

Downs chosen as principal of Wilsonville High School

JENNIFER SITTON

From budget cutbacks to larger class sizes, things will look a different for the 2011-2012 school year. For Aaron Downs, assistant principal, next year represents a new beginning, as well as the end of a chapter in his life at WLHS that has lasted nearly 12 years.

After going through an application process that included submitting essays, appearing before interview committees and advancing through multiple rounds of selection, Downs was hired as principal at Wilsonville High School. He will replace Andy Sommer, who is retiring after working as principal for 11 years.

"I feel honored and humbled to have been chosen. I'm very excited, but I know it's going to be a big change," Downs said. The sentiment of change was echoed by Lou Bailey, principal.

"It's good news and bad news. It's good because he has aspired for his professional growth to become a high school principal," Bailey said. "But it's sad because he's a big part of our team here. He has made a lot of great relationships with kids and is a big part of our culture here."

Having graduated from WLHS in 1992, Downs has very strong ties to the building and the community. After

graduating from college with a teaching degree, he spent two and a half years in the business world before returning to WLHS as a substitute teacher. He was hired as a social studies teacher and basketball coach, and later became an instructional coordinator and

Before he was an assistant principal, Downs was a teacher, and he says some of his favorite memories are those from the classroom. One of those memories centers around a practical joke he and his students would play during fire drills. After the drill was

their classrooms wouldn't be infiltrated by random teachers and their students. Downs hopes to bring this sense of fun and lightheartedness to Wilsonville.

"They have an incredible community (at Wilsonville). I want to bring my support to our teachers and staff. But mostly I just want to bring myself. I like being a dork," Downs said. That sense of enjoyment may start to infiltrate WHS as soon as this spring. Downs says he plans on starting the transition early in the spring by being at WHS a few days a week, while slowly integrating himself into the school and the community. "Everyone has been very supportive and very encouraging of the transition," Downs said. "But it's not like I'm going to disappear. I'll still be around here, just not every minute of every day."

Downs plans to attend school events such as baseball games and choir performances as well as being present during the school day, something that the WLHS administration team supports.

"Anything he can do between now and June to start developing relationships over there and familiarizing himself with their culture will help him when he starts in September," Bailey said. "We will support him through this period of

transition, but he will have to juggle two roles for a while."

The administration team will also have to shift around roles and responsibilities in the coming year as they will not be filling the vacant assistant principal position, one of the many ways the district is attempting to cut down on spending.

It's undeniable that Downs has made a lasting impression on many WLHS students in his 12 years here. Students of every age have appreciated his down-to-earth personality as well as his approachableness and humor.

"I was really surprised to hear he was going to Wilsonville," Taylor Rose, senior, said. "I'm really happy for him, but he will be missed because he added a lot of great attributes to the school."

"I'm sad that he's leaving but I'm really happy for him," Jade Chang, senior class council member, said.

This is reflected in the legacy Downs hopes to leave.

"I want to be remembered as someone who built great relationships with everyone, as someone who like to have fun and cared about the kids," Downs said. "I'd like to thank everyone for all the years of support. I don't even really view this as a job. It's just a great place to be with great people."

