

# Schools Update: Youth Reengagement Pilot Project

By Jamie Hamsa

This pandemic has been a challenging time, with one of the multitude of effects being students falling behind in academics. In October 2020, Vernonia School District (VSD) has responded to parent, student, and community concerns by pursuing specific funds and developing a response plan to address this issue through Oregon Department of Education's (ODE) Youth Development Division (YDD) Reengagement Opportunity Grant.

On December 10, it was announced that Vernonia School District was not only awarded \$120,000 for local efforts but an additional award as a partner with Northwest Oregon Works for \$290,000 towards a regional effort across Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, and Tillamook counties.

The Youth Reengagement Grant Pilot will serve youth age 14-21, who are three or more credits behind their perspective peers to reach academic success. ODE released funds January 4 and the pilot project duration will run until June 30. The pilot program will implement the evidence based program, Check & Connect.

Vernonia School District Superintendent Aaron Miller shared that "the grant will provide much needed supports for our students who are struggling with school, whether due to Distance Learning, or other issues. This will be a great resource for our staff working to return students back into our schools, and actively engage them in their learning and the development of their futures."

Check & Connect is a nationally-recognized program with proven success. Of the dropout prevention interventions reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, Check &

Connect is the only program found to have strong evidence of positive effects on staying in school. Check & Connect is a model of ongoing, systematic intervention and support to promote students' engagement at school and with learning.

All eligible students and their families will be invited to voluntarily participate in this opportunity. Check & Connect works with students by building a persistent, positive, and trusting relationship with students and their families to facilitate home-school collaboration.

Each student participating in Check & Connect is assigned a trained mentor from existing school staff that take on a unique, specialized role. Check & Connect mentors seek to build long-term, sustained relationships with participating students and families by providing weekly, individualized support for youth to reach their academic, career, and wellness goals.

The Youth Reengagement Pilot will build on existing programs, services, and resources within the home, school, and community to best connect youth to address targeted needs. Mentors will also assist in connecting youth, as needed, to social service agencies, career, trade, apprenticeship, and volunteer opportunities from businesses. Once enrolled, we will use a two pronged approach for reengagement and retention: remove barriers and incentivize participation.

Each mentor will work with students and families to identify barriers to access and engagement. These barriers could include: lack of transportation, technology needs, lack of money for food/clothing/rent/childcare, mental/physical health needs, employment, etc.

Student participants will also have access to incentive funds to recognize sustained participation and celebrate accomplishments of individualized

goals. Incentives will be aligned to student-identified areas of interest or motivation and will be designed to build positive associations with goal attainment and persistence.

An additional component of the program is going beyond forming positive, trusting relationships with adult mentors but also reducing isolation and increasing peer connection through building capacity to offer access to student tutors.

Students that have demonstrated academic success across differing grades and subjects of need, not enrolled in the Youth Reengagement Pilot, will have the opportunity to apply for a paid position. They can build their resume and receive necessary training to provide tutoring to students enrolled in the Reengagement Pilot.

The VSD is deeply committed to building a youth-centered program that is responsive to and reflective of the needs of our students and families within a short duration to inform continued efforts past June 30, 2021. To that end, we have designed a pilot program that will seek and elevate student and family voice as we work to develop, improve, and refine our sustainable program model. The program will employ an asset-based approach that honors the contributions and strengths of participants. Throughout our work, we will seek to remove barriers to access and engagement for students and families.

For more information to participate as a student or assist in efforts as a community member or local business, please contact Jamie Hamsa, Director of Social Emotional Health & Wellness, [jhamsa@vernoniak12.org](mailto:jhamsa@vernoniak12.org) or at (971) 248-5101 or Rachel Wilson, Vice-principal Vernonia Schools, [rwilson@vernoniak12.org](mailto:rwilson@vernoniak12.org) (503) 429-1383 or (503) 429-1333 x 1383.

## School Board Report

### At the January 14, 2021 School Board Meeting:

**Return to In-Person School** – Superintendent Aaron Miller told the Board that the District is continuing to plan for returning to in-person school on February 8 for K-2 students and for K-5 students at Mist School, but it will depend on the state metrics and the county numbers. He said once those first students are back, the rest of the elementary students would join them in two weeks, and then middle school and high school would return two weeks after that. He said middle and high school students would only attend in-person school for two days each week and would have three days at home. Masks and physical distancing will be required. Miller said he does expect a reduction to the state metrics to be announced at a January 19 meeting scheduled by Governor Kate

Brown, which should make it easier for students to return.

**Board Appoints to Fill Vacancy** – After interviewing and discussing two potential candidates, the Board voted to appoint Amy Cieloha to fill vacant position 3. Following the vote of the Board, Cieloha took the oath of office and took part as a Board member for the rest of the meeting. The term will expire June 30, 2021.

**Board Accepts Staff Resignations** – The Board accepted the resignation of high school social studies instructor Byron Brown, and graduation coach Dana Hyde, both effective June 30, 2021.

**School Board Recognition Month** – Superintendent Aaron Miller thanked the members of the School Board and recognized their service to the community and School District, as January is

School Board Recognition Month.

**Student Presentations** – JoLee Graham, Lorrie Shipley, Makenlee Espinoza from Mist Grade School shared information about their Native American studies.

**Public Comment** – Juliette Safier, President of the Teachers Union, asked that when the District, Board, and community talk about students starting school back in the building that it is not referred to as "back to school." Safier noted that students and teachers are already in school and have been work-

ing very hard since beginning to attend school virtually.

Vernonia School Board Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 11, at 6:00 pm. Please check the District's website for updates/changes: [www.vernonia.k12.or.us](http://www.vernonia.k12.or.us)

### FOR TOWING EMERGENCIES IN AND AROUND THE VERNONIA AREA

*Make sure you request service from a local provider!*

Police and County personnel are required to use a rotation of available providers, **UNLESS YOU SPECIFICALLY ASK** for a service by name.

REQUEST TOWING SERVICE FROM



**(503) 429-9797**

*Annoying the Upper Nahalem Valley since 1982*

**TOO BUSY?**  
Call your LOCAL bookkeeper

**PAYROLL PLUS LLC**

**Edi Sheldon 503-429-1819**  
[edisheldon@gmail.com](mailto:edisheldon@gmail.com)

Licensed tax consultant • Full service payroll  
Personal & small business bookkeeping • QuickBooks assistance  
CORPS, S-CORPS, LLC, Partnerships • Personal one-on-one service

LTC #29629 - Oregon licensed tax consultant  
RTRP #P00448199 - designated as a registered tax return preparer by the Internal Revenue Service

The IRS does not endorse any particular individual tax return preparer.  
For more information on tax return preparers, go to [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

**BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A**  
*True Value*

**BE PREPARED FOR WINTER**

- chains • antifreeze • winter tires mounted & balanced
- wipers • kerosene • flashlights • boots
- batteries • lamp oil • gas cans • candles • propane

Family owned & operated for over 50 years

834 Bridge St., Vernonia  
(503) 429-6364