

Graduation rates improve throughout Clatsop County

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Graduation rates across Clatsop County and throughout the state were on the uptick last school year, according to state figures.

The state defines on-time graduation as taking four years. Overall, schools statewide have increased the graduation rate at least five years in a row, slowly creeping up from 72 percent in the 2013-14 school year to 78.7 percent last year.

Oregon schools still lag behind the 84 percent national graduation rate recorded in the 2015-16 school year by the National Center for Education Statistics.

Seaside, which had dipped in the 2016-17 school year, was back up to 73.4 percent last year. The school district has commonly posted a graduation rate of around 75 percent.

Astoria High School recorded a 77.7 percent graduation rate, which Principal Lynn Jackson said was the highest in his 12 years as an administrator. He pointed



Seaside High School's class of 2018.

Seaside Signal

toward a focus statewide on making sure students are on track as they enter high school.

"That transition in that eighth- and ninth-grade year, that transition is vital for stu-

dents creating a solid academic standing," he said. "It is very difficult to help students catch up on credit or skill deficiencies when they're in their 11th year."

Jackson also pointed to

Measure 98, passed by voters in 2016 to improve career-technical, college credit and dropout prevention programs in high school. The measure has helped fund a six-week sum-

mer school to help about 20 at-risk eighth-graders get a head start, Jackson said. The measure has also helped the school district add more diverse programs such as agriculture and a Future

Farmers of America club.

"These are the type of programs that excite students in their passions and interest, and in turn their learning," Jackson said.

Jackson also credited partnerships Astoria has created with groups like the Northwest Regional Education Service District and the Lower Columbia Hispanic Council to help low-income and Hispanic students.

Warrenton High School, with a 76.7 percent graduation rate, continued a steady upward climb extending back at least seven years. The school district has been lauded for academic success despite containing more than half the students in the county considered homeless. Knappa, which posted a 20 percent increase in its graduation rate in 2016-17 at more than 90 percent, again improved, last year reaching 94.3 percent.

Jewell School, a small K-12 campus, posted a 78.7 percent graduation rate last year, a 10 percent increase from 2016-17 but down from the last 100 percent graduation rate the school district achieved in 2013-14.

Measure 98: Keeping kids on track, improving graduation rates

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For Seaside Signal

Seaside High School is taking steps to improve attendance, increase its graduation rate, and enhance its offering of certified technical education programs.

At the Seaside School District's January meeting, Principal Jeff Roberts gave a brief update on how the school administration has used grant funds from the state, as well as their plans for the future.

Measure 98 — or the Oregon State Funding for Dropout Prevention and College Readiness Initiative — was approved by voters in November 2016. During 2017-18, the first year of implementation, school districts and charter high schools received their first allocation from the state's High School Success fund.

In order to be eligible for the second distribution of funds, schools submitted a four-year plan. The high school received approximately \$217,368 during the first year and \$230,582 the second year. Schools that received funding, including Seaside High School, have until June 30 to spend the second distribution.

The first year emphasized planning, Roberts said. This year, the school is more vigorously putting the plan in action.

A freshmen push

In the Seaside community, Roberts said, "we have a chronic attendance problem." To combat truancy, Roberts and staff have shared ideas with other school districts about strategies that have led to success. Area schools work collectively toward trying to improve countywide attendance.

For the 2018-19 school year, vice principal Jason Boyd made home visits to families, targeting incoming freshmen who struggled with attendance in eighth grade. When he meets with families, he welcomes them to the school and discusses opportunities available to students.

"Often times, these parents' contact with school was as a result of negative interaction," Roberts said. "We wanted to try to get in front of that, and make sure that initial interaction was positive."

When students miss class, a staff member calls parents or guardians, rather than them receiving an automated message, which is easier to ignore. Additionally, the school is taking opportunities to recognize students who attend school regularly.

Going forward, Roberts said, they plan to continue with family and community outreach; increase recognition on an individual and classwide basis; and

reduce suspensions, or opt for alternatives such as in-school suspension.

Grad track

The high school also is working to improve graduation rates as part of its fulfillment of the state's Measure 98 criteria. Freshmen are the focus, although that doesn't mean they are unconcerned with the other classes, Roberts said.

"We had to start somewhere," he said. "We had to make a concerted effort someplace."

English teacher Ann Susee is coordinating the freshmen

on-track team, which meets at least monthly. Staff members are assigned to reach out to students who are not on track and discuss what interventions can be offered. In particular, students are considered off-track if they are falling behind in their core classes.

In 2017, seven freshmen were off-track after the first trimester; in 2018, two students were off-track. Roberts acknowledged that number will increase throughout the year — "we have a lot of challenges in front of us," he said — but "the trend is positive."

The school also is imple-

menting a requirement for all freshmen to take a whole year of math as a response to underclassmen struggling in Algebra 1. After the first term last school year, 18 freshmen had failed math; that number was 10 in the 2018-19 school year.

"Is 10 an acceptable number? No," Roberts said. "But again, the trend is significantly pointed in the right direction."

The school also is offering a credit recovery class led by math instructors, rather than putting students in the computer lab without mentorship. Additionally, the school

is considering implementing an after-school math lab that includes transportation.

Tech training

In the past, the school has had two sustainable CTE programs: Construction and Information and Communication Technology. Under Mike Verhulst, the Information and Communication Technology program has morphed into Business and Management, with an added focus on entrepreneurship, marketing and other business-related subjects.

Teacher Jeff Corliss still oversees construction and

other woodworking classes. Roberts hopes to see the program evolve by increasing connection with local contractors and giving students opportunities for hands-on work at project sites, as well as developing a contemporary computer drafting curriculum.

The state this school year recognized the school's culinary arts program as an official CTE offering through 2022. At the end of the previous year, about 190 students — or half the student body — had expressed interest in taking a culinary arts class in 2018-19, Roberts said.

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