

Local student arts programs funded through donations

By Jacob Bertram
Columbia Gorge News

Four arts programs at smaller schools in Klickitat County were the recent recipients of donations from the Northshore Community Foundation.

Wishram, Lyle, Centerville and Klickitat schools were awarded \$552.50 each last month to support their budding arts programs through the local arts sponsorship program, whose board decided in April to allocate donations received from the Arts & Fusion event from 2019 to support young local artists.

Tammara Toppel, Northshore Community Foundation executive director said it was "extremely gratifying to be able to deliver these checks and to hear the excitement from both teachers and students. I learned how our \$552.50 per school would provide creative growth experiences for children in my county and felt an array of emotions that came with the understanding of the impact."

Established in 2016 and operated by the Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce, the Northshore Community Foundation was created to foster awareness and innovation in Art, Agriculture, Education, Health and Sustainable Economy among our residents by providing grants, scholarships, educational programs and events which feature and focus on these aspects.

"Teaching Art is a passion, and being able to carry out this important work is very important to me," said Kristen Ringer, the secondary arts, and fourth- and fifth-grade teacher at Wishram High and Elementary School. "These funds will help us continue to increase the depth of our Arts program, and this donation is greatly appreciated."

At Wishram school, the



In-house artist and paraeducator Jenn Armstrong poses for a group photo with ASB officers Carson Berdahl, Matt Gray, Layne Bruhn, and Evan Riley, as well as principal Kristin Cameron and Northshore Community Foundation executive director Tammara Toppel. Contributed photo

arts program serves secondary students, and with the funding received, Ringer said she plans to use it to offset the cost of a kiln. With the kiln, she said she'll be able to enhance her students' learning experience and inspire them to continue learning about art.

Donations from community partners are essential to small school districts, and can help us expand our course offerings," Wishram Superintendent Mike Roberts said. "In rural and remote settings, our students face a significant opportunity gap that only the school can combat!"

Klickitat School likewise

will invest in a kiln, said Superintendent Brian Freeman, with the donation helping to offset the cost.

"We appreciate the community support providing more opportunities for our students to participate in the Arts," Freeman said.

Asked about a big dream idea for further investment in the school's art program future, Freeman replied that the district would be interested in investing in a photo lab, where "we could learn to develop film and have a Photography Lab Class."

Likewise, Lyle School District officials said the funding will be used to repair the kiln located at the school,

and invest in multiple art supplies, construction and watercolor papers as well as printmaking and fiber art supplies. They also intend to publish comics that the students have been working on this spring, said Dallesport Elementary School Principal Lori Smith.

"This generous support from the community allows us to expand arts opportunities and experiences for our students, adding immeasurable value and pleasure to their lives. Ultimately, it means our students can dream a little bigger," Smith said.

At Centerville School in central Klickitat County, Principal Kristin Cameron

said the funds would be used for their yearly "Artist In Residence" art program, which normally sees a guest artist arrive and teach art activities to students. This year, due to COVID restrictions, Cameron said the program has been modified to include in-house artist and paraeducator Jenn Armstrong to provide students with art experience. Using a butterfly theme, students have recently been involved making flying origami butterflies with the help of Armstrong.

"We will fly our butterflies at our School Picnic on June 2. She will then work with students and complete a mural on our boiler room

wall; the wall that kids use at recess for wall-ball and such. Each student will have their own, personalized butterfly on the wall," Cameron said.

A major hurdle for schools, like many, is funding. At least two of the districts, including Lyle and Centerville, have noted that their annual budget for art activities are range from \$2-300 a year, making the donations granted to the districts higher than what their budgets normally allot to the programs.

"This funding helps us tackle the next rung of our whole school vision to reincorporate the Arts into our students' daily lives," Roberts said.

Legislature OKs \$9.3 billion for schools after partisan debate

By Peter Wong
Oregon Capital Bureau

A two-year, \$9.3 billion budget for state aid to public schools is on its way to Gov. Kate Brown after a partisan fight in the Oregon House.

