

Chalk Talk

Chalk Talk is a monthly column of information about Vernonia schools. It is written by various staff members. This column was written by Superintendent Kenneth W. Cox, PhD.

Patrons of the Vernonia School District:

Much has been said in the media and within our community about the recent citation of Mr. Miller, principal of Washington Grade School, and his future with the Vernonia School District. I would like to make sure that the facts are correctly represented and will attempt to summarize some of them here.

1. Mr. Miller was cited for possession of less than an ounce of marijuana, which is a violation in the State of Oregon (ORS 475.864(2)) and is not a criminal offense.

2. Mr. Miller openly admitted to the officer who confronted him that he had been smoking marijuana.

3. Mr. Miller has dealt with the legal ramifications of his actions through the appropriate legal channels.

4. I have reported Mr. Miller's actions to the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission in Salem, even though it does not appear that this offense will have an impact on his administrative license.

The Vernonia School District has three policies in place that address the use of drugs by students or staff. Full copies of these policies will be placed on our district website (www.vernonia.k12.or.us) for your review. Some relevant excerpts have been included here.

Policy GBEC – Employer and Employee Responsibility Regarding Drugs and Alcohol:

"It is the policy of the district to prohibit the use or presence of illegal drugs, controlled substances, or alcohol in the workplace."

"Off-duty misconduct that adversely affects the effectiveness of the employee's job performance may result in discipline."

"Compliance with this policy is mandatory. Violations of this policy shall result in appropriate disciplinary action."

Policy JFCH – Substance/Drug Abuse:

"Substance abuse or the possession, use, sale or supply of an unlawful drug, including drug paraphernalia, or any substance purported to be an unlawful drug on or near the district premises or at any school-sponsored activity is prohibited."

Policy JFCI – Student Drug Testing

"Vernonia School District 47J is conducting a mandatory drug testing program for student athletes. Its purpose is threefold: (1) to provide for the health and safety of all student athletes; (2) to undermine the effects of peer pressure by pro-



viding a legitimate reason for student athletes to refuse to use illegal drugs; and (3) to encourage student athletes who use drugs to participate in drug treatment programs."

Students who test positive are subject to suspension from participating for ten, twenty, or ninety days or more, depending on whether it is their first, second, or third offense during their high school career. In addition they must complete a district-approved diversion/intervention program. Students are not penalized academically for testing positive and test results are not shared with criminal or juvenile authorities unless the district is under court order to share such information.

As indicated in my previous statement, before making any decision I examined the facts that were at my disposal concerning this incident, consulted with our district's attorney and followed district policy. Because this is a district personnel issue, I could not discuss any details of the consequences that Mr. Miller would face; however, since he has made the following public, I can share with you that I have administered appropriate disciplinary sanctions against Mr. Miller, which include random drug testing, a significant salary reduction, and insistence on his participation in, and satisfactory completion of, a drug rehabilitation program. I and the Board believe that these consequences are appropriate under the current circumstances.

In addition to this discipline, I am recommending that the school board conduct a full review of all district policies that relate to drug and alcohol use by both students and staff. This review would include input from students, staff and community members. I have also begun developing a random drug-testing program for administrators and will present it for board approval at the next board meeting.

While I believe that I have dealt with this matter in a professional and appropriate manner, I recognize that some do not agree with my decision. It was a difficult decision and I understand that some may still have concerns. In an effort to understand and resolve those concerns, I welcome a visit by any district patron who would like to share their concerns with me. It is my hope that through communication, a genuine effort to understand each other, and patience we can move forward as a district and as a community.

Sincerely,
Kenneth W. Cox, PhD
Superintendent

30th year for Echoing Evergreens



What did kids from Vernonia and Mist do the week after Jamboree? Many went to Echoing Evergreens Vernonia Booster Club Day Camp, held August 6-10, at Camp Wilkerson.

The yearly camp is staffed by all volunteers, accepts all school age children (there is a fee to attend), and runs as a day camp Monday through Friday, with an overnight stay for children in fourth through sixth grades on Thursday.

Many volunteers, such as Vernonian Sue Robertson, first came to camp with their children. Some came to camp themselves when they were young. This year was the camp's 30th year. Over the years, it has been held most often at Camp Wilkerson, but also had a year at Cedar Ridge and two years at Mist Grade School.

This year, 282 children attended camp. Each age group,

with boys and girls separated, has one adult counselor and one aide (from grades seven through 12). There were 16 'stations' with different activities, ranging from making rock necklaces to building suet bird feeders. There were skits and songs and healthy lunches and snacks.

At one activity station, children who will be entering Kindergarten this fall were wrapping yarn around pens, then decorating journals made of folded paper bags held together with yarn.

The attendees decorate the adirondack shelters in the theme for their group and there are different themes for different days, Thursday was '50s day, for instance.

A lot of effort and energy goes into the camp so all the children attending can have a great time, and learn a few things, too.

Be ready: Fall sports start next week

Student athletes interested in participating in a fall sport at Vernonia High School are being reminded that all forms must be turned in to the school office before practices begin on August 20.

The required forms are the Code of Conduct (must be signed by parent and athlete), Proof of Insurance form, and

Physical form for incoming freshmen, juniors or any athlete who has not had a physical in the past two years.

The above forms may be picked up at the high school office. Also, all fees are to be paid before turning out for a sport, including pay-to-play fees, towel fees, and any outstanding bills from previous years.

There is also a change in the scrimmage night for Varsity Football. It will be Friday, August 24, with pictures beginning at 4:00 p.m. Parents are welcome to take pictures of the team or individual athletes. The blue and gold scrimmage will begin at 5:00 p.m.

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Small and Large Animals

