

Community Connections

Within our growing, diverse community, we sow the seeds of opportunities to raise prepared, resilient students.



Health fair event shines light on community need

The district was overwhelmed with support from hundreds of attendees to the Nov. 15 community bingo night and health fair.

Held mainly in the Gervais High School gymnasium, the health fair was open to all ages and members of the community, and included 20-plus local service providers who shared physical, mental, and behavioral health service options with Gervais. Community members received free dental checks and fluoride polishing thanks to the Dental Taxi, 80 people were vaccinated against COVID-19 or flu, and many children received free haircuts.

"To our delight, we fed 440 people from the food trucks and for nearly two hours, the GHS gym, cafeteria, and foyer were packed full of happy folks," said Director of Student Services and Federal Programs Dr. Creighton Helms.

Though it started as a community bingo night to encourage attendance, the district thought the opportunity to merge the event with a health fair was too great to pass up. This is especially true with the health fair component being

financially taken care of with a large grant from the Willamette Health Council.

"Gervais, given how small we are, does not have any health-based services in our community at all," Helms explained. "People must travel to Keizer or Woodburn (or farther) to visit a doctor or pharmacy. We can also assume that community residents have barriers to visit these services, such as a lack of reliable transportation or communication. So, we wanted to bring these people to Gervais, to share who they are and what services they provide, and give people a chance to learn more about them."

The participating health providers at the event will support the district's future school health care initiatives, which will likely include the opening of a school-based health center in the fall of 2023.



Middle school students explore inclusivity

No One Eats Alone, at least that's the goal at Gervais Middle School.

An early November event hosted by the eighth-grade leadership class is part of a nationally-recognized organization that focuses on ending social isolation and bullying.

"Students sitting alone become targets for bullies," explained Principal Toni Johnson. "The small art of asking them to join you for lunch can totally

change someone's day."

The leadership class did this by organizing games with get-to-know-you questions and emphasizing the importance of including others.

Lucas Hill, the leadership teacher, said the counseling department, which also hosts friendship groups with students to deter bullying, actually started this as part of a larger anti-bullying campaign to limit isolation, which can lead to depression, anxiety, thoughts of



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Gervais Elementary School students learn beyond the classroom

This fall has been full of instructional opportunities for Gervais students in grades K-5, both in the classroom and out.

All students are receiving 45 extra minutes of English language instruction for writing down ideas, opinions, sharing life experiences and reporting observations in an academic way.

"At GES, we believe that our words are powerful and with intentional practice, they can be even more powerful!" said Raul Gomez, an English language development teacher. "As a school, we are teaching with purpose as we work on developing and enriching our student's English language. This work is challenging, yet rewarding, as we push, pull, and stretch our students to speak and write in ways that will open more doors for them now and in the future."

The school has also added extra interventions for those needing supplemental reading support. A team of one teacher and four instructional assistants work together to make sure the interventions are a success. A new literacy program helps with assessment and remediation, as needed.

Not all learning happens just in the classroom.

A fifth-grade field trip in early November to The Oregon Garden led to hands-on science lessons and activities about habitat and adaptation alongside several environmental science instructors.

Fifth-graders are also participating in the Eggs to Fry Program, sponsored by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Students are raising salmon eggs in an aquarium in the front entry that will be released into the Willamette River.

"They are learning responsibility and ecology as they collect data each day and take care of the salmon that have just now begun to swim inside the tank," Principal Dusty Price said. "Every student in the school loves to stop by the tank and check on their progress. It has been a very exciting project." Gervais Elementary School also acknowledges that there are some things about life students can learn that aren't part of the curriculum.

In October, double amputee and motivational speaker Kacey McCallister visited the school, inspiring young people that they can do hard things, as he certainly did. After losing limbs when he was hit by a semi truck at age 6, he learned to do everything on his own, eventually becoming a strong athlete, coaching wrestling, completing marathons, and even finishing the Spartan Race entirely on his hands. He encouraged students that when things are difficult, that's when we learn and grow the most. Not only did McCallister lead an assembly, but he also visited classrooms throughout the day and then stayed to play in a soccer match with the after-school club.

Another assembly in November featured a K9 demonstration with the Marion County Sheriff's Office. The two K9 units shared how they train their service dogs and showed apprehension demonstrations, featuring an officer in a bite suit. Students not only learned proper care and handling of dogs and safety tips for encountering dogs in public, but they also learned how to build trust with community law enforcement.



The Oregon Garden



Eggs to Fry Program



Motivational speaker Kacey McCallister



K9 demonstration with the Marion County Sheriff's Office

Winter sports season up and running

The winter sports season at Gervais High School has begun with new coaches hoping to continue the successes of Gervais teams in recent years.

