

Schools Update: Summer Activities

By Superintendent Jim Helmen

I am excited to be writing my first *Vernonia's Voice* column. I want to thank everyone in the community for being so welcoming. There are a few events that I want to highlight.

Our principals and staff have worked hard to develop summer learning opportunities for our K-12 students.

A little background on summer learning grants funds: in 2022, the Oregon legislature appropriated \$100 million for summer learning programs for Oregon schools focused on high school students and enrichment programs for K-8 students.

With Vernonia Schools' summer learning grant funds we will

be providing the following activities for K-12 students:

- Aug. 1-4 – Volleyball Skills Camp
- Aug. 8-26 – Special Education Summer School/ Extended School Year Services
- Aug. 8-18 – High School Credit Recovery/9th-grade On-track program
- Aug. 8-12 – Nature Art Creative Writing - Graphic Novels Football/ Track Clinic Legos and Engineering Math is Fun
- Aug. 8-11 – Art & Juggling 1
- Aug. 8-19 – (M-F) Kinder Camp
- Aug. 15-18 – Art & Juggling 2
- Aug. 15-19 – Creative Chemistry
- Aug. 15-24 – Credit Recovery 2
- Aug. 22-24 – AVID/Boot Camp

Summer Learning Details

ALL Summer Learning information, such as activity times and dates, grade levels for each activity, location of events, staff assigned, and ACTIVITY PARTS SIGN-UP FORMS, will be located on the district website under the heading "SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM-2022"

2022 Summer Lunch Program

We want to remind everyone of our Summer Meals Program hosted by Vernonia Schools.

We have FREE meals daily for every student ages 1-18 and adult meals for \$4.50!

LOCATION: Vernonia Schools Commons area

DATES: June 27 - August 19,

Monday -Friday

TIME: 11 am - 12:30 pm

We have a fantastic summer school staff that is excited to serve you. We hope to see you soon.

Please visit <https://www.vernonia.k12.or.us/foodservice> to see our Summer Meals Menu.

Our summer lunch program team is working extremely hard to ensure all our community children have access to free nutritious meals and fun activities for ALL. We understand that the current location at the school may be a barrier for families, so the summer program is currently working with the Oregon Department of Education to find alternatives to adding another Summer Meals location. We will keep everyone posted as this process develops.

Vernonia Schools Website

I encourage everyone to visit our District website for ALL school information (www.vernoniak12.org). We are updating the website daily to better support easy access to District information. If you have any questions or need help, please contact Barb Carr at bcarr@vernoniak12.org.

I want to send an open invitation to community members and students to email, call, or set a meeting with me.

Go, Logger Nation!

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School Board Report

At the July 14, 2022 School Board Meeting:

Superintendent Report – Superintendent Jim Helmen attended his first official meeting since starting in his new position. Helmen updated the Board on summer activities around the District.

Pelster Elected Board Chair, Wagner Elected Vice Chair – The Board voted to elect Stacey Pelster as Chair of the School Board and Susan Wagner as Vice Chair.

Board Approves Substitute Teacher Pay – The Board approved Licensed Substitute Teacher Pay at \$201.01 per day.

Board Approves Board Meeting Schedule – The Board approved the Board meeting schedule for the 2022-23 school year. The Board will continue to meet at 6:00 pm on

the second Thursday of the month. Meetings will be held in the Schools Library, except for the October and April meetings, which will be held at the Mist School. The Board also scheduled a workshop for Thursday, September 29 from 5:00-9:00 pm.

Board Accepts Staff Resignations – The Board voted to accept the resignation of VHS math instructor Robin Manning, and VES 2nd grade teacher Taylor Obley.

Board Makes Superintendent Advisory Assignments – The Board approved the following volunteer advisory committee assignments:

- Safety Committee – Susan Wagner
- Talented and Gifted Committee – Susan Wagner, Joanie Jones, Amy Cieloha
- Policy Review Committee – Amy Cieloha,

Javoss, Susan Wagner
Curriculum Committee – Joanie Jones, Javoss McGuire

The Board also approved the following Board Assignments:

- Negotiations Team for Classified & Licensed Union Groups – Stacey Pelster, Susan Wagner, Greg Kintz, Javoss McGuire
- Scholarship Committee – Javoss McGuire, Scott Rickard, Greg Kintz

Board Approves District Designations – The Board designated the following: District Chief Administrative & Budget Officer/Clerk, Custodian of Funds, and Representative of Federal/State Fund & Grant Applications – James Helmen; Depository of Funds – US Bank & Government Pool; District Auditors – Pauly, Rogers & Co.

P.C.; Insurance Agent of Record – Brown & Brown Northwest; Attorney of Record – Garrett, Hemann, Robertson, Jennings, Comstock & Trethewey, P.C.; Newspaper of Record – *Vernonia's Voice*.

