

Equity report presented to board

By Trisha Walker
Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER — Hood River County School District Superintendent Rich Polkinghorn and department heads Catherine Dalbey, Bill Newton, Anne Carloss and Patricia Ortega-Cooper presented an update on the district's equity plan at the May 26 board meeting.

The update was a way to illustrate to the board "how equity is woven through all different aspects of our organization," Polkinghorn said. "When we talk about equity, equity really is what happens when student outcomes are no longer predictable by any social, cultural, educational need or economic factor," he told the board. "That really requires us to get every child what they need to develop fully to their academic and social potential. That requires us then to really look at data and outcomes and be analytical in terms of our approach to our work and identifying practices that are leading to inequity and addressing those."

"Sometimes those practices are hard to see and we have to do a lot of self-reflection and examine our biases and create conditions for students to be successful that maybe weren't there previously," he said. "That allows us then to discover and see the gifts that each child brings to our schools and to honor those gifts that they bring."

Polkinghorn said that while equality is about sameness — giving everyone the same thing — equity is about fairness — making sure everyone gets access to the same opportunities.

"We must ensure equity before we can enjoy equality," he said.

The board of directors adopted Policy JBB in 2017, which aimed to eliminate "historically predictable achievement disparities."

Dalbey, human resources director, said the goal of her department is for district staff to mirror the diversity and makeup of its students. "That's also called out in

the equity policy that the board has adopted," she said. "The quote from the policy is, 'Hire the very best candidates in all positions that reflect the diversity of the community that we serve.'"

"... We're really focusing on recruitment and retention; we want to make sure our kids have the best of the best. They deserve that," Dalbey said. "And with that is making sure we're checking our biases at the door as far as hiring practices. We all have our own individual cultures, our own individual backgrounds, and I think people kind of gravitate towards sameness ... but we don't want a team of the same. We want divergent thinking, we want people that have different perspectives, we want to make sure that we eliminate that bias when we're trying to make hiring decisions ..."

Once staff is recruited and hired, then the job becomes retention — and to support staff. On that end, the district has a wellness group and affinity groups.

"People do not come to the district to work in a job," she said. "It's really a lifestyle, a commitment — there's a real reason why we do what we do and we cannot do the work of the school district without every person and position that we have."

Newton, curriculum and instruction director, said his department is focused on helping teachers meet the needs of diverse learners. One example is the dual language program at Mid Valley Elementary, which is expanding in the fall with grades K-1.

"We know research shows dual language is most impactful way for students to learn a first and second language, and we know academically our students achieve at greater speeds when they're first learning their native language before they transition to their second language," Newton said.

The AVID program — Advancement Via Individual Determination, an elective college prep class for intended to close the achievement gap — is another example.

The program has expanded to include middle and high school students, as well as at Cascade Locks this year. Staff is looking for ways to expand the program to other elementary schools in the future.

Carloss, student services department, began her presentation by saying, "I know you've heard this before, but I'm going to say it again: We believe that kids do well if they can, not if they want to ... We also say that the kids who are struggling the most are trying the hardest. Because if you could do it, you would do it. If you knew how to read, you'd read."

"We are totally committed to equitable practices in order to identify the kids who need extra supports," she said, noting that using data to guide decision-making means the results are more equitable for all students.

"One of the things we are constantly looking to do in our school system is, the kids who kind of rise to the top of ten on the behavioral/social/emotional side are the kids who are externalizing behavior," she said. "... But we're also very concerned about the internalizers. We're trying to develop a refined systems that are equitable to look at the kids who might get lost in the school district ... We're looking at the attendance, behavior and academics because research will show you that if you have, even by third grade, having poor attendance, poor academics and one behavioral incident, your likelihood of dropping out of high school becomes exponentially higher."

One positive outcome of COVID has been the acknowledgment that SEL — Social Emotional Learning — is important. "We understand in our department that if you cannot regulate your body and your brain, you cannot access your cortex to learn," she said.

Ortega-Cooper, equity and family partnerships, said her department facilitates opportunities for people to gather.

"Not to create comfortable spaces — we have been comfortable for too long, that's

why I think we haven't made progress," she said. "We facilitate opportunities for us to get real, to learn how we act in the skin we're in and to have difficult conversations ... In Hood River, we are changing that conversation. I'm very proud of our administrators as well as teachers because we're talking about rigorous classes, we're talking about how to create access for students who have the potential but they need this specific support — they don't need the same."

"... I know you're going to get a lot of criticism because of our stand but I want to urge you, stand with us because we are committed to ensure that Hood River is highlighted because we're getting to the point of providing 'excellence for every student every day,'" the district's motto, she said.

