

# Schools Update: Where is Everybody?

By Katie Cook

It all started out with a conversation with a friend. The comments consisted of, "I think they made a bad decision," "I wish they would do it this way," "I wonder why they are doing it like that," "What are they thinking," "I am not voting for this person," "I think everyone should vote for that person," and "I've got to do something about this."

But then...they didn't show up to vote.

How often have you had a conversation with your friend, neighbor or family member about what is going on in the school district, community and country? How often have you stood on the corner of the street outside the post office and talked about what really

should be done in these areas? How often have you said, "If I had a chance to do something, this is how I would do it?"

So, let me ask you this. When was the last time you showed up at a school board meeting or city council meeting? Or maybe you are like me and show up to the meetings after the decisions have been made? I was like that. I had so much to say but did not "show up."

I lived in a huge school district before I moved to Vernonia. It was very difficult to get my voice heard or represented. Then I moved to Vernonia. After a while, I found myself approached by people on the corner of the street and in the store and within my home who had concerns about the school and community. I heard these voices and they sounded familiar to me because they sounded like my voice. So, I decided to run for school board and be on the "other side of the table." I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to make sure all voices were heard and

I was anxious to be a mediator of sorts.

When I showed up to the first meeting, I looked out at the empty chairs and thought, "Where is everybody?" The next month, after hearing even more conversation on the streets and in the school, I showed up to the school board meeting. I looked at the empty chairs and thought, "Where is everybody?" This has been the pattern ever since I joined the school board.


With further investigation, I discovered that many of the board members felt as I did. We all had the desire to hear the voices of the people. We all wanted to hear the public comments so that we could have the opportunity to make sound decisions for our district.

You can guess where I'm going here. We are inviting you to come share your voices. We want to hear your opinions and observations before the decisions are made. Because here is the truth - Our small board will make (and has made) decisions that seriously impact not only the school district but the

future of our community and our future leaders. What we implement impacts the direction of where our school and community heads.


Did you know, recently we have talked about weapons on school grounds, implementing new policies, how to work with home schoolers and online school students, transfer limits and opportunities, how the common core "Engage New York" is being implemented, and possible strategic plans to better serve our children, teachers and parents? This is only to mention a few of the items your school board is discussing.

Are these conversations you want to join? We invite you to come to the next school board meeting and share those same thoughts you share on the street and in the store. I hope that the next time I attend the school board meeting, I am able to hear what Horton the Elephant heard from the speck of dust on the clover, "We are here, we are here, we are here!"



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## School District Begins Strategic Planning

At the February 11, 2016 School Board meeting Vernonia School District Superintendent Aaron Miller provided the Board with a timeline for the upcoming Strategic Planning Process he has been discussing for several months.

The planning process will be led by consultant Kate Pattison, whose services are being provided by the Northwest Regional Education Service District (NWRES D).

Miller originally initiated the idea of a planning process with the

Board with the intention of retaining and increasing enrollment in the District by gathering input from staff, parents, board members, students, and the community at large.

In an outline of the project provided to the Board, Pattison stated that the process would include the gathering of feedback from stakeholders to understand areas for the District to focus efforts over the next three years. The process would identify ways to measure success and identify specific

outcomes. It would also provide multiple opportunities to provide feedback.

A timeline was presented to the Board which calls for surveys to be conducted for staff, students and parents, along with focus group meetings with school and district leaders in February. The timeline also calls for a work session with the Board at their March 10 meeting followed by focus group meetings with parents and other groups on Saturday, March 12 and April 2.

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