Board Chair Thanks Students for Volunteer Help – Board Chair Stacey Pelster thanked high school students who volunteered during the 4th of July Great American Bash event. "It was awesome!" said Pelster. "They were down there participating, they were respectful and responsible, they helped clean up. They did a fantastic job."

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

"It's All About Culture" *continued from front page*

to Lock-down, Lock-out, and evacuation and ensuring our systems are solid. I am currently working with the School Board and administration on planning safety training – we want to ensure we are ready when it is time to respond to any emergency. We are currently investigating getting school shooter training for all staff members in our District. We will be meeting with the local police department and County Sheriff's department to begin planning for this training. We hope to get this training for our staff before school starts and provide ongoing training options throughout the school year. We will also work with our local city government, transportation department, and fire/rescue to review our current crisis management plan."

VV: Teachers and public school systems across the country have been targeted and accused of indoctrinating students with a liberal agenda. There are also questions about Critical Race Theory, the "Don't Say Gay" law in Florida, the banning of political symbols in the Newberg School District, and other controversial political issues being taught or discussed in schools. How would you respond to those concerns?

JH: "We will be focusing on educating our students to meet and exceed the state of Oregon educational standards identified through the common core state standards and developing high-quality students that can meet the demands of this world, and what pathway they choose, once they graduate from high school. There is an expectation across the board for everyone that we will be teaching to a high level of rigor and following the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) guidelines and recommendations for how to do that.

Anything outside of that and how we educate our kids – that is going to be decided by the School Board and educational community."

VV: Coming out of COVID it feels like there is a morale problem across the teach-

ing profession – teaching through COVID was hard. How can you try to address this moving forward?

JH: "My take on COVID is it was tough on everyone. But, one thing I believe is tough times make tough people – this includes our students, staff, and families. You learn a lot about yourself when you are taken out of your comfort zone.

I think it is impossible for morale not to be impacted when you go through what everyone did with the COVID Pandemic. We need to make sure that we are being very intentional about communication and developing consistent and supportive systems for staff. Paying attention to staff's wellness and mental health is very important, and it directly impacts our students. Teachers and staff have an enormous responsibility in educating kids, especially coming out of COVID – they need tools and supportive systems to ensure they can do that.

As we are evaluating our systems, behavior support needs are continuously coming to the forefront of district-wide needs – this priority is not unique to Vernonia. One of the tools identified for supporting elementary behavioral needs is training opportunities for staff and skills building. To increase training and support options for staff and students, Dr. Jen Cooper, a trained clinical psychologist with significant experience in working with adolescent behavior, has been hired. Dr. Cooper is also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army National Guard as a med unit psychologist, so she brings a wide array of skills to support our students and staff. Dr. Cooper will work closely with Jaime Hamsa, School Wellness Director, and Rachel Wilson, K-12 Assistant Principal, to identify and support students with social-emotional health needs and develop school readiness skills for grades K-12. We do not want to be reactive to behavior problems, but proactive in our student support and staff training."

VV: What other priorities are you working

on?

JH: "We are currently looking at school Smarter Balanced, graduation percentages, On-Track to Graduate 9th graders, attendance, and behavior data to determine and develop a baseline on how our students are performing. We are also evaluating our ODE grants and are beginning the process of evaluating how these funds are supporting our students. To reach our goals set by the School Board and the state of Oregon, we have to know where we are at right now.

There are a couple of professional development areas we will focus on immediately. One of those is 'Depth of Knowledge (DOK).' DOK is simply identifying what level of rigor and critical thinking our students are required to perform in the classroom daily. We want to ensure that we provide teachers the training they need to continuously challenge students in every academic area. I strongly believe that how intentional we are with our classroom planning related to standards and rigor, the more engaged kids are in the classroom and the fewer behavior issues we may see. We have a fantastic administration, teachers, and staff, so this should be an easy lift for everyone.

In early August, our administrative staff will be developing a yearly professional development calendar focused on training all staff around effective instructional practices, behavior management strategies, and student social-emotional learning training. I am very excited to get this underway.

We have a significant focus on developing a district-wide continuous improvement plan focused on goals related to instructional practices, socio-emotional learning, and career and technical education (CTE). Through direction from the Board and input from staff and the community, structuring a three-year 'Continuous Improvement Plan', is very exciting.

Most importantly, we're making sure that our systems and expectations for ad-

ministrators, teachers, students, and community members, and exactly what we're doing daily, are clearly communicated, even over-communicated, and that everybody is on the same page.

To build a positive and productive school culture, everyone needs to know what is expected of them, and it's consistently supported and reinforced.

I am very thankful and appreciative of the warm welcome from the Vernonia and Mist staff and community. I hope everyone knows and becomes a leader in our District goals as they relate to success in all parts of District achievement – in the classroom, in the hallway, on the sports fields, in the community, at fine arts events – everywhere. When we say Logger Nation, everyone will know what that means! So, I am very excited about what we will accomplish this school year."

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