

# ASPIRE opens doors for Hermiston High students

By MICHELLE MUNRO

Sometimes what a teen needs most as they plan out their future is someone who can walk through the options with them. The ASPIRE (Access to Student Assistance Programs In Reach of Everyone) program is a mentoring program that matches trained community volunteers with high school students to talk about goals beyond high school. Topics of discussion might include potential careers, researching continuing education, college applications and

admission processes, financial aid forms and scholarship applications, visiting college campuses, and even

interviewing tips.

Mark Gomolski is an ASPIRE mentor. "Growing up in a single-parent family, I know how hard it was," he says. "I had a mentor in my life, Mario Garcia. When I grew up, I asked him how I could repay him for all he had done for me; he replied that if I mentored others that was payment enough." ASPIRE offered Mark the opportunity to pass on what he's learned.

Hermiston High School staff and administrators are great supporters of

the ASPIRE Program and its success is due largely to their awareness of the significance of mentors. Roger Berger, Generation College advisor, notes that "ASPIRE is important because every student has a unique situation and goals they are striving to achieve. ASPIRE mentors are able to give the individual attention that each student needs. It really is a difference-maker for HHS!"

Business teacher Ben Dagley agrees. "Mentorship is critical for growth in any professional pursuit. We learn from those who have come before us, and we often set personal goals modeled on those we respect and look up to. ASPIRE provides this key link to the real world outside of high school, by connecting students with people who can talk about real life beyond the halls of our schools. ASPIRE volunteers have a passion to help students find this connection and



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they give of their time and experience to support kids entering the world of work. It's an excellent program and we are very proud to have community members who want our students to become the best version of themselves."

During the 2016-17 school year, Hermiston High ASPIRE students received close to \$3 million in scholarship opportunities. One 2017 HHS graduate had this to say about the program: "I walk the campus of Oregon State University every day because of ASPIRE, because of the mentors who pushed me to be successful. All those countless hours of help and guidance made it possible to afford college and obtain my goals. I can't thank the program and my mentors enough for everything they've done."

Like many other volunteer programs, ASPIRE faces a challenge — a shortage of mentors. The HHS program currently has 10 volunteers, who expect to meet with about 250 students by the end of the 2017-18 school year. That's only about 15 percent of the 1,600-student Hermiston High population. Each year more students recognize the benefits of participating, and as the program grows more volunteers from the community will be needed.

*Michelle Munro is the ASPIRE coordinator at Hermiston High School. Interested volunteer mentors may contact her at [michelle.munro@hermistonhsd.org](mailto:michelle.munro@hermistonhsd.org) or 541-667-6121.*



*ASPIRE mentor Jennifer Cooper spends some one-on-one time coaching Hermiston High senior Valeria Moreno.*

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