

Exceptional programs enrich students' experiences

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Despite tight budgets, Sisters students have some extraordinary opportunities in Sisters schools — thanks to community partnerships and dedicated volunteers.

The Sisters School Board heard about two of those programs at their Wednesday, June 1, meeting.

Students of “The Dead Programmers Society” (a play on The Dead Poets Society) offered up a presentation on their video game creation, which earned them a “Best Design” award — middle-school level — from the Oregon Games Project Challenge (OGPC) in April.

Ashton King (6th grade), Grey Louvar (5th grade), Taine Martin (5th grade), Ilya Goheen (5th grade), Conrad Irlan (4th grade), and Clayton Heuberger (5th grade) developed their game “World Traveler” over a period of six months so they could participate in the contest. World Traveler used the popular game Minecraft as a platform; the students re-wrote it in Java, also composing their own music for the game.

The team also configured a

router at Sisters Tech Space to allow for anyone, all over the world, to access and play the game.

The project took 214 hours to build.

“There’s a way of learning here that’s important,” said school board member Stephen King. “It’s not a teaching exercise.”

In this endeavor, the students set a goal, explored the means to achieve it, figuring things out themselves, with support from their coach, Tricia Louvar.

King urged his fellow board members to push for more support for the tech design program, pushing it down into the elementary school level.

“It’s almost like language training,” he said. “High school is too late.”

Sisters Folk Festival (SFF) is partnering with the school district to push arts and music education down into the elementary school level.

SFF Creative Director Brad Tisdel and elementary school artist-in-residence Karen Williams presented on the work students are doing through the Oregon Community Foundation Studio to School grant



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Arts and technology give students an extra boost in Sisters schools.

obtained by Sisters Folk Festival.

Williams works with all of the students on art projects, with an outlook that such work is not “art for arts sake” but as a vehicle for learning critical thinking, creativity, and student leadership as they take on and teach to others.

School board member Amanda Clark reported that her own children have come home enthusiastic about new concepts they have learned through the arts program.

The artist-in-residence program has been working on integrated arts curriculum in grades K-8.

The program has created

a signature art installation for the eastern entrance to Sisters.

During art classes at Sisters Elementary School (SES), artist-in-residence Laura Campbell worked alongside Williams with students in kindergarten through fourth grade developing a mural for the school’s fence along Highway 20.

Campbell herself came up through arts programs in Sisters schools, with support from Sisters Folk Festival, and has returned to the community to pursue her art and to educate students.


The mural is an extensive installation along the elementary school fence, depicting

riparian habitat, fish, and the landscape of Sisters. By immersing the children in their interest in painting their fish, the project integrated natural history and science along with the artistic endeavor.

Tisdel explained the nature of the five-year Studio to School grant and noted that “a lot of the implementation has been input from staff — this is what we want most.” And what staff wanted most was an art teacher on site at the elementary school.

Williams’ presence has clearly paid off, Tisdel says.

“The school is vibrant. The school is beautiful and it’s exciting.”






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