

# General Council briefed on Chalkboard Project

## Chronic absenteeism is 'the enemy' to Native student achievement

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

The take-home message, said Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George at the May 18 General Council meeting held in the Community Center, is that chronic absenteeism for Tribally enrolled students in the Oregon public school system is "the enemy."

In 2013, the Community Fund funded an analysis of how Tribally enrolled students are performing in the public school system. ECONorthwest and the Chalkboard Project compared Tribal membership rolls for seven of Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes with data provided by the state Department of Education.

The most important finding, George said, was that 28 percent of Tribally enrolled children in elementary school are chronically absent, meaning they miss 10 percent or more of days throughout the school year.

The chronic absenteeism rate increases to 31 percent for middle school students and 43 percent for high school students who are enrolled in Oregon Tribes.

"When kids miss, as you can imagine, more than 10 percent of the school year, their success in school is greatly diminished and that carries throughout their education career," George said.

"This, I think, is the enemy. ... We have to help change the culture about how education is valued in our families. We have to be sure that every kid knows that school is their path to success. We want them there and we'll do what it takes for them to be successful. ... Every day counts. Our kids must go to school consistently to have successful futures, especially in early grades."

George said that the differences between the seven Tribes that participated, including the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, were negligible.

The study found that 67,172 Oregon public school students self-identify as Native American or Alaskan Native, but only 3,210 of those students are enrolled in the seven federally recognized Tribes in Oregon that participated in the study. (The Coquille Tribe



Photo by Dean Rhodes

**Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Kathleen George briefs the general membership on results from The Chalkboard Project's review of how Native students are performing in Oregon public schools during the May 18 General Council meeting held in the Community Center.**

and Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw did not participate.)

"The way Oregon collects data on Tribal members has not allowed them to see our kids within the larger picture," George said. "That helped me see the problem that Oregon Tribal education directors were having ... they were trying to find a needle in a haystack of how actually enrolled Tribal kids are doing among 67,000 people who were self-identifying."

Other study findings discovered that about 75 percent of Tribal students attend schools in rural areas or small towns and that 29.3 percent of Tribally enrolled students attend the bottom 15 percent of Oregon schools.

The study also found that only 55 percent of Tribal students in elementary school met or exceeded grade level in math in 2011-12 and that number decreased to 44 percent in high school.

However, Tribal students did better in reading, with 66 percent meeting or exceeding grade level in elementary school, 55 percent in middle school and 69 percent doing so by high school.

Only 55 percent of Tribally enrolled students graduate high school in Oregon in the minimum four years and 59 percent graduate in five years.

George also stressed the importance of education by displaying a slide that showed people with more education experience less unemployment and earn more money in their lifetimes.

"People with the lowest levels of education are laid off first and rehired last," she said.

Education Department Manager Eirik Thorsgard said that the Grand Ronde Tribe is reacting to the study's findings. Next school year, the Tribe will be offering increased tutoring for Native students and Family Tutoring Nights,

as well as reach out to families of students experiencing chronic absenteeism.

"This is about the stability of Tribal families," George said.

The general membership also received briefings from the Tribal Veterans Special Event Board and Tribal Royalty.

Veterans Special Event Board Chairman Steve Bobb Sr. detailed who currently serves on the board, as well as members of the Tribal Honor Guard and Veterans Royalty. He said upcoming events involving the board include the Veterans Summit and Marcellus Norwest Memorial Veterans Powwow in July, as well as a planned fundraising car show in September.

Royalty Coordinator Jackie Many Hides, Junior Miss Grand Ronde Iyana Holmes and Little Miss Grand Ronde Kaleigha Simi briefed the membership on their April trip to the Gathering of Nations Powwow held in Albuquerque, N.M.

The May 18 General Council meeting also was the last for outgoing General Manager Mark Johnston, who resigned to take a job closer to his family in southern Oregon.

He was gifted with a performance to "You Raise Me Up" by Veronica Gaston and received a necklace from the Norwest family that was presented by Marcella Selwyn.

Jonston's last day with the Tribe was Friday, May 23.

Kathy Werst, Dan Stroebel and Jackie Many Hides won the \$50 door prizes and Jade Unger won the \$100 door prize. Stroebel donated his prize to the Veterans Special Event Board and Many Hides donated her prize to Royalty.

In addition, necklaces created by Tribal Council member Jon A. George and hand-painted light switch plates donated by Gaston were raffled off.

Bobby Mercier gave the invocation and he joined Brian Krehbiel, Travis Stewart, Unger, Thorsgard, George and Eric Bernando in performing the cultural drumming and singing to open the meeting.

The meeting also included three hours of discussion after lunch about Tribal enrollment issues.

The next General Council meeting will be held at 11 a.m. Sunday, June 29. Tribal Council nominations are the only item on the agenda.

The video of the General Council meeting can be viewed on the Tribal Website at [www.grandronde.org](http://www.grandronde.org) under the Video tab. ■

## Friends of Nixwa raise \$4,200 for bulletproof vest

Tribal member Veronica Gaston announced at the May 18 General Council meeting that Friends of Nixwa raised \$4,200 to purchase a bulletproof vest for Tribal K-9 officer Nixwa, which is Chinuk Wawa for "show me."

Gaston said that one anonymous donor from Salem pledged \$1,400, which almost covered the entire cost of a vest for the Belgian Malinois. Tribal donors included \$1,500 from Dakota Whitecloud. Other significant donations came from Portland resident Lou Nelson (\$100) and Gary Jones of Salem (\$288).

Gaston also held numerous raffles during the meeting to give away prizes to those who donated. The grand prize – a Pendleton blanket – was won by Barbara Mercier.

Gaston said that about \$2,000 of the funds will be spent to buy the vest and the remainder will pay for any training or equipment Nixwa needs.

She is planning another Friends of Nixwa fundraiser from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, June 13, in the Community Center. Lasagna will be served for a donation and Nixwa will perform a demonstration, she said. Tribal Royalty will make deliveries on the Tribal campus. People also can continue to donate to Friends of Nixwa through the Tribe's Finance Department.

"I plan on making another donation come per capita time," Gaston said. "This dog will be able to get anything it needs."

Gaston said people interested in attending should RSVP by 3 p.m. Monday, June 9, by calling her at 503-560-8217.

# ATTENTION

If you are currently receiving or are in need of SNAP benefits, Social Services provides an Oregon Department of Human Services caseworker who comes to Grand Ronde twice monthly on Wednesdays. The caseworker may assist with applications, updates, child care, etc.

If you are in need of services, call 503-879-2034 to schedule an appointment or you can reach Michelle Carmona at 503-879-4523. ■

## Kick the Habit.

Call these numbers for free from anywhere in Oregon:  
1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669)

Español: 1-877-2NO-FUME (1-877-266-3863)

TTY: 1-877-777-6534

Or register online at: [www.quitnow.net/oregon/](http://www.quitnow.net/oregon/)