been played 287 times with audiences mainly in the U.S., Germany, and France, and all of that without spending a single dollar on advertising. At some point he does intend to advertise, but not until he has been able to produce at least 20 episodes.

Perhaps there's no better way to encourage students to become life-long learners than to lead by example, and this is one teacher's attempt at doing so.

*Thanks to Kevin Stuart and Superintendent Wes Owens of Sherman County Schools for their submission!*



**Distance Learning  
with a  
Contemporary Flair**

Sherman County Teacher Turns  
to Podcasting  
[https://anchor.fm/  
historyrevisitedwr](https://anchor.fm/historyrevisitedwr)  
[https://open.spotify.com/show/  
3NfZjzjY3qUcRMyYq4yGmb?  
scrllybrkr](https://open.spotify.com/show/3NfZjzjY3qUcRMyYq4yGmb?scrllybrkr)  
<https://>

Welcome, Members of the Oregon Small Schools Association,

You still have time to sign up, if you have not already, for our annual OSSA Conference which is just a few short weeks away. It will be hosted at Salishan once again. We look forward to the opportunity for principals and superintendents to come together at this great conference, highlighted by our keynote Andrew Marotta (see right).

Student scholarships applications are due April 15<sup>th</sup>. We will be reviewing the applications during the OSSA conference. The announcement of the scholarship winners will be on May 6<sup>th</sup>. This will be for a total of (9) scholarships: three each for 1A, 2A, and 3A.

The deadline to nominate an administrator of the year has been extended. If you have an administrator in your district that has shown exemplary work, I invite you to nominate them and celebrate their efforts to make your school(s) a better place for students and staff. Nominations are due May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Also, May 3<sup>rd</sup> is the deadline for the OSSA Teacher of the Year. There are so many fantastic teachers in our small schools. Let us give recognition to the teacher that deserves the accolades for the work they do day in and day out.

I would like to take a minute to thank our executive administrator Michael Carter for the work he did in putting together a letter of support for the female superintendents in Oregon. This effort was led by Michael Carter, Guadalupe Guerrero, Paul Coakley, George Mendoza, and Aaron Bayer. Members of our board also signed on as support for our female colleagues. I feel it a pleasure to work with so many great superintendents in our state that work so well to support each other. I received many comments from female superintendents of how much this effort made them feel appreciated and supported.

We would love to share some of the wonderful things going on with you professionally or within your district. Please take a minute and share some of the successes you had this year. Too many challenges and hurdles had to be navigated this year and we want to know what good things have happened. With your permission, I would like to share those with our colleagues

We have many board positions that will need to be filled this upcoming year. Please consider putting your name in for a regional or at large position that is or will be vacant.

I look forward to seeing you at the OSSA Conference,

Eric Milburn

OSSA Board President

## OSSA Salishan Spring Conference 2022



**KEYNOTE:** Andrew Marotta is an energetic and enthusiastic school leader who has put his positive imprint on his beloved school, Port Jervis HS, in Port Jervis, NY. With the release of his first book, *THE PRINCIPAL: Surviving & Thriving. 125 Points of Wisdom, Practical Tips, and Relatable Stories for all School Principals*, Andrew is looking to expand his impact to others.

Letter from Michael Carter Executive Director OSSA:

## A Voice in the Wilderness

We have just finished the COVID-19 Crisis (we hope!), and schools have resumed with in-person instruction throughout Oregon. The crisis has been described by many as the most challenging time of their personal lives and careers. I know as a practicing school superintendent, it was a most challenging leadership time, and my community, like many others in Oregon was very divided. Many times in the last couple of years, school leaders were challenged because they were simply following the law.

As we reflect and move forward from this crisis, it is important that we remember to take care of ourselves and support each other. The Oregon Small Schools Association is one way we can support each other and work to change the laws in order to reflect the needs of our small school districts and the communities that we serve. We will need some new OSSA board members since we will have four retiring this year. If you are interested, please give me a call and we can discuss how you can serve, support your colleagues, and make a difference. As an organization, we must be involved in policy development and modifications to ensure that these state mandates truly reflect the values and needs our small school districts. I'm reminded of the words of Henry David Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience when he wrote, ***“Don't be afraid to be a voice in the wilderness for children and the poor. It is the moral and sensible thing to do.”***



The OSSA was involved throughout the COVID-19 crisis working directly with legislatures, ODE, and OHA to get our students safely back to school. The OSSA Board of Directors were all working behind the scenes with COSA to safely move through this challenge and keep the needs of our students in the forefront. While the process was very slow, and at times we likely felt that our voices were not heard, in the end we can see that we made it, and we survived. But now the time has come that we move past survival and get back to serving our students' needs and get back to thriving.

Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children's Defense Fund, in her important essay, "Standing up for Children" provided seven key suggestions to help leaders like us advocate for children, and as we move forward, they should serve as a guide for us as leaders.

- "Have a positive vision for our children and nation."