The House passed the budget on a 36-20 vote, majority Democrats for and minority Republicans against, after Republicans failed to send it back to the Legislature's joint budget committee to add \$300 million for the two years starting July 1.

The extra money, and more, is likely to materialize anyway in a couple of months. The state's latest economic and revenue forecast, presented May 19, projects \$664 million in excess corporate income tax collections — which under a 2012 ballot measure go into the state school fund. The third-quarter forecast, scheduled for Sept. 22, will yield the actual number.

The Senate approved the budget, 23-6, on May 25.

The excess collections, known as the "kicker," were not mentioned during the House debate.

The \$9.3 billion in state funds will be combined with a projected \$4.6 billion in local property taxes for 197 school districts. The ratio is the reverse of what it was before Oregon voters approved a series of statewide property tax limits in the 1990s and shifted the burden of school operating costs from property taxpayers to state income taxes, which account for more than 90 percent of the state general fund. (The school fund also gets Oregon Lottery proceeds and marijuana sales taxes. Some money from Oregon's new corporate activity tax, which lawmakers passed in 2019 and started in 2020, also is included.)

Only the budgets of the Oregon Health Authority and the Department of Human

Services, both of which get federal grants, are larger.

GOP: More money

Brown originally proposed \$9.1 billion in her 2021-23 budget, which she unveiled Dec. 1, a slight increase from \$9 billion in the current two-year cycle that ends June 30. She proposed to tap \$200 million from the state's education reserve, which lawmakers had already withdrawn \$400 million from last year to balance the budget during the coronavirus pandemic. But since then, the overall budget picture has improved because of increased projections of tax collections from two subsequent economic and revenue forecasts, some savings from budget cuts, and \$2.6 billion in federal aid from President Joe Biden's pandemic recovery plan.

Seven Republican representatives, including

Minority Leader Christine Drazan of Canby, said the aid budget should reflect the \$9.6 billion advocated by the Oregon School Boards Association. "As we ask our schools to bring kids back to have full in-person learning five days a week, they are going to be bombarded with unknowns," Drazan said. "The need for them to have the resources necessary to create an environment where these kids can be successful cannot be overstated."

Rep. Greg Smith, a Republican from Heppner who sits on the budget committee, said boosting the amount would be a true bipartisan gesture in an often-fractured House.

The May 14 vote of the full budget committee was 21-1. Sen. Chuck Thomsen, R-Hood River, was the lone dissenter, and also opposed it May 25 when it came up in the full Senate. One Republican was excused

from the committee vote.

The motion to send the budget back to committee failed with two Democrats — Mark Meek of Oregon City and Marty Wilde of Eugene — joining 20 Republicans.

Earlier in the day, Republicans attempted but failed on a procedural motion to put to a vote a separate bill committing Oregon's 197 school districts to reopen fully for the 2021-22 academic year that starts in a few months.

Amount defended

Rep. Susan McLain, D-Forest Grove, said overall education spending in the new budget cycle is projected at 51 percent of the tax-supported general fund and lottery proceeds, and the state school fund accounts for 32.4 percent.

"We are creating record investments in public schools this year," McLain, co-leader

of the education budget subcommittee, said.

Rep. Dan Rayfield, a Democrat from Corvallis and co-leader of the Legislature's joint budget panel, said about \$6 billion of a projected \$28 billion in general fund and lottery spending for the next two years is one-time money.

He said he and McLain worked for four months to come up with the right figure for school aid. "It is our job as a legislature to find out what is the Goldilocks porridge in our budget that meets the needs of our children, but also at the same time, is a sustainable budget that we can continue to operate on," Rayfield said.

Rep. Andrea Valderrama, D-Portland, leads the David Douglas School Board and is the newest member of the Legislature, having taken her District 47 seat on April 1 after her predecessor resigned under pressure.