

Campus from A1

Anderson, Kristina DeVoe and Aydin Berry, walked over to share the meal together. The trio met at Lincoln Middle School and became best friends. They are regular attenders at the Monday night Campus Life Club.

All said they appreciate how inclusive club activities are and they provide a safe and welcoming environment.

"I love all the people involved," Berry said. "They are very nice and caring to everyone." Anderson agreed and added, "The club activities are fun and very different. We do lots of crazy stuff."

At a different table three other sophomores enjoyed the tacos and each other's company. Sixteen-year-olds Shelby Trisler and Ian Shepherd and 15-year-olds Evie Smith and McKenzie Baker said they loved the free lunch and it wasn't as noisy as the high school cafeteria so it was easier



PHOTO BY CINDY WEILDREYER

Students share a meal on 'Taco Tuesday' as part of the Campus Life program.

to talk to each other. They don't attend club meetings but enjoy the weekly free lunch.

"The food is good and I love learning more about what's going on in the community," Trisler said. His friend Ian chimed in and said the tacos are good and he likes hanging out with his friends.

After eating, some of the guys gather at the other end of the gym and shoot hoops before heading back to class.

When the lunch began on Oct. 1, the attendance was 12-15 students. As word spread more began showing up and now 40-plus students regularly enjoy the meal.

As the first students arrived, Lourdes Doerflinger pulled freshly baked cookies from the oven. She said she has always loved connecting with kids.

"I wish I'd had an experience like this when I was growing up," Doerflinger said. "I do this because I want to create a fun, safe place for kids to enjoy."

High School CL Director Richard New also enjoys the time he shares with youth because

he believes the world is becoming more and more challenging for the youth of today.

"It seems like there is a lack of available mentors for our next generation," New said. "I'm just happy I have the opportunity to be available to be there for our future leaders."

SLSD from A1

has been the lead coordinator in the SSA process.

"This is a pretty big opportunity for schools in Oregon," he said. "This kind of funding hasn't been available in Oregon for a really long time."

Two community input sessions, on Dec. 10 and Dec. 12, saw around 30 community members turn out to ask questions and cast their votes on the best ways to spend the funds.

SSA funds are dedicated toward addressing child and student needs, particularly for the underserved segments of the population. As such, equity is a driving element of the act and members from across the community are required to be part of planning process.

Of the SSA's \$2 billion, 20 percent is required to be spent on early learning, 30 percent on statewide initiatives and 50 percent on the Student Investment Account.

The Student Investment Account has been the focus of community input sessions. Spending is directed toward meeting students' mental or behavioral health needs and increasing academic achievement by reducing disparities among groups who face challenges and disadvantages. Such groups identified by the legislation include students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners, foster children and economically disadvantaged students.

"For about three decades in Oregon, we've seen a lot of reduction in funding and services that we could provide as public educators," said Smith. "Within South Lane, that's especially difficult because we serve a large amount of students who have those challenges. ... Our hope with this is that we start to see more success with those groups of students."

Oregon Department of Education data shows a growing diversity among the student and teacher populations across the state. Though Cottage Grove does not see the same degree of diversity as state averages, particularly among students of color, the district has been able to identify disparities among its various groups.

In preparation for community input, SLSD undertook a data collection

process in which staff pinpointed trends across the district in specific populations. Data was pulled on more than 20 sources including reading and math scores, attendance and graduation rates, behavioral discipline, mental health surveys and participation in career and technical training programs.

"We didn't just ask, 'What were third graders scoring in reading on the Smarter Balance Assessment,' we said, 'What are third-grade students of color scoring on the reading assessment? What are students that are economically disadvantaged scoring on that same grammar?'" explained Smith.

Based on this data dive, the district presented the community with six summary statements which highlighted areas of concern within various underserved groups. Six groups were identified as performing lower than peers in at least one area focus: LatinX, black/Native American/American Indian/multi-racial, special education students, males, homeless or economically disadvantaged, and students with socio-emotional or mental health needs.

The statements highlighted problem areas such as lower test scores, high rates of behavioral discipline, low graduation rates and higher levels of stress for particular groups.

For example, compared to other students in the state, South Lane eighth-grade students were found to experience more bullying, report higher mental health needs and suicide rates, play more video games and get less sleep.

The summary statements also identified areas where groups performed better than their peers, such as the attendance rates among LatinX students.

Following presentations last week, community members voted on an array of proposed solutions, which included sugges-

tioning services, increasing staff to work with specific populations, expanding Family Resource Center services and providing more afterschool or summer school support. Community members also proposed their own solutions.

A week prior to the community input sessions, Smith also sat down with 18 students and asked for their opinions on how the money ought to be spent. The students shared stories of adversity and advocated on behalf of the peers in giving feedback.

"These are difficult conversations that we're having — even as adults they're hard to have — and they handled themselves in an amazing way," said Smith.

Following these input sessions, the district has planned stakeholder meetings in January which will focus on input from community members from groups identified in the summary statements, al-

lowing different sessions for each group. The district is currently enlisting members of those groups to establish connections.

"All the input we get comes back to our district-level committee," said Smith. The committee includes district staff, a parent and a student. "That filter is the one we use in order to take a look at all the input that we have and determine next steps."

After distilling the information, a Student Investment Account plan is slated to be brought before the school board for approval in February and a final application submitted to the state in March.

"It's a good thing that we're hearing each other from all different directions," said Smith.

More information about the Student Success Act and Student Investment Account can be found at the school district's website at www.slane.k12.or.us.

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