The high school girls basketball team, which had its first games Nov. 30, has a new coach in Enrique Sandoval.

Sandoval is a Woodburn graduate and has been a coach in the neighboring school district, but this is his first time coaching a girls team.

"Having those local ties is really important to the program,"

Athletic Director Tucker Brack said.

The high school wrestling team also has a new coach in Iban Gomez, who himself was a Gervais High School wrestler.

"With a new coach, there will be no home high school meet this year, but we're hosting a middle school wrestling meet for the first time in years," Brack said.

The wrestling program at Gervais Middle School is still new but essential to building the high school program, Brack said. In fact, the team hosted its first wrestling meet in years on Dec. 7.

"With a new coach at the high school, we didn't want to have a meet there," Brack said, "but the one at the middle school is a trial run so that we can still see how it goes and



get used to doing that more in the future."

Middle school girls basketball had an early start, partly to accommodate both boys and girls teams and partly to allow sufficient coaching. The girls' season ends at winter break, and the middle school boys take over the Wolverine



gymnasium at the end of break through February.

Looking back to earlier this year, the Gervais High School volleyball team was the highlight of the fall sports season, going to the state playoffs for the

first time in 15 years. Additionally, the boys soccer team had nine wins this year and the district debuted its cross country teams at both middle and high schools, with a middle school meet hosted on the new walking trail.

"More home events mean it's better for the school and for the community," Brack said. "We're the center of town."

Girls soccer had its first JV team, which only makes the program stronger, and the football team had its best record since 2004.

"This is the first time we've had a JV (football) team and a middle school (football) team since before the pandemic," Brack said. "JV helps a program because it gives more kids the confidence they need to progress to the varsity level."

Early Learning Center improves kindergarten readiness

This year, the Gervais School District Early Learning Center has grown to one of the largest in the region, with a large daycare attendance and three full Pre-K classrooms of nearly 60 students, 75% of whom attend for free.

With the addition of a third Pre-K classroom this year, the ELC can now, for the first time, divide students by kindergarten readiness.

"With only two rooms, we had one room that was divided with our youngest and the other our oldest students, but in that older room, it was a mix of students who would be entering kindergarten the following fall and some who still had another year of Pre-K to go," said Director of Student Services and Federal Programs Dr. Creighton Helms. "The extent, then, that the older room could present curriculum (both academic and social-emotional) to the older students was limited, because at that age, there is still a notable difference in development between students that are 5 and those just turning 4."

Now, students are put in classrooms based on their ages: 3-year-olds, 3- and 4-year-olds, and one room dedicated to students entering kindergarten in fall 2023.

"This means that this older room can present curriculum

(academic and social-emotional) that truly prepares them, as best as we're able, to be ready for kindergarten," Helms said. "These Pre-K teachers will liaise with the kindergarten teachers to align the work they're doing."

With the extra classroom also comes additional support for staff. A former kindergarten teacher with 30-plus years of experience will serve as an advisor to the pre-K teachers, coming in weekly to observe them and model teach for them. Elizabeth Flores, who comes to the district with extensive Head Start experience, was hired as the preschool program coordinator to lead work in all three classrooms. Additionally, the district is partnering closely with Mid-Willamette Valley's Community Action Child Care Resource & Referral group to provide regular coaching and mentor teaching. And in the spring, Pre-K teachers will meet regularly with kindergarten teachers at Gervais Elementary School to maximize students being kindergarten ready.

"The idea is," Helms said, "if our older room sees themselves as actually a pre-kindergarten room and not a preschool room, those students will gain a lot of skills we hope for them to have when they join our elementary school."

The Inkling: learning the power of the pen

With the help of two English teachers, a group of Gervais High School students have resurrected the school newspaper, and the whole school has an inkling it will be a success.

The Inkling's first edition in many years debuted in October with 75 to 100 copies printed.

The Inkling has a legacy at Gervais High School, having been started in the 1980s and championed by specific staff members, specifically Jaira Hill "who was really focused on the importance of student voice, newspaper production, and reporting through student journalism," said Superintendent Dandy Stevens. "Besides emphasizing the actual logistics of publishing a student paper, she set the stage for Gervais students to be engaged in student journalism at both the state and national levels."

The Inkling and its students consistently won awards from the Journalism Education Association under Hill's leadership, and those recognitions continued when Stevens taught at Gervais High School from 1998 to 2004. During that time, she said, the student newspaper averaged a staff of about 20 students, published every other week, and continued to experience success in journalism competitions, sending students to conventions around the country. During that time, they also established the state's first student-published bilingual newspaper called Community Connections.