This is so true since the COVID-19 crisis has divided our country in more ways than anyone could imagine.

- "Believe we can serve all of our children and then do it. We can transform our nation's priorities if we truly believe we can."

I strongly believe that we must never give up insisting that our students be protected and given the opportunity to be educated at all cost; that is our first priority.

- "Have faith and act without ceasing."

Many have lost faith in our system, and it is our jobs as leaders and educators to help restore that faith and hope for the future.

- “Don’t be intimidated or silenced by budget experts or political spinsters.”

We have a great opportunity to use what we learned from this crisis to improve the system and advance education. We cannot afford to allow budgets or political agendas to derail our future potential and educational reform and improvement.

- “Be strong and courageous planting the seeds of hope and caring.”
- Recognize and honor the sacredness of each and every child.”

Oregon is working hard to provide “true equity” for every child in the state, and this work is vital to our future success.

- “Organize, mobilize, and hold our leaders accountable.”

We as educational leaders must step up and be dealers of hope and have the courage to realize that every single one of us can make a difference. We must hold ourselves and each other accountable to do this important work. We must make a difference and we must never give up, working tirelessly to provide equal opportunities for every student that we serve in our respective districts.



I challenge myself and each of you to put aside our personal and organizational egos for the greater good of saving our children and building them the future that they deserve. We must move past the survival stage caused by the pandemic crisis and move to the thriving stage. The OSSA is here as organization dedicated to support small school districts in this important quest, so please get involved. Together we can move to the next level of success.

I personally want to thank each of you for all that you do for the students that you serve. I want to thank COSA for their partnership and continued service to the OSSA. Lastly, I want to thank the OSSA Board of Directors who serve and provide the leadership that the organization needs and requires in order to be successful.

I wish you all the best as this most challenging school year comes to an end, and if there is anything that you need from the OSSA, please give me a call, and we will work to support you.

Sincerely,

R. Michael Carter

OSSA Executive Director

# Improving Children’s Mental Health in the Decline of COVID

*"In a 2020 survey of 1,000 parents around the country..., 71% of parents said the pandemic had taken a toll on their child’s mental health, and 69% said the pandemic was the worst thing to happen to their child” (Abramson, 2022).*

Sadly, though Abramson (2022) continues to report that the CDC found that approximately 20% of children continue to have mental health issues, only 20% of those receive mental health services. More and more of those children are having to access services through their own local education agencies. The pandemic has exposed inequities in childhood mental health access and funding - existing inequities that only deepened in the last two years. A 2020 report (Pearrow, et al.) found that children who needed school-based mental health services the most, most often those from lower SES homes, had access to fewer counselors and school psychologists in their school districts. We know as administrators from smaller districts and rural areas that this is often the case.

Oregon Department of Education has been the recipient of 2021 federal money (the American Rescue Plan Act The American Rescue Plan Act, passed in March 2021, included \$170 billion for school funding, which many schools are using to improve student access to mental health resources. ODE Senior Mental Health Officer, Dr. B Grace Bullock, will be at the conference speaking about ODE’s new pilot projects and plans for the future.

Preview: The project now has 3 goals that include:

1. Increasing mental health literacy in school communities. Working with the NW Mental Health Technology Transfer Center on building free, online resources and instruction.
2. Developing a micro-credential for school staff, administrators, and CBOs to support them in their mental health as well as equip them with skills, tools and resources to serve students and families.
3. Development of the Communicate Care Coordinator (CCC) positions and related PD, credentialing, and the pilot project.

## Important Mental Health Resources

American Psychological Association	<a href="https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-childrens-mental-health">https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-childrens-mental-health</a>	Children’s Mental Health is in Crisis	As pandemic stressors continue, kids’ mental health needs to be addressed in schools
National Alliance on Mental Illness - California (NAMICA)	<a href="https://namica.org/blog/impact-on-the-mental-health-of-students-during-covid-19/">https://namica.org/blog/impact-on-the-mental-health-of-students-during-covid-19/</a>	SCHOOL DURING THE PANDEMIC: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS ON STUDENTS	A collection of studies and surveys about the impact of COVID-related school changes on students’ mental health
American Psychological Association	<a href="https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2022/covid-psychological-fallout">https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2022/covid-psychological-fallout</a>	Psychological Fallout of COVID May Be With us for Years, APA CEO Says	Unresolved grief is just one piece of the pandemic’s widespread mental health fallout, a psychological second pandemic that needs to be addressed.

Abramson, A. (2022, January). Children’s mental health is in crisis. *Monitor on Psychology*, 53(1). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-childrens-mental-health>

Pearrow, M., Berkman, T., Walker, W., Gordon, K., Whitcomb, S., Scottron, B., Kurtz, K., Priest, A., & Hall, A. (2020). Behavioral health capacity of Massachusetts public school districts: Technical report. [https://www.umb.edu/birch/research\\_evaluation](https://www.umb.edu/birch/research_evaluation)

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# Oregon Small Schools Association

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