

Vernonia Schools after the Flood: A Conversation with Ken Cox

Vernonia School District Superintendent Ken Cox was only in his second year on the job when all three of his school buildings were flooded last December. Now at the start of his third year in Vernonia, he is tasked with the responsibility of shepherding the community through the process of re-siting and rebuilding its schools, trying to keep families and staff from leaving the district, and continuing to provide a quality education for his students some of whom will be attending classes in modular classrooms. The following are excerpts from a conversation Vernonia's Voice had with Dr. Cox as he looks forward, backwards and sideways as he prepares to start the new school year.

"We won't know how many students we'll have registered until after school starts. We have heard some people are leaving. I personally know of two or three families that have moved into the community, new families. My guess is it will be about fifty students lost. We will give the school board a head count in mid-September. I don't think it's as bad as it could be."

"We're looking at getting a communication strategy set up to send things out and let the community know what's going on, let them know when we are moving forward."

"I think the Oregon Solutions process is going to benefit us in the long run. Anytime you get the strength and cross interactions from the agencies that are sitting around the table with Oregon Solutions, we can only benefit. We're all frustrated as a district and to some extent as a community because we are not going fast enough, but sometimes you just can't push any faster. We all need to be patient and understanding, especially with as big a project as we're trying to put together."

"Relocation of the schools is a school board decision. The Oregon Solutions process is only acting as advisors. I think the school board is supportive of the Oregon Solutions process. This is not a matter of them telling us what to do, but them helping us in making that decision and providing information."

"We have an excellent school board, and I would go on record with that anywhere. They work well together. They are understanding of their role of setting direction and vision for the district."

"When I was hired, the board was considering a bond for new schools. The flood has forced our hand. It has shown us that we don't want to build them in the current location, and that we do need to do something. And it has given us opportunities. We can get other input and other financial resources to address this, rather than put it all on the back of this community. This has been something that has been out there, something we've needed to do anyway. And now we have the opportunity to get statewide support to do what needs to be done."

"We have a unique opportunity to provide for the future of Vernonia. The school board and I are well aware that the future of this community lies in our hands. We need to come up with a viable option and sell it not just to this community but to the fund raising community as well, so we can be an example of resiliency after a flood and of looking to the future."

"The most important thing I would tell people is that our children are our future. We have to look to the future. We can do this but we have to stick together, we have to work together. We have a lot of problems, but we can accomplish it. I heard a quote recently, 'Luck is when preparation meets opportunity.' And we're looking for some luck, but we are also going to be prepared, and we're trying to find the opportunities to make this a reality."

VHS Fall Sports Schedule

Football (all games start at 7 PM)

9/5	Sheridan	Home	10/9	Neah-Kah-Nie	Away
9/12	Knappa	Away	10/17	Riverdale	Home
9/19	Nestucca	Away	10/24	Warrenton	Away
9/26	Portland Christian	Away	10/31	Ranier	Away
10/3	Clatskanie	Home			

Volleyball (JV starts at 5 PM, Varsity at 6 PM)

9/4	Gaston	Away	9/27	Columbia Christ.	Away
9/11	Clatskanie	Home	9/30	Ranier	Home
9/12	Columbia Christ.	Home	10/2	OES	Away
9/13	Damascus Tourn.	Away	10/7	Catlin Gabel	Home
9/16	Neah-Kah-Nie	Home	10/11	Clatskanie Tourn.	Away
9/18	Riverdale	Away	10/14	Clatskanie	Away
9/23	Warrenton	Away	10/16	Warrenton	Home
9/25	Portland Adv.	Home	10/23	NKN	Away

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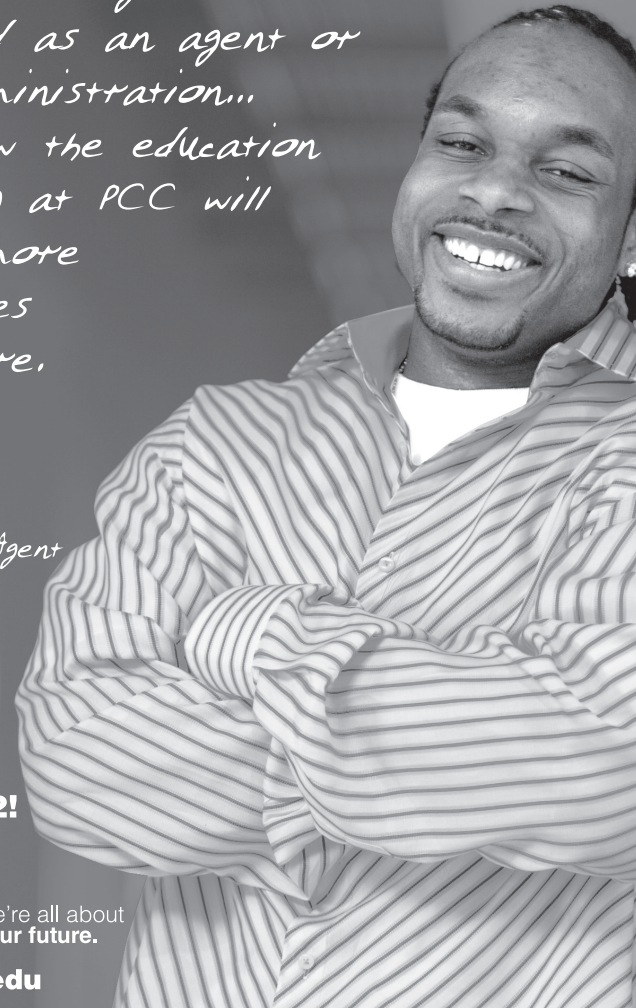


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