Polkinghorn acknowledged there is more work to do and the work never ends. He also recognized that some will find the work controversial.

"We can open doors for students and put them in more honors and AP classes, but if the conditions in that classroom aren't created in a way for the students not just to feel welcomed but to be welcomed and be included, that's not going to be a successful model," he said.

"We stand behind the work, we stand behind addressing the needs of every single student in our school district systematically, student by student, so all of our students are successful. I'm don't know anyone who can criticize that work because that's the right work to be doing, ensuring success for all of our students," he said.

"Equity is not a thing that we do in our school district, and I've said this before — it's not a thing that we do, it's how we do our thing," he said. "It's interwoven into every aspect of our work. So we're going to continue to do that work because we believe in the work ... absolutely we have work to do. We're committed to doing it."

D 21 expects to welcome back students full time

By Kelsie Cowart
Columbia Gorge News

THE DALLES — North Wasco County School District 21 is planning full time, in person instruction for the upcoming 2021-22 school year.

"Planning for next year, we are planning on welcoming students back full time for regular, in person instruction," said Interim-Superintendent Theresa Peters. The Oregon Department of Education is gathering input from around the state and is scheduled to release final guidance at the "Ready School Safe Learners Forum" on July 22, Peters said. The Board of Directors discussed plans for the upcoming 2021-22 school year at their regular meeting May 27.

According to Oregon.gov, Ready School Safe Learners is a "framework for schools ... that ensures the health and safety of all students and staff and the families they return to each day," put together by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) in coordination with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). It is the guidance that District 21 has been following for the entirety of the 2020-21 school year.

A scheduled session for school superintendents was planned June 1, to preview what is being looked at in regard to plans for full-time reopening and provide for input.

The district also reported that for the remaining weeks of the school year, mask requirements were to continue unchanged. Due to a clarification from the Department of Education, District 21 was given the option to adjust their mask requirements for vaccinated individuals (student's, staff, and spectators) but would be required to follow requirements such as OHA's vaccination

documentation verification, and administration staff decided to continue set mask requirements, with "mask breaks," as they have since the beginning of the year.

Other business included recognizing the high school's current AP Scholars, it's cheerleaders for winning state championships, Track and Field athletes for their participation and victories at the Wilsonville High School invitational. The board also took the time to recognize both new and retiring staff.

Meeting action items included the unanimous passing of Resolution 20-21-15, a resolution requesting a transfer of appropriation, moving \$204,000 of unused, authorized funds from the Student Investment Account into Federal Programs [grant] to cover part of the required 25 percent of the ESSR III fund, going towards Summer School and Enrichment Programs.

A request to approve authorization to negotiate and approve a Guaranteed Maximum Price contract with Griffin Construction LLC for the Kurtz Gym Seismic Rehabilitation Grant Capital project, as well as the motion to add two additional projects of replacing windows on the north side of the gym and repairing the gym's heating system (neither of which were a part of the original seismic grant project), was also unanimously approved.

Other action items included approving the 2021-22 School Board meeting calendar, as well as adding a clarification statement to May 4 Budget Committee Meeting Minutes, clarifying the budget committee's request for additional information regarding FTE for a Communication Specialist position in the proposed budget document.



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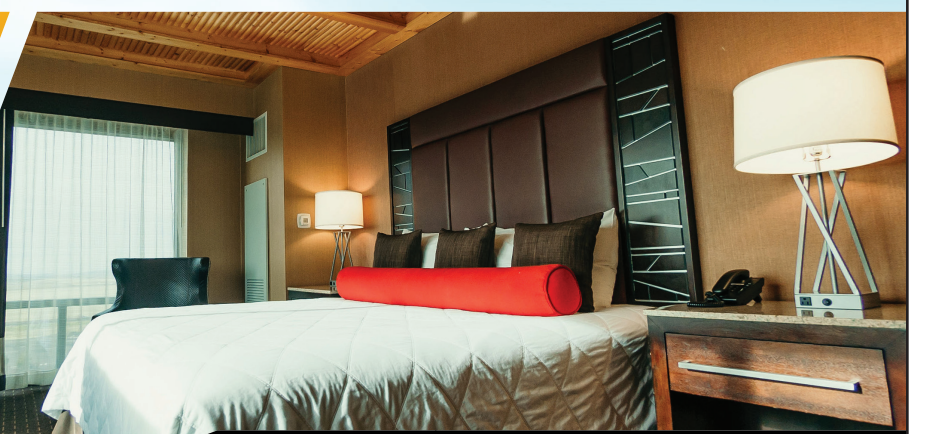
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