

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY

LGSD honors School Counselor Teresa Dowdy

By Trish Yerges

Few school counselors can say that they have been nationally recognized for their exemplary work as a professional school counselor, but that's true of the La Grande High School's Teresa Dowdy, who was one of three counselors in Oregon to win this national honor.

She was honored with the 2019-20 College Board Counselor Recognition Award during the National School Counseling Week, February 3-7. The award recognized Dowdy as an exemplary school counseling professional, who has proven to be a lifelong learner, collaborator, advocate, innovator and results-oriented counselor, committed to student success and opportunity.

Dowdy has been working for the La Grande School District for about 27 years, teaching journalism, business and yearbook, but also as a volleyball coach for years, and since 2007 as a counselor. LHS Principal Brett Baxter has worked with her for about 18 of those years.

"She is absolutely student centered," said Baxter. "I've always known her to be an outstanding

advocate for kids, creating programs that are highly valuable for them."

In the counseling role, Baxter observed how tenacious and unrelenting Dowdy has been in advocating for the students. "Behind closed doors she spends literally hours with kids who are having troubles or even to the extent where they may be in crisis," he said.

The mental health aspect has become such a big part of what counselors do every day and Dowdy has become a really reliable support to the students. In terms of academic guidance, she has been tracking their credits, helping them remain on track for graduation and making sure they get scholarships toward their next step of education.

Dowdy is the counselor for both the freshman and junior classes, about 350 students. She will follow them so that next year she'll have sophomores and seniors. Staying with the same students so she really knows them.

LHS Assistant Principal Brett Smith



Dowdy

also praised Dowdy's performance as a counselor. "Teresa is one of the key persons that makes the machine go," he said. "She has a great attention to detail and to doing

what's right for kids."

But Dowdy's impact at school goes beyond the student body. "She does our staff wellness and college career night, and she's the first one to hop in when a staff member has a loss or when we're doing a lunch or any kind of staff culture climate, making the school feel good," Smith said.

Dowdy is quick to volunteer, and she does that out of the goodness of her heart, he added.

"She has a gift for taking care of people, staff members," said Smith. "It has made her successful at the high school with what she's done. She has a huge heart and wants to help."

Dowdy has remains connected with the students through volleyball and in her office. "The kids know she will listen to them and help them with whatever they need," Smith added. "They also know that she

will hold them accountable, yet love them and do whatever she can for them. It's a really good gift that she's got."

One of her counseling colleagues, Chelsea Rohan, has known Dowdy for over 20 years.

"Teresa is an exceptionally hard worker," she said. "She spends many hours at school working for kids, families and fellow teachers, and she goes to lots of different conferences outside the walls of school to find helpful things for students at our school, ways to support them."

Her dedication to the kids and their families is a top priority. It's not unusual to find Dowdy working from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and at lots of evening activities and events at the school.

"She is a great advocate for people who maybe are marginalized in our world in some ways," said Rohan. "She really advocates for students, families and her colleagues when she feels they need someone in their corner."

Dowdy is a life-long learner and is constantly getting trained through reading and learning new methods and then utilizing those methods as a counselor at LHS.

Rohan said that Dowdy really cares about people, what happens to them and how she can help them.

Consequently, stepping into the role of Staff Wellness Coordinator comes as no surprise to her colleagues. "With the district's Wellness grant that they received last year, she's on the Wellness committee for the district and then also for LHS, she's the coordinator," said Rohan. "She has a lot of fun organizing events like our (current) weight loss challenge."

Though Dowdy is very modest about her recognition awards, Rohan said that she's also won a "Leadership in Counseling" award in 2018 through the Oregon School Counselor Association. In addition, she has won an award from the La Grande Chamber of Commerce for her amazing work of raising thousands of dollars for the LHS athletic department and their activities.

Dowdy's colleagues and other LHS staff find it a pleasure to work with her, and they share Smith's sentiments. "People like Teresa are invaluable and sometimes few and far between," he said. "She's awesome."