Unfortunately, once Stevens left the district in 2004, the fervor for the journalism program dwindled and eventually budget cuts led to the elimination of the program.

Until now.

Earlier this year, a senior approached English teachers Kate LaFollette and Ryan Figura about resurrecting The Inkling. They've started an after-school journalism club with about 10 participating juniors and seniors. The group writes the articles, then sends them to Eagle Web Publishing in Salem to print.

"Ryan has a background in teaching journalism at the high school level, and we both have a passion for journalism and informational writing," said LaFollette. "We both had been wanting to teach the class for a while and were eager to jump on the opportunity to help build this club with our students." The club advisors said their hope is to bring this version of The Inkling up to the bar of the previous Inkling teams.

"More importantly, students are engaging with this newspaper and engaging with students' writing, and that seems like a really good first step," Figura said.

The newspaper, which is currently distributed at the high school, middle school, and district administration office, so far has mainly focused on school happenings and local events, but the hope is that as students engage more, they will feature a wider range of topics.

Not only is the journalism club excited, but the overall student body seems to be embracing the newspaper.

"We have gotten a lot of positive feedback from teachers around the high school that kids have been sitting down and reading the paper in the morning and discussing articles with their friends," LaFollette said.



To be a true success, the community's support (which has been aplenty) is crucial.

"We hope that the students that work on the paper continue to engage in the community in a positive way, and keep creating something that they're proud of," Figura said. "This is really an opportunity for students to grow their own voice, learn the power of their words, and we want to continue to create that space for our kids."

Middle school students explore inclusivity

continued

violence, and even suicide.

"It started here because our counselors felt that there were a lot of kids who just didn't fit in or connect with other people," Hill said. "That can be really dangerous for an adolescent to feel they don't have connections."

On the day of the event, students got their lunch then went to a randomly-assigned classroom — the idea to break down barriers and eat with people outside their normal group. After eating, they were given some conversation starter questions (like whether they prefer dogs or cats) accompanied by some competitive games like hot potato and Pictionary.

"It was meant to be both low stakes and fun," Hill said.

He said he was proud of the leadership class of eighth-graders leading the charge. "This is a dream group — they really are wonderful," he said. "You can see the adult in them."

The immediate feedback was the day was a fun experience and students were positive about the activities. But beyond that, only time will tell, Hill said.

"We have to be more intentional to break up social clusters that impact the ability to meet new people," he said. "With middle schoolers you don't see the results right away. It takes time to percolate and brew in their mind, but my hope is that yes, it had an impact that's noticeable."

But one thing they were sure to address that day was to encourage students to look out for each other.

"If you see someone alone, reach out," Hill said. "We put them through this experience, and I think a lot of them believe it's important. So when they remember it, they'll remember why they did it. Just that awareness is key."



School Board UPDATE

Gervais board gets update on strategic plan

It's year two for the district's four-year Strategic Plan, so the Gervais School Board got an update at its November work session to make sure all four goals are on track to success.

Goal 1: The district will promote social and emotional growth, support the mental well-being of all, and create an environment of empathy and respect

Performance Indicator 1a: Create and publish a district-wide calendar of events that can be used by students, families, staff, and community members, therefore advertising upcoming events to enhance maximum participation. At the work session, it was reported that the district successfully completed the calendar by the end of September, as was the plan, and posted it to the district website.

Performance Indicator 1b: Collect Social Emotional Learning (SEL) data from the 2022-23 school year. Analyze the data and update the action plan for the 2023-24 school year along with a calendar of events.

The district has started an assessment called DESSA, a nationally-recognized strength-based behavior rating scale. What this looks like at the elementary school is that teachers complete a 7-10 question assessment three times a year for each student so progress can be mapped.

Results are given to counselors, who can offer support to teachers and interventions to students as needed. The middle and high school students take the survey themselves.

The plan is to update the action plan and calendar by May 31, 2023, and report the progress of the action plan to the board at its November 2023 meeting.

Performance Indicator 1c: Prioritize the SEL curriculum and associated professional development based on the highest needs found in the 2022-23 data. The team will meet in April to follow through on this topic.

Goal 2: Cultivate equity by honoring diversity, using inclusive practices, and supporting students to achieve their unique potential

Performance Indicator 2a: GSD Equity Committee will use the Resolution and Commitment to Educational Access and Inclusion, adopted by the GSD Board of Directors, to identify GSD's equity lens guiding questions and begin their application. The deadline for completing equity questions and making them ready for districtwide use is Feb. 28, 2023.



