

Academy hopes there is no mystery to school's mission

Cannon Beach Academy still building a brand

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Nearly halfway through the first school year, the Cannon Beach Academy is still a mystery to many in the community.

"Half think we are an elite school where you pay tuition. The other half think we are only for Spanish-speaking students. Neither are true," said Amy Moore, the bilingual charter school's executive director. "We have people who still don't know what grades we are."

The academy, which serves kindergarten through second grade, is trying to overcome the sense of confusion and enroll more students for next school year. In order to keep a charter with Seaside School District, the academy has to eventually grow to serve up to fifth grade.

Four years after the closure of Cannon Beach Elementary School because of cost concerns and tsunami danger, the new school is battling an information gap and looking to evolve from community startup into a community staple.



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Students at the Cannon Beach Academy take time away from the classroom for recess on the playground.

"I think we were so focused on getting the doors open, we just assumed people knew who we were," Moore said. "Now we want to push forward with the message we are tuition-free public school, that you don't have to live in Cannon Beach to attend, and that we have small class sizes."

Traditionally, charter schools offer a choice in curriculum or program focus that a school district isn't already providing. Many have specialties, like the arts or sciences, or are driven by the desire to seek independence from a centrally-run school system.

But part of the confusion with Cannon Beach Academy is the fact it was not intended

to be a charter school at the beginning, said board member Phil Simmons. The primary mission of the original task force was to keep a traditional public school in Cannon Beach.

"This started a year and a half before the school closed. Our focus at that point was to get a school district school in town. The only problem was that the school was in this bad location," Simmons said. "We wanted to keep the school and just move it. People would propose a charter school to me as an alternative, and I can tell you personally had no idea what a charter school was. I just knew we had a good school in Cannon Beach and wanted to keep it."

'I think we were so focused on getting the doors open, we just assumed people knew who we were.'

Amy Moore,
Cannon Beach Academy
executive director

It was only after the final door was closed that Simmons started researching charter schools. His research dispelled his negative connotations when he realized charter schools are still tuition-free public schools, part of a school district.

"I can understand why there is some confusion, because I was similarly without knowledge," he said.

'Community-supported place'

Due to state requirements, the academy chose to offer a different curriculum and a bilingual element to differentiate from other schools in the school district. They chose Spanish as a way to build upon the number of native Spanish speakers who already live within the town, Simmons said.

Out of 22 students, seven come from Spanish-speaking

families, according to Moore. Of those, six qualify for English language learner services, which is 27 percent of the student body. By comparison, 9 percent of students at Gearhart Elementary School and 22 percent at Seaside Heights Elementary School qualify for the help.

While parents have noted that the small class sizes and bilingual aspects add value, the common motivating factor for many is still proximity.

Alberto Rodriguez, a parent of a kindergartner, works at the Ocean Lodge and Wayfarer hotels in town and is from one of the seven Spanish-speaking families the school serves. While he appreciated Spanish being incorporated, being close to his daughter is what drove his decision.

"I like it because my job is here," Rodriguez said. "It's easier to be around and involved."

For Colin Woody, a parent of a first-grader at the academy, having the school close to his work at the restaurant Castaways enables him to be more involved with his child's education.

"I think this school has had to go through so many hoops that it hasn't had a chance to define itself," Woody said. "But I see it as a positive place. A community-supported place."

Moore said the same reasons that make the charter school different from others are also crucial to success.

"Why we're here is why we're here. Choice is a part of our mission, but this school is here because we wanted to bring community back to Cannon Beach," Moore said. "The essence of identity is tied to knowing our importance in the community while also providing choice to those who may not live in Cannon Beach."

'Information gap'

With the doors open, the academy now has access to grant money to help promote the school in a way that wasn't possible before, Moore said. In the past three months, the academy has invested in a new website, marketing campaign and a billboard to get the word out.

Enrollment must increase to be more sustainable, and Moore would like to see 50 students by next school year, she said.

"Our biggest barrier for this year I think was people being nervous about whether or not we will open and stay open," she said. "But we're looking to fix that information gap, and I think between demonstrating our academics is sound and educating why we are here, we will grow."

School district provides the first details of new campus designs

District officials share plans with community

By R.J. Marx
Cannon Beach Gazette

SEASIDE — School district consultants walked planning commissioners through designs for the new school campus in the in the Southeast Hills.

One thing is certain: the school will have a magnificent view.

"We've talked about the difficulties of the site, but the benefits are it's going to have the best view of any school in Oregon," architect Dan Hess said. You're going to see the ocean, you're going to see the city."

Hess, project manager Jim Henry, land use planner Greg Winterowd, with input from City Planner Kevin Cupples and Public Works Director

Dale McDowell walked the city's planning commissioners through design plans to provide information and listen to suggestions at the Tuesday work session, Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley said.

Some of the plans are dictated by the site itself, located on land south and east of the current Heights Elementary School. "It's a difficult site, but it's not impossible," Public Works Director Dale McDowell said.

The shape of the location — including lane width and parking — is mandated by the fire department.

"When they pull a truck in, they've got to be able to pull their hose 175 feet," McDowell said. "They've got to be able to get to both sides of the school. We're working with the school district and the fire department to make sure we get that right."

Remodeling and additions to the Heights Elementary School

will house the district's elementary school population of 730 students, architect Dan Hess told commissioners.

A combined middle and high school building will provide classrooms in an I-shaped configuration, with middle schoolers on one side of the building and high schoolers on the other.

A track and football field with striping for soccer, road links for two sites, parking and a stormwater detention basin were also presented.

Because of slope, the west side of the campus will stand three stories and the east two stories. The upper floor will house classrooms, the cafeteria and the music program. The cafeteria will be divided to separate high school and middle school students. The space could be also transformed into a performing arts space, he added.

A sports field would be the only athletic outdoor playing



R.J. MARX/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Dan Hess of BRIC Architecture addresses Seaside's Planning Commission.

area, intended for practice and physical education.

Varsity teams will continue to compete at Broadway Field.

The site would also be a collection area for residents in case of an emergency, including an earthquake or tsunami.

The new school will be hooked to a generator in case of outages, McDowell said.

Added emergency access comes from a former logging road behind the campus.

A "closed campus" may not please students, Roley said, but it will help keep traffic down on roads to school. "This is not an appropriate site for them to be leaving midday," she said.

At the current site, there are 17 exits and many ways to access area roadways. At the new campus, there will be only one.

Traffic studies detailing impacts to local roads were designed to be "conservative" in approach, planner Winterowd said.

Families of two or three kids will be able to travel to the same school, reducing traffic to the campus, he said.

The district will have about 330 parking spaces in the new campus, including spaces already designated at the Heights. Overflow parallel parking will be available along roadways for special events.

The site is "being built for growth," Roley said, who said the district expects steady, modest growth in years to come. The campus, currently at 1,500 students from K-12, will be built to accommodate 1,700.

"Our consultants felt the meeting went very well," Roley said Wednesday. "We thought it was worthwhile for us and the city as well. We continue to have ongoing partnership with the city staff and it was nice to bring that all to the table have the commissioners looped in so they don't get all this information in a notebook and looking at it for the first time."

School district consultants and officials shared plans with the public in Cannon Beach at the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce on Thursday.

A Spanish presentation takes place Feb. 6 at 6:30 p.m. at Broadway Middle School, 1120 Broadway.

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