



Small Talk

the official newsletter of the
OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

The Road Less Traveled



By: **Michael Lasher**
OSSA Executive Director

There are many wonderful reasons to hope for a career in a small school district or Education Service District (ESD). Chief among them are the growth we can see daily in the lives of children

that pass by our door, in the classroom or on the playground. As an educator, you make a huge difference in the lives of children. On balance, no one has the ability to make a larger difference in the lives of more children than educators like you. But, there is another area where you make a difference that is often overlooked.

I've never met a successful small school administrator who wasn't adept at working with stakeholders in the community. Even though small schools are the center of their communities and are key to the vitality of the community, we can't accomplish all we must for children without the assistance of others. Perhaps it is the focus on what's best for kids that helps us engage with those we'd rather avoid and to have conversations with people we wish shared our opinions and perspective, but don't.

In this heated political season, when campaign ads are being run that denigrate and demonize the other side, it's reassuring to think that in most small communities we know better than to badmouth someone. As I've told many a new employee: "Don't talk bad about anyone in the community, you never know which board member they're related to." In reality, it's not the fear of retribution or retaliation that prevents us from speaking our mind and perhaps

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Making a Difference with Trauma Informed Teaching Practices

By: **Bob Lorence**, *OSSA 2018 Administrator of the Year*



Two years ago, I made the transition from an elementary school principal to a high school principal. I had quite a few trepidations about moving to the "upper grade levels". Some of these concerns have proven to be false, like not being able to relate to older students. I have found that most high school students are just bigger kids doing some of the same silly things. What I didn't realize was my experiences and relationships built during those elementary years would be a wealth of knowledge in helping my high school staff understand why a student may act out in class or why that student is chronically absent.

For the past four years, the Umatilla School District has been providing professional development in trauma informed teaching practices. We have been learning about how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) affect our students' day and their behavior at school. Traumatic stress can severely impact a student's ability to learn, function in social environments or be able to manage their emotions and behaviors in the classroom. The more teachers understand the signs students exhibit and the more they recognize why simple things in the brain produce adverse reactions, the better teachers can limit classroom disruptions that can escalate into behavioral confrontations.

When a school puts trauma informed teaching strategies into place, it begins using a new lens to look at ways to solve problems. For example, when a student has a history of coming late to school and skipping his

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burning a bridge. Rather, it's the knowledge that everyone in a small community has value. Granted, sometimes we have to look hard to find it.

Working in schools, we also know we need community partners in healthcare, DHS, law enforcement, etc. We may not always agree with their priorities or methods, but we know that there may come a time when we, or a child, will need the help of that partner agency, so we best not speak harshly or in haste.

For this reason and many others, school teachers and district leaders are a beacon of civility for our communities, although neither you nor the community may realize it. I am fortunate to have a diverse board who have views across the political spectrum and who originate from all over the country. One member sometimes wears a MAGA hat and always carries a concealed weapon to the board meeting, while another defends juvenile offenders and supports and attends LGBTQ

events. They are always polite to one another. Yes, they know the other member's political persuasion, they just choose to focus on their agreed job -- working together for what's best for kids and what's best for schools.

They are an inspiration to me for their ability to come together in support of something beyond themselves and their own views. We all know this work we do can come with frustrating, even infuriating interactions. It's important to remember that in spite of that, you can be the best example to your students, schools and communities regarding civility, respect and compromise. When you treat someone kindly who may not deserve it, when you listen to all sides of an issue before making a decision and when you exhibit the flexibility to modify your point of view, you are modeling to your students, your co-workers and your community the best of what it means to be an American.

This, we all need to do.

first two periods, our previous protocol would have been to apply our discipline matrix, including punitive punishments that may make the student angry and less willing to comply. Our new strategy brings the student and parents in to meet with a team of people representing wraparound services. In this case, we learned the student was missing school because he was providing childcare for a sister working nights to help pay rent to keep their house. Through wraparound services, we were able to provide a childcare option that limited his need to stay home to one day and only missing his first period.

Today, this student is a senior on track to graduate and is much more engaged in his education.

Another strategy that helps schools address students experiencing trauma is to provide consistency and structure within their daily routines. Students from traumatic environments can be triggered by unstructured classrooms and lack of boundaries. Teachers who provide clear expectations and consistency in their daily structure can create a feeling of normalcy that many students do not have outside of school. Teachers who genuinely expresses warmth and understanding can help a stressed-out student feel safe.

Administrators can also make a difference. Students with traumatic backgrounds may already have a negative view of authority figures and may be used to unfair punitive punishments that do not produce the desired redirection. Administrators need to set clear limitations addressing

the student's behavior tied to a restorative alternative to discipline. I have a student who has very advanced computer skills; he is self-taught and spends all of his spare time developing his computer skills. At our school, we discovered he was using our computer network as his new computer playground – he wasn't doing anything damaging, but was finding "back doors" to areas within the network thought to be secure. This student has a high ACEs score and does not respond at all to punitive actions. It took awhile to find an approach that turned his behavior around. We were able



