

Schools Update - School Building as a Model

By Aaron Miller

Since its completion the Vernonia Schools building has been a destination for school and architectural visits, and this year is no exception.

Last week Rainforth/Grau Architects and building administrators from the Folsom-Cordova Unified School District near Sacramento, California were here for a tour of the new building. This group, like others in the past, were looking at the overall design of the building, how its common spaces work together to meet the needs of K-12 students, and how its energy efficient features are utilized and operating.

These visits are very important to school districts who are considering building new facilities.

Looking at how other schools were designed and built helped shape the final version of the Vernonia Schools facility and the Vernonia School District (VSD) is happy to be able to return the favor to other schools looking to build for effective instructional space and efficient, energy-saving features.

In addition to visits looking at the building design, we have also had several classrooms come to visit our facilities, and work with our students on natural resource projects here in Vernonia.

For the second consecutive year 8th graders from Lakeside School in Seattle, Washington will spend a week here in Vernonia, learning about the history, flora and fauna of the area, as well as learning how our community is moving forward after two major

floods within 11 years. These students will work at helping Vernonia Elementary School students in the classroom, will hook up with Vernonia Middle School 8th graders for a class project, will help the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council in the field, and visit Stub Stewart State Park for a hike and nature tour.

Three years ago 8th graders from the Jane Goodall Environmental Middle School from Salem, Oregon came to participate in Salmon Watch activities with our 4th graders and kindergarten students.

Our new building was built for our students, but also to be a model for other rural schools. With each visitation and cooperative project that is completed we further realize these goals and aspirations.

School Board Report

At the September 8, 2016 School Board Meeting:

Public Comment – Jim Krahn addressed the Board and updated them on the School Bond Committee's work. Krahn told the Board that members of the Committee have begun meeting with organizations in the community to answer questions about the bond proposal. He said the Committee, in an attempt to make the cause more visible, is printing and distributing flyers and distributing yard signs. Also in the works are large banners, the continuation of the direct mail campaign and an advertising campaign in *Vernonia's Voice*.

Building Reports – Vernonia Elementary School (VES) Principal Aaron Miller told the Board that the Kindercamp program was a "huge success" with 21 of 31 incoming kindergarten students participating.

Miller reported that seven teachers and both principals attended two days of initial Focus School Professional Development training and then shared an overview of the training with other teachers. Module topics include: Formative Assessment as a Process, How to set Learning Goals and Success Criteria, How to Gather and Interpret Evidence, How to Respond to Evidence and Provide Feedback, and How to Involve Students through Peer Feedback and Self-Assessment.

Miller told the Board that the Mist Grade School Open House will be Wednesday, September 28 from 6:30-7:30 pm and the VES Open House will be held on Thursday, October 6 from 6:00-7:30 pm.

Miller reminded the Board that their Board Meeting on October

13 will be held at Mist School.

High School Principal Nate Underwood told the Board that several teachers will be participating in the Willamette Promise this year, as well as the NW Promise program offered by the Northwest Regional Education Service District. (NWRES D) Both programs allow students to earn college credit for work they do at the high school.

Underwood reported that the high school is beginning to implement the AVIS Program, a college and career readiness program that will be taught to freshmen by Teri Willard.

Underwood told the Board that Rachel Wilcoxon will continue as Dean of Students, David Suhrbur has been hired to teach high school science with David Spackman teaching high school physics, Michelle Eagleson will continue her Instructional Coach responsibilities and will take over the Title I Program, Reed Watson has been hired as the high school football coach, and the high school has 11 exchange students registered this year.

Underwood reported that the high school will focus this year on student attendance, limiting inappropriate use of cell phones, and the use of After School Detention instead of In School Suspension.

New Staff – Superintendent Aaron Miller announced the hiring of new first/second grade teacher Andrea Anderson who has a Bachelors and Masters Degree from George Fox University, and experience teaching at Banks Christian Academy. He also announced the new high school science teacher David Suhrbur, who

has a Bachelor of Science from the University of Illinois Chicago and a Masters Degree from Eastern Illinois University; the Board later approved this hire. Miller noted there are two Instructional Assistant positions currently open. He also introduced new first/second grade teacher Debbie Taylor.

Revised Fee Schedule – The Board approved a Revised Fee Schedule which included the addition of \$20.00 fee for the middle school shop/construction class.

Superintendent Report - Superintendent Aaron Miller provided the Board with a copy of a letter he sent to the ASSE International Student Exchange Program concerning their decision to not allow any students to be placed in the Vernonia School District this year who listed basketball as an interest on their application. (See full story on front page.)

Miller told the Board that neither OSAA or VSD Athletic Director Gordon Jarman have a problem waiving pay-to-play fees for the students of volunteer coaches.

Miller told the Board he expects enrollment to be down this year because the District had a large graduating class of seniors and a small incoming kindergarten class, but would wait until the October meeting to provide actual numbers.

Miller said that the District hosted the NWRES D in-service, which was very successful, with the only issue being parking for all the attendees.

Miller told the Board construction is progressing on the new baseball field and the completion of the softball field.

School District Responds to Exchange Student Sanctions

continued from front page

hooking up families and kids together that have similar interests," Miller told the Board. "If you have kids that play basketball it's much easier if your foreign exchange student does as well."

"...we are an exemplary program by your own declaration," said Miller in his letter. "Given our track record your discrimination against our program is even more unfathomable."

Miller noted in his letter that the VSD has welcomed and hosted many students over the years with interests other than basketball. "We as a school district are accepting of ALL students, whether they play sports, are outstanding students, are talented musicians, or are just an average student who is here for an experience abroad," states Miller. "By singling out basketball, you are discriminating against your students who have their placement choices limited by their interest, and you are discriminating against your students and our parents who have determined they are a good match for each other. We are playing by the rules, have officially demonstrated we are playing by the rules yet you have still levied sanctions against our program."

In his letter Miller tells McNallan the VSD is considering whether to continue its association with ASSE.

"We have played by the rules and will continue to do so," said Miller in his letter. "We ask that you reconsider your decision and allow students and host families in Vernonia to have the same opportunities as everyone else participating in your program."

Vernonia's Voice is published twice each month on the 1st and 3rd Thursday. Look for our next issue October 6.

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