

Vernonia Elementary and 'Focus Schools' *continued from front page*

taken.

Title I is a federally funded program that provides extra money to schools or districts that have higher poverty levels. The program specifically provides extra funding for students who are identified as disadvantaged as well as students who are not performing well.

Miller says the old evaluation system did not provide a fair assessment. The new assessment formula is much more nuanced and is based on a combination of factors including student achievement, growth, and subgroup growth. It focuses more on individual student growth as well as growth among students in historically underserved subgroups, which includes economically disadvantaged students, students in special education programs, and students who don't speak English as a first language. "This helps level the playing field and looks at individual student's growth, which makes sense," says Miller.

Under the new assessment process VES students in the subgroups have not shown adequate progress. "In those subgroups our math and reading scores were lower," explains Miller. "So we had to figure out a way to address their needs better, as well as address the overall needs of all our students."

The Focus School identification for Vernonia lasts for four years. This school year, the second in the program, Vernonia received \$34,000 through the program. Miller says VES is using the funding for professional and skill development for teachers, and for materials to implement new programs. VES was also eligible to receive an additional \$40,000 this year and next year to implement an expanded reading program. "This was a mandate in which they actually gave us the funding to put it in place," said Miller.

VES teachers are using these expanded tools and resources to look at how VES assesses their students, how they analyze data, and then provide instruction so students meet their achievement goals. According to Miller, teachers have used Focus School specific workshops, as well as early dismissal Fridays to come together and share ideas and strategies, receive additional training and develop tasks to create desired progress.

Specifically VES instructors have developed a standards-based report card for students and developed a master schedule which provides daily

time for reading and math interventions. Teachers have also worked on how to prepare students specifically to perform well on state assessment tests as well as analyzing data about each specific student, including test scores, and attendance and behavior records, to identify students in need of additional services. According to Miller these focused steps have helped create a more consistent and cohesive program.

In addition, VES has developed an extensive Parent Volunteer Program, which puts parents in the classroom or working individually outside the classroom with students in need of extra help. This program supplements the Title I teacher and assistants who are already working to decrease gaps in learning. The expanding reading program also offers "Power Hour," an after school program with six assistants who work with groups of students. Miller says over sixty students had already signed up for this program.

"One of the things we've found, as we focus in on specific skills is that we also need to provide time for kids to practice and use those skills, by reading to adults and not just have direct instruction," says Miller. "We need to create a chance to work with an adult to provide those developmental assets that are so important for our kids."

For VES, the results of this additional funding and work by instructors, teaching assistants, volunteers, and staff has been significant. The ODE uses a somewhat complicated matrix to produce a report card for each school, scoring schools in three categories: Academic Achievement, Academic Growth and Subgroup Growth. In 2011-12 VES scored 30% on this report card, earning them an overall score of Level 2, (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being lowest and 5 highest). Along with this Level 2 ranking came the Focus School designation. In 2012-13, after just one year of additional funding, VES showed improvement in all three areas and had raised their score to 65% and an overall score of Level 3. A closer look at the report card shows that in Academic Achievement VES raised their score from 60% to 70%, in Academic Growth they raised their score from 20% to 70%, and in Subgroup Growth had raised their score from 20% to 50%.

"It very good data and shows that what we're doing has worked and we've made a difference," says Miller.

"But it's only one year. We have to be able to sustain it and maintain that growth."

Another telling statistic: when compared to all seventy-five Priority and Focus schools in Oregon, VES ranked 5th highest in scoring.

Miller explained that, under the old evaluation process, VES was classified as a 'Targeted Assisted Program' which meant the school assessed every single student and then identified and targeted those students with the greatest needs. Those targeted students were the only ones who could receive assistance from Title I professionals working in the school.

"We went through a process about four years ago to become a school-wide Title I school which allows us to serve all students. It was a very elaborate process, but now we are able to utilize our Title I dollars to help every single student."

Miller says that before Oregon switched to the new, growth model evaluation, Vernonia was judged, just like all other schools who receive Title I funding, by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), under the 'No Child Left Behind' program. According to Miller, under No Child Left Behind, there were targeted percentages of students who had to meet or exceed state test standards. "Every single year we met or exceeded AYP," says Miller. "There was never any indication that we weren't doing that well."

According to Miller ODE decided this really was not a fair way to assess students and spent several years to develop the new rating formula. "When they changed the system to look more at growth of individual students, that was where they saw deficiencies in our test scores and identified us as a Focus School," said Miller. "Until they came out with this new system, every single piece of data showed that we were doing what we were supposed to."

Although access to extra resources has played a big role in the improvements VES has experienced since becoming a Focus School, Miller also gives a lot of credit to the resolve of his teaching staff and their willingness to go the extra mile. Miller cited an example: This upcoming summer from June 23-27 every single VES teacher has volunteered to attend a weeklong teacher's conference in Portland. "The conference costs are paid for through our Focus School funding, but they are volunteering a week of their time," says Miller.

The conference will focus on overall general instruction and helping students grow, as well as a focus on reading instruction and using all the elements of teaching to be more effective.

"I really feel like our teachers have put in an incredible amount of work," says Miller. "The buy-in from staff has been a critical piece. They've really taken this to heart."

VHS Athletic Hall of Fame Induction

Vernonia High School will induct their first group to their newly created Athletic Hall of Fame.

The event will take place on Saturday April 19th at the Cedar Ridge Retreat and Conference Center and is open to the public. The event will start at 6:00 PM with a no host bar and social time. Dinner will be at 6:30 with the induction ceremony following. Tickets may be purchased at the door for \$15.00.

The first group to be inducted is:

- Gilbert Bergerson, 1928
- John (Gordy) Crowston, 1952
- Leonard Schmidlin, 1962
- Marvin Crowston, 1962
- Steven Hanson, 1970
- Patrick Curl, 1975
- Dean Bernardi, 1978
- Travis Gwin, 2005
- Joreigh Landers, 2007
- The 1976-77 Cross Country Team

Columbia Humane Society Featured Pet

"Sneakers"

Sneakers came to the shelter with our last California transport. She is a very sweet and very shy little girl that is going to need just that right special home. She seems to do well with other dogs and from what we have been told she does well with cats. She still needs to learn the value of sharing her things, but with a little time and patience and teaching she



will get that too. She is still a puppy at only 12 weeks old. She will need a home that is willing to train her and make her grow into the great dog she has the potential to be. Her adoption fee is \$250. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to call or email.

Web: www.columbiahumane.org
2084 Oregon Street
St. Helens, OR 97051

Phone: 503-397-4353
Email: animalwelfare@columbiahumane.org



at the Grange!
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All proceeds go toward P.E.O.'s ongoing commitment of providing scholarships to women.

**Friday
April 25th
9am-4pm
&
Saturday
April 26th
9am-3pm**