

# Schools Update: Professional Development

By Aaron Miller

When parents and community members see Professional Development (PD) on the school calendar, they often wonder what it is that these teachers are doing while their students are at home. The fact of the matter is that on these days teachers are truly working to develop their professional skills to enhance what they are doing in the classroom to impact student learning.

Professional development can take many forms. Teachers often have opportunities to attend trainings and workshops outside of the district, they work on book studies where they are collaboratively working on a skill or program that is focused on within a given text, or they are planning lessons collaboratively to implement state standards and other effective instructional methods that they have learned during past professional development.

This year teachers in the Vernonia School District are working on two specific initiatives that are already bearing fruit in the classroom with their students.

Teachers at Vernonia Elementary, Mist Grade and Vernonia Middle Schools are working on the Oregon Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (OFAST) grant. OFAST provides funding for teachers' time to go through a 5-module course on improving formative assessment techniques. Teach-

ers are working hard to implement these strategies that really focus on providing strong feedback to students on their current level of performance, and the future progress needed to meet learning targets and success criteria on each lesson and unit of study. In addition to focusing on the effectiveness of the teacher's feedback to students, this grant is also training teachers to involve students more effectively in providing feedback to each other on their progress toward the success criteria of each lesson and unit.

Teachers at Vernonia High School are working on an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) grant. Through this work teachers are working to implement "proven instructional methodologies and content area best practices to improve outcomes for all students." AVID's intense curriculum is designed to create and foster a "college-going culture that increases the number of students who enroll and succeed in higher education and their lives beyond."

While OFAST and AVID are the primary focus of our professional development time this school year, there are always other initiatives and tasks that require teacher work time outside of their regular day with students.

Professional Development has been increasingly tougher the last two years as our budget has been cut and teachers voluntarily gave up some of this valuable time in order to increase the

number of student contact days in our calendar. The amount of time spent on PD has steadily decreased the last three years due to budget constraints, and this element of our work is definitely in need of more time.

Because planning, preparing, correcting and developing their professional skills are items that can't be done effectively when staff are working with students, most teachers work significantly longer each day than they are paid for. While teachers get paid for an 8-hour day, they very typically work at least 1 1/2 - 3 additional hours each day in order to take care of those additional

tasks. More PD time is needed, and a boost in our budget is a remedy that would provide even more contact hours with students, as well as more hours to collaborate and prepare so we can be as effective as possible when working with those students.

Next time there is a day off of school and you are wondering what those teachers are doing without their students, please know that they are continuing to work hard for them, just in a different way that will allow them to be even more effective at helping kids learn.

## "Project Based Learning" Class Makes Presentation *continued from page 9*

Pioneer Museum and the Vernonia Grange, Betsy Miller with the Vernonia Area Chamber of Commerce and the Friends of Stub Stewart State Park, Aaron Miller representing the Vernonia Lions Club, Dean Smith with the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District and the Vernonia Volunteer Ambulance

Association, and Bill Langmaid representing Vernonia Hands on Art, the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council and the Vernonia Education Foundation.

Grant applications are due in February and students will assess the applications and award grants before the end of the school year.

## Vernonia Students of the Month

### December 2016



**Nova Gleason** Grade 2

Nova is a very focused worker and a very willing helper in her classroom at school. She follows directions and is responsible, respectful and safe. Her favorite subject in school is math. She played soccer this summer. She also enjoys painting.

**Megan Zavales** Grade 6



Megan's teachers say she takes initiative with her work in school and is also very thorough. She is known as being kind and compassionate towards others and always has a great attitude. Megan says her favorite subject is math. She plays basketball on the Middle School team as well as a tournament team.

**Cassidy Whitton** Grade 12



Cassidy is very active in school. She played varsity volleyball and will play on the varsity softball team. She also does stats for the basketball team. She is the Vice President of the Student Body and is involved in the Project Based Learning Class. She was also involved with the Forestry Team in the past. She says her favorite subject is history. Next year she plans to dual enroll at OSU and Linn-Benton Community College to study Business, and then possibly go to law school.

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