Performance Indicator 2b: Continue offering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) focused professional development opportunities for all staff and board members. This has been met because, as of mid-October, each school administrator and school site council has selected and scheduled professional development topics for the remainder of the school year.

Performance Indicator 2c: All administrators, the counseling team, and club advisors will guide honoring and promoting educational access and inclusion through day-to-day practices and scheduled events. This will be assessed by the GSD Equity Committee, led by Gervais High School Principal Andrew Aman and Gervais Elementary School Principal Dusty Price, in May. The committee meets every month and documents progress. The goal is to present a report to the school board in June 2023.

"Equity is hard to access for absolutely everybody in the district," Aman said, noting that eight different languages are represented by the student body. "But I think it's important. Our goal is to help every student feel welcome, safe, and included."

Goal 3: Link the district's preschool through grade 12 curriculum to state standards, select and apply the best instructional strategies, and use assessments to measure student progress and adjust instruction.

Performance Indicator 3a: The district must align all district scope and sequence documents to Oregon Department of Education's (ODE) academic content standards by Feb. 1, 2023, and have that posted to the district website. At the work session, it was reported that this is on track.

The main adjustment needed would be to make Oregon history and tribal history more robust, in light of Senate Bill 13, enacted in 2017 for K-12 instruction to add Native American curriculum. Information on coursework, goals, and materials used will be posted on the district website.

"We would encourage parents to contact a building administrator if a parent wants to look at materials used (for any class)," Gervais Middle School Principal Toni Johnson

Gervais Board gets update on strategic plan

continued

said. "We want it to be easy and transparent about what the materials are, and how things are taught and managed in each class."

Performance Indicator 3b: Select instructional strategies that help students make significant growth to achieve grade level standards in core subject content. By March 1, the district is expected to have completed a selection of instructional strategies, published strategies on the district website, and provided appropriate professional development for staff.

Performance Indicator 3c: Implement the newly adopted i-Ready K-12 diagnostic program, analyze results, and make necessary adjustments to instruction. By June 1, 2023, the district is expected to complete the implementation, analysis, and adjustments, and report findings to the school board at its June 2023 meeting.

Goal 4: Use Long-Range Facility Planning Committee data to select district facilities most in need of improvement regarding ongoing safety issues, optimal learning space, and increased student, staff, and community use

Performance Indicator 4a: Conduct research on May 2022 bond election facilities' improvement trends and to document projects voters supported and those they did not support. Bond research began in July, with findings presented to the board in November.

Performance Indicator 4b: Review Long-Range Facility Planning Committee's updates and assessment information on current General Obligation (GO) Bond labor and materials' costs, use findings to prioritize construction projects, and estimate costs for a future bond measure.

Performance Indicator 4c: Create a campaign that will inform voters of the benefits students, staff, and community members will receive from improvements to district facilities. This is through a bond communication campaign that is launching now in anticipation of a May 2023 election.

The research conducted was through two surveys, one in summer and one in the fall. There were also three opportunities this fall for the public to see the school facilities.

The district also has a marketing team that will help with getting the word out, and a pre-bond planning committee is reconvening. There are also meetings that have been scheduled with the architectural firm to discuss modifications to amounts asked for in the past.

While there is no bond on the ballot, the board will have to vote by February 2023 if it wants a bond measure on the May 2023 election ballot.



To learn more scan the QR code!



Meet the school board Henry Bustamante

(Gervais alumni 1983)

"Facilities are the biggest challenge, and the solution is to help pass a bond"

How long have you been on the board?

Nearly 10 years

Occupation?

Appliance sales

Other public service positions and/or volunteer activity?

Gervais sports league president and coach for over 20 years until it dissolved this last year. L.E.A.R.N board member 4 years. Boys & Girls Club in Woodburn volunteer. Other volunteer projects with the district over the years

Why did you decide to join the board?

To help promote youth sports in Gervais in the district and make sure all kids get an education that will help them make a good life.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the district? What solutions do you think the board can take to help solve these issues?

Facilities are the biggest challenge, and the solution is to help pass a bond

What are you most proud of about serving on the school board?

Getting recognition from the kids

What would you like readers to know?

How hard and dedicated our teachers, administration and staff work to make our kids feel safe and making sure our kids have the best learning environment possible

Any other thoughts?

Our district I feel is one of the best in the state, from our dedicated teachers that care about our kids, to an administration that is dedicated to making sure our teachers, counselors and staff have all the tools needed to make sure our kids are safe, fed and able to learn to be good citizens.