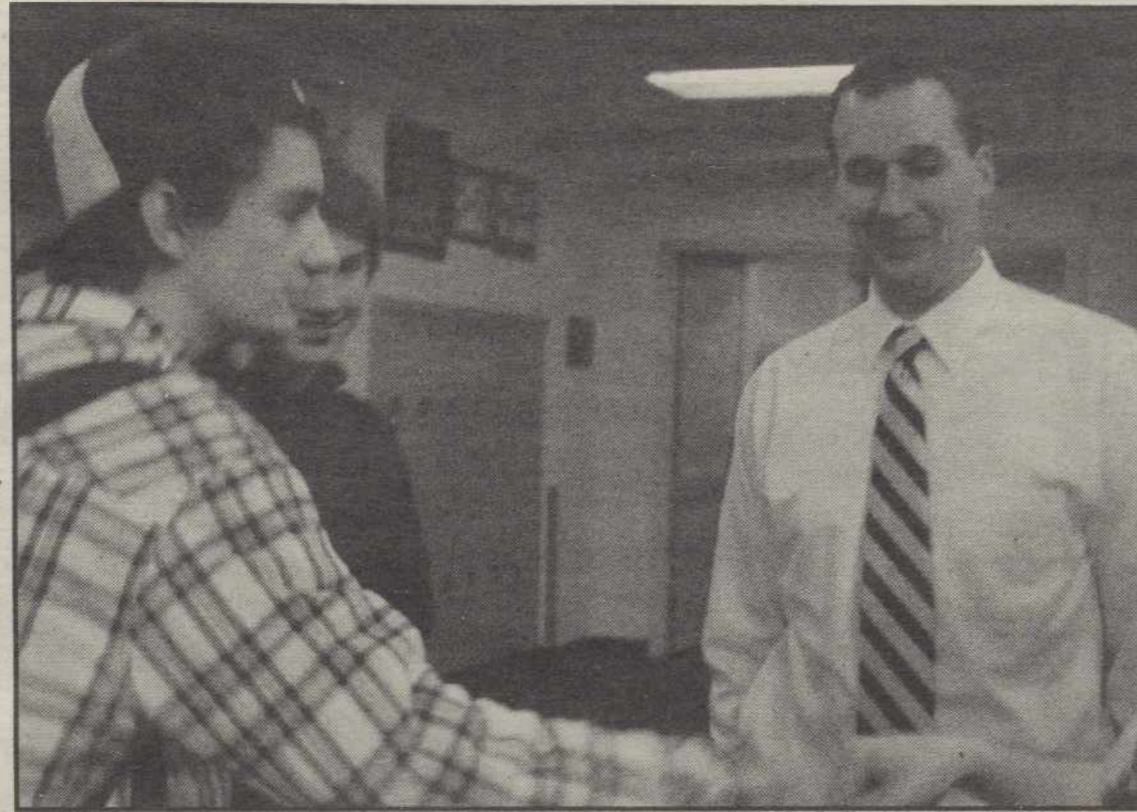


Photo by Laurel Massaro

Aaron Downs, assistant principal, bonds with students on 'A' porch during break. Downs was recently hired as Principal at Wilsonville High School, and says that he will miss the students at WLHS and the relationships he has made here.

eventually assistant principal. He said that while all of the positions have been quite different, they have all been beneficial to his development as an educator.

"I really appreciate all Lou (Bailey) has done for me," Downs said. "He has allowed me to have leadership opportunities that have helped me prepare for this job."

over, his class would rush back inside the school and settle into a random teacher's classroom. That teacher would return to find Downs in the middle of a lesson with his entire class seated, listening attentively, in his or her classroom. Soon, other teachers started to do the same thing so that eventually all the teachers would run back from fire drills so that

National Merit finalists take another step closer to scholarships

ALISON FIELDHOUSE

Scoring in the 99th percentile on the PSAT is difficult, but for three WLHS students, this was only the first step in a process that could lead to scholarship money for college. After being named National Merit Scholar semifinalists, Joshua Grelewicz, Samantha Ing and Sabrina Levy, seniors, began the application process that is similar to the college application process.

"We had to fill out an application to become a finalist," Levy said. "This included writing an essay, sending a transcript and SAT scores and having recommendations."

There are only 15,000 finalists, which includes the top 1 percent of students nationwide based on their PSAT scores and application. Selected from the pool of finalists, each could win a \$2,500 scholarship. Finalists can also name a college as their top choice to possibly receive more money from that school.

All three plan on attending college next year. Ing plans to either attend Wellesley or Portland State University for undergraduate studies and is undecided on whether

she wants to take a year off between high school and college. Levy and Grelewicz know they want to attend college right away, but are not sure where.

Grelewicz, Ing and Levy are strong students, each taking a bevy of advanced placement classes.

English, AP Environmental Science, AP Government, AP Psychology, AP Spanish and AP Physics.

It would be difficult for anyone to stay on top of their studies with so many AP courses, but each has their own special place for studying to ensure they do

favorite people to kick it with," Ing said.

Levy's and Grelewicz's study spots are closer to home.

"The best place to study is at my desk and for downtime, anywhere out in the sun is perfect," Levy said. Similarly, Grelewicz enjoys the comfort

been dancing ballet since she was in elementary school and Grelewicz is a member of the band, Top Hat Confederacy. Ing has some interesting hobbies of her own.

"I enjoy hollowing out hardcover books and practicing the violin," Ing said. She is also a member of the school's orchestra and enjoys listening to Ke\$ha in her spare time.

The trio members each have an inspirational person or motivation for the choices they make.

"Noam Chomsky (linguist). But in all seriousness, I don't look to any one person for inspiration—I try to garner a little piece of inspiration from everyone," Levy said.

According to Grelewicz he looks up to Confucius (Chinese philosopher) and William Blake (poet).

Ing had one specific person in mind.

"Justin Altemus is a huge role model for me because he reminds me of Ke\$ha in the way that he is unafraid of the h8ters. He once said 'seriously, they'll put this in an Amplifier article?' (NMS Finalists article in March 2010 issue) and I was so inspired, that I decided to study for the PSAT. I owe him all of my success," Ing said.



Photo graphics by Emily McNabb

Sabrina Levy, Samantha Ing and Josh Grelewicz, seniors, meditate in preparation for upcoming tests. After becoming National Merit Scholar Finalists, the three now have a chance to earn scholarship money for college. In order to qualify as finalists, they had to have scores in the top 1 percent of all seniors in the United States on the PSAT.

Grelewicz's schedule includes AP English, AP Statistics and AP physics, Ing takes AP Government, AP Spanish, AP Statistics and AP Environmental Science and Levy, with the heaviest schedule, is enrolled in six AP courses, including AP

not slip up.

"By far, the best place to study and have down time is the music building. The practice rooms give you isolation from other people and distractions, while just outside of the practice rooms are music kids, who are my

of his home.

"My desk is a good place or in the summer, my backyard," Grelewicz said.

Along with being strong students, they all have hobbies and extracurricular activities that they are passionate about. Levy has