

Community Connections

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



Gervais School District joins national program that launches student experiments into space

The Gervais School District is launching a new program that could see some of its students' work on the International Space Station (ISS).

This summer, the district was selected to participate in the Student Spaceflight Experiments Program's (SSEP) Flight Experiment Design Competition, with a chance for one of its projects to fly on Mission 17 to the ISS in the spring of 2023.

Through this program from the National Center for Earth and Space Science Education (NCSSE), Gervais students in grades 8-10, as well as advanced science students in 11th and 12th grades, have the opportunity to design and propose real microgravity experiments that could fly into low Earth orbit. Gervais School District is the only district in the state of Oregon participating in this program.

"The Gervais School District has had a strong focus on STEAM — science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics — and this program not only aligns with our curriculum goals, but also with our district's vision," said Superintendent Dandy Stevens. "This project will not only foster a greater appreciation and understanding of science, but it will also challenge and

empower students to examine more deeply their abilities and impact on the global community."

Right now, students are trying to determine which design experiments to focus on. These topics range from seed germination to food studies to bacteria to cell biology.

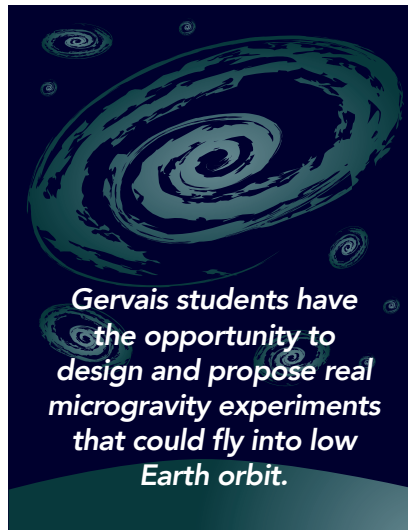
Some fun discussions are happening within groups of students," said April Joy-Koer, the high school science teacher who's been active in getting the district involved. "I think they will enjoy the journey."

Of the many experiments and proposals Gervais students will put together, one will be selected to join others from around the world to be ferried to the ISS, where astronauts will conduct the experiments as directed by the student teams.

In addition to the Flight Experiment Design Competition, there will be a district-wide art competition for the Mission Patch, a paper 4-by-4 square emblem designed by students that will

accompany the winning experiment representing Gervais in space. Additionally, the English department is hosting writing workshops at lunchtime to help students in writing their

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After school program revs up thanks to grant

The Gervais School District has received a \$204,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Education to go toward building an after school program for grades K-8. While the grant is called the Latinx Student Success Grant, Dr. Creighton Helms, the district's director of student services, said the money could be used toward a wide array of opportunities. The district decided to focus on after school programming, as it would have a significant impact on students, especially the younger grades.

"They get out of school at 2:30 and, unless they are able to pay for the after school program afterward, they would just go home," Helms said. "It seemed like a rich area to put our attention toward."

Because it's only available for the year, and because the district only learned they received the grant in August, the schools jumped into action, sending out surveys to parents to see what level of commitment they could secure and



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Preschool grant expanded this year

Gervais School District has been able to expand its preschool offerings this year thanks to funding from the Oregon Department of Education's Early Learning Division.

Through the Preschool Promise program, which helps households that are at 200% or less above the poverty line send their children to preschool for free, Gervais now has an additional 20 slots available to students ages 3-5 for its preschool. Previously, the district had 18 slots. "Before we had a total of 35 to 40 students but this year we're closer to 50 or 55," said Dr. Creighton Helms, director of student services.

This grant allowed the district to open a third classroom,

which it fortunately already had available, as well as money to accommodate the extra seats. Gervais is using some of that funding to expand the outdoor play area of the preschool, complete with a garden zone, and a sand and water table area.

The district has been preparing its third classroom, which started up the second week of October. The other two classrooms have been in progress since August.

"We actually had the space, but the hardest part has been staffing," Helms said. "But we've been really fortunate here, we have some staff from the Gervais community, and we've spent a lot of time and energy into getting that third classroom ready."

Gervais Middle School starts year with new design on facade



(L to R) Artists Kira and Melitina Basargin

A new school year means a new look, just enough to make an impression. That's the case for Gervais Middle School, which now has a fierce wolverine painted on its front facade.

"I wanted to make the front of the building more welcoming and fun," said Toni Johnson, who took over as principal this year. "Visiting schools have trouble locating the middle school, so I thought this would help."

Johnson has taught art at the school in the past, so she knew the right person for the job: eighth-grader Melitina Basargin.

"I knew she would do a beautiful job," Johnson said. "Her mom said she was so excited and couldn't wait to start." Melitina's sister, Kira, also helped with the design and painting project, completing the task in August.

"They made a great team!" Johnson said.

"The community, staff and students have loved the addition of the wolverine," Johnson continued. "(This is a way) to increase school pride. We may be a small school, but we have a huge heart!"

GES debuts family night

A new exciting feature at GES this year is a monthly family activity night hosted at the school.

