ASPIRE helps kids discover 'what matters'

Community mentors, students interact

By Katherine Lacaze
For Seaside Signal

At Seaside High School, every senior is given the opportunity to meet with an adult mentor as they undertake the daunting task of preparing for college and careers after graduation.

While Upward Bound and Talent Search — federally funded TRIO programs administered by Clatsop Community College — address the needs of low-income and first-generation students, the ASPIRE program looks out for the rest.

"We want to make sure every student has that one connection," said Matt Bisek, the high school's ASPIRE coordinator. "It feels good for them to know someone is looking out for them to make sure they don't slip through the cracks."

ASPIRE, which is administered statewide by the Oregon Student Assistance Commission, was inspired by a group of volunteer mentors in North Bend who met with high-schoolers and "nagged" them about important dates for college applications, financial aid, apprenticeships, internships and other preparatory tasks for life after high school. They were known as the North Bend Naggers. From that concept, ASPIRE was born, Bisek said.

A chance for continuity

Bisek, who is new to the district this year, said his job as co-ordinator is to recruit and train adult volunteers. His second job with the district is working as the liaison for Upward Bound and mentoring about 25 students who meet the qualifications.

He also is new to education, coming from a background in finances and sales. He recently completed his master's in education, but instead of teaching, he desired to work in an administrative role where he could make the same impact and "feel like what I do matters every day," he said.

He enjoys both mentoring through Upward Bound but also the program management responsibilities associated with his role as ASPIRE coordinator. The high school has had five different

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Matt Bisek, coordinator for Seaside High School's chapter of the ASPIRE program.