

American history comes alive with student's HAFFI presentation

The Vernonia School District Board of Directors heard audience comments from VYC parents (Please see related article.) and a student presentation at their November eighth meeting. The board also discussed results of the bond election, took action on several policies and heard administration and financial reports.

Vernonia High School student Rachael Bentson presented her HAFFI project. HAFFI, explained history teacher Scott Finley, stands for Historically Accurate Fictional Family Identity. Each of Finley's U.S. History students is assigned a fictional identity, and must prepare a speech and a paper explaining how the character was affected by specified historical events.

Portraying a maid in a Southern governor's mansion, Bentson...with a delightful accent...greeted a guest and talks about her work, her family (husband and five children) and her feelings in response to the Emancipation Proclamation,

President Lincoln's death and other historical events surrounding the Civil War. As a way to include required information on the U.S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision and the federal Homestead Act, Bentson's character talks about her hopes for owning a homestead and her husband's meeting Dred Scott.

Finley said that, while not all presentations were as polished as Bentson's, all students benefited from the project, with many seniors later commenting on how their HAFFI project experience helped them complete their Senior Projects. Board member Leslie O'Leary commented that the project makes history more meaningful because the students must weave events and dates into a personal history.

Preliminary results of the school district bond election showed 508 ballots in favor of the bond and 720 opposed, with 59 percent of registered voters casting ballots. Superintendent Larry McClellan told

the board that there was no overwhelming majority, since 41 percent of voters did not vote. Board chairman Carla Strand asked the public to refer to the school reasons why people chose either to vote no, or not to vote. Strand, McClellan and director Jeff Blum will meet with Dan Brown, chair of the Long Range Facilities Committee, to develop an action plan in order to move forward. Director O'Leary requested that research be conducted into the reasons for no votes and not voting.

The board unanimously approved policies concerning accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, employee bond coverage, property inventories, and district athletic eligibility. The VHS Philosophy and Guidelines for Extra Curricular Activities will serve as the administrative rules for the athletic policy.

McClellan reported that the district finally has a school nurse, Cathy Ramsdell, recruited by Columbia County Health.

Her office is currently at Washington Grade School but she will be working throughout the district.

Elementary Principal Kirk Sherrill reported that Run for the Arts funds would pay for two artists in residence, Maranee Sanders and Valerie Otani. Sherrill also reported that the DC 2002 trip would take place March 3-8. Both Sherrill and High School Principal Mike Durbin commented on the well-attended CIM Recognition Night, October 23. Durbin also reported on the success of fall athletic programs.

As part of the financial report, McClellan told the board that it appears that schools will be affected by legislative action to balance the state's budget. Since school funding totals 52-53 percent of the state general

fund, it is likely that cuts in school funding will take effect this school year, McClellan noted. In order to track expenditures more closely, he has added an additional page to the financial report to reflect district spending by area. Efforts are underway to keep spending to a minimum until there is more information.

- In other action the board:
- Was told the district is working with OSHA to address a complaint about air quality at Washington Grade School.
 - Approved an agreement to allow Jewell students' participation in baseball and/or softball.
 - Approved extra-duty and custodial contracts.
 - Accepted, reluctantly, the resignation of Child Development Specialist Tami McDonald.

VYC students, parents upset with changes and lack of notification

Frustrated, angry parents, and students attending Vernonia Youth Corps (VYC), an alternative education program, met Nov. 9 with Vernonia High School Principal Mike Durbin and representatives of Cascade Education Corp. The parents had appeared before the Vernonia School Board, Nov. 8, where parent Jenelle Serafin read a statement detailing the concerns of parents.

Serafin and other parents expressed concern about changes in the VYC program that would require students to leave their familiar school and go by bus to another location. They were also concerned about the difficulty of retaining after school jobs if students go to school out of town. Additionally, the parents were extremely upset about the lack of notice or possible alternatives.

VYC students were informed in a meeting Monday, November 5, that the program was moving out of town the following week, on November 13. Field crew supervisor Joe Batty said that all students were given copies of the materials from Cascade Education Corp, and Durbin followed up with a phone call to all program parents. Only one of the parents admitted to having seen the written material.

According to Durbin, work on how to continue serving students in the program began three weeks ago, when it be-

came clear that a change was needed, probably at the end of the quarter, because of staffing issues. Durbin said he did not want to inform VYC parents or students of the problem until a solution had been reached.

The VYC program has been operating on a shoe-string budget this year. The program was previously funded by a grant that the district did not receive this year. Batty has held the work experience portion of the program together and the students have completed several projects. However, according to Durbin, the school has not been able to maintain the academic portion of the program. Students in VYC are required to spend half of their time on work projects and half completing high school academic requirements.

The district was concerned that the students continue to be served in some manner. The solution reached by Durbin was to transport the students to a very successful program run by the Northwest Regional Educational Service District and Cascade Education Corp. The program, based in Forest Grove, uses the same model as the Vernonia program and is run by former Vernonia resident Gary Myers. Vernonia students will have an opportunity to decide whether or not the program will work for them during a two-week job-shadowing program beginning November 13.



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