GES just hosted a Family Art Night with 42 families coming to do a variety of art projects: chalk street art, abstract sculpture, watercolor, and mosaics.

The goal is to create a gathering space for families to connect with each other each month with some exciting activities. The schools are community centers in Gervais that bring the community together to support kids and families.



Gervais Athletics off to strong start

New athletic director Tucker Brack, who also serves as assistant principal, has high hopes for a high-performing year.

"We have great coaches and great kids," he said. "I'm just helping to get what needs done."

New this year is a cross country team - the school hosted its first cross country event in 32 years, and it hasn't had a team in almost as long. It was hosted on a new walking path around the campus.

Cross country is being introduced at the middle school, too, so there will be a funnel of future runners.

In all, there are 115 student athletes out for fall sports, which makes up nearly one-third of the school.

In addition, the Gervais High School gym was spruced up with a new paint job, courtesy of the class of 2022. Additionally, the stadium was spruced up by Kevin Davidson and the district maintenance team, with fixed lights and a new scoreboard.



Gervais High School enters second year of partnership with Willamette Career Academy

Gervais High School has offered a strong career technical education (CTE) program for its students for many years, but this is only the second year that the district is involved in the Willamette Career Academy program in partnership with the Willamette Education Service District (WESD).

The district has 30 juniors and seniors participating in WCA, having selected them through an application and interview process. The students can choose from the following fields of study: cosmetology, diesel mechanics, health services, information technology, construction technology, and manufacturing.

Participants gain real-world exposure while taking college-level courses. Health services students conduct blood pressure labs, dissect organs and tour hospitals. IT students learn coding but also build servers. Construction and manufacturing students learn OSHA regulations while building and fabricating large products.

For junior Diego Contreras, manufacturing might not be directly related to his goal of becoming a math teacher, but it helps.

"It was suggested that I take manufacturing because you have to pay close attention, you can't be distracted, and there's some math in manufacturing," he said. "I'll have lots of opportunities to take any job I want because of manufacturing because there's so many jobs there. If being a teacher doesn't work out, doing a trade job is an option." Students from last year are already reaping the benefits of the program, with some getting internships at Pape



Machinery and others receiving scholarships to study health care.

"I honestly feel that if I wasn't in the program, I probably wouldn't know what I was going to do in the future," said senior Mariah Ramon, who's in the cosmetology program. "This sets us up for the next step in life."

Others, like senior Natalie Gieselman, came into the program because it fit their career goals.

"During the Covid shutdown, I took an interest in health

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After school program revs up thanks to grant

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what programs their children would be interested in discovering during after school hours.

Gervais Elementary School was able to launch its after school club the last week of September, with 260 students (70% of the student population in grades K-5) able to participate in a wide array of programs, including art, Cool 2 Be Kind (service), drama, Legos, soccer, Spanish, STEAM (coding Ozobots), and violins.

"Students are beyond excited for these opportunities," said Principal Dusty Price. "Before this year, the school was able to provide limited after school programs, but this new grant has helped secure staffing for clubs that every student K-5 can join."



The middle school started up its after school program in early October, featuring a piano club, a book club and a Dungeons and Dragons club. Helms is also excited about the possibility of a Unified Sports team in the winter, which would bring special education students on the same team with students from the general population.

The grant pays for staff and supplies for the after-school program, and so administration is open to adding more to the programming as interest arises. And, at least at the elementary school, clubs will be offered in four different sessions, with new options to choose from each session.

"We want to do everything we can to say yes to teachers and students who show interest and want to start a group," Helms said.

Helms pointed out that most neighboring school districts have access to after school programming, either at the school or at other facilities in town. This hasn't really been the case for Gervais, which is part of why this grant is a game changer, and why it's important for the district to pursue the grant every year.

"The real value is that in public education, with all the mandates, the system, as designed, can eliminate opportunities to be creative, and students lose their sense of wonder," he said. "This is another way to inject creativity into their day and for them to realize that play helps them see that learning is a good thing. And to have the ability to get together with peers, to socialize in a safe environment, that really makes a difference."

Student experiments into space

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proposals.

"It's exciting that Gervais School District students have a desire for a challenging and formative STEM experience and that SSEP is seen as an opportunity to demonstrate that the next generation of scientists and engineers can come from Gervais as equally as they can come from anywhere else," said Dr. Jeff Goldstein, director of the NCESSSE. "While we aim to embrace student ownership in learning, just as important is to use the excitement of real science to engage entire communities."

Willamette Career Academy

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care because I had family I lost during the pandemic," she said. "I'm so glad I (entered WCA) because this is exactly what I want to do."

Gieselmann will leave the health care program as a certified nursing assistant and with college credits in hand to go toward a bachelor's degree in nursing.

She and the other students admit that the program has taught them more than the subject matter. "I learned I can handle a lot more than I thought I could," she said.

"I don't really like working with others, but we do that a lot and it's taught me a lot," said senior Gabriel Martinez, who's in the diesel mechanics program. "It builds character. And I've made a lot of new friends."

The program is not for the faint of heart. Students in the morning WCA group have to make the 7:20 a.m. bus to WCA in Salem every day (almost two hours before the normal start time for school) and return to the high school shortly before noon, jumping right in with their core classes, followed by sports or other after-school activities they're involved with.

"It's a lot, it can be stressful sometimes, but it's so worth it because you're getting so many credits and you're pretty much guaranteed a high-paying job in a competitive field," Gieselmann said. "So stick with it; you have to see it to the end."

CTE is clearly a priority for the district, and that's obvious in another new way this year. Starting this year, Gervais Middle School students are getting exposure to CTE too. For one period a day, the high school's CTE instructors are teaching some of their construction, agricultural science and art curriculum to the younger grades.

"In general, because education has been pushing students to go to college, there's a shortage of employees doing important, high-paying jobs in CTE fields," said Gervais High School Principal Andrew Aman. "So we're shifting education so they understand that you don't have to take out a loan and spend years in college to build a solid career for yourself."



School Board UPDATE

City council tours school buildings, meets with school board

The Gervais School District and the Gervais City Council convened last month for a joint work session that included a tour of the district's three school buildings. This meeting was in line with the school board's 2022-23 goals of collaborating with community stakeholders and identifying the facility features with the most need for improvements.

During the tour, city councilors and the mayor had the opportunity to see firsthand the state of the district facilities and to ask questions about the projects that had been proposed in the failed May 2022 bond. Each person was provided with a breakdown of the identified repairs and remodels including costs, as well as which projects the Pre-Bond Planning Committee had eliminated because they were too expensive or not high enough on the priority list. The architect was also present to answer questions about project costs or logistics concerning repair and replacement of facilities.

At the end of the tour, the councilors and the board members reconvened at the district office conference room to discuss what they saw.

The two biggest issues at Gervais High School that the group addressed were the boys' locker room and the science classrooms. The boys locker room has one working toilet, two urinals, and three make-shift showers. Most of the plumbing, tile and fixtures are original to the 1960s building. A high school student explained that for the larger science classes, the lab spaces are too small and the equipment, such as sinks, gas lines, ventilation hoods and electrical access, have not been updated since the building opened. Science courses and requirements have changed significantly since then.

Gervais Middle School's hallways are too small and overcrowded. The classrooms are undersized and the eighth-grade modulares, constructed in the 1990s, have no bathroom facilities. The middle school also has no science classrooms.

Gervais Elementary School has poor ADA access to the building and is in need of an HVAC system to replace the boiler.



During the tour, city councilors and the mayor had the opportunity to see firsthand the state of the district facilities and to ask questions about the projects that had been proposed in the failed May 2022 bond.

The group also discussed next steps, which include three upcoming community engagement sessions to get feedback about building improvements and the bond, and to offer tours for anyone interested. Those dates are:

October 25: Gervais High School/6 p.m.

October 26: Gervais Middle School/6 p.m.

November 2: Gervais Middle School (Spanish only)/6 p.m.

The district is also mailing out monthly FAQs regarding the bond. Additionally, the board is gathering information from specific precincts who voted "no" on the May 2022 bond to see how to better engage those voters.

While another bond is not officially on the May 2023 ballot yet, the board is anticipated to make that decision at the February 2023 board meeting.





Get to Know Your School Board

Ana Contreras

"Education is a powerful tool to help provide stability and help students turn their dreams into reality."

How long have you been on the board?

A year and a half.

Occupation?

Communications Coordinator for the Office of Information Services for the state of Oregon. We are a shared technical service for ODHS and OHA.

Why did you decide to join the board?

Education is important to me, especially because my father was severely dyslexic and never learned to read or write. I want to see every child succeed. The resources available within a community determine the extent to which it can support families. Gervais is a low-income community and, as such, suffers because it doesn't have the necessary financial resources. You can see the negative consequences in the effects of poverty that are felt both physically and emotionally, often resulting in destructive personal choices and increased crime. Education is a powerful tool to help provide stability and help students turn their dreams into reality.

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?

This past May, the Gervais School District asked the community to consider a bond measure for \$35 million to renew and expand our aging facilities. It has been 30 years since a school bond has passed in this district. Although the bond didn't pass this time, the board will continue to pursue this course of action. The main reason the board is in favor of a bond is the safety and security of our students.

What would you like readers to know?

Gervais public schools were designed to ensure that all children receive access to free and comprehensive basic education. And, while public schools are supposed to get equal funding regardless of their location, the reality doesn't always match this goal. State funding per student can vary significantly and poor schools often get less money in state funds and grants than wealthy schools.



This reality is evident in our existing facilities. The need for project improvements around safety and security is more important than ever. Our buildings are in desperate need of upgrades, such as fencing, secure entryways, roof repairs/replacements, and so much more. It's important that our children learn in a safe, calm and secure environment to provide competitive educational and athletic programs that Gervais can be proud of.

I welcome all parents, staff, students, community members and stakeholders to participate and engage in our civic duties. We have an obligation to work toward the common good of our society. In a world with so much division, let's work together to ensure our students have all the necessary tools and resources to succeed in life, starting with a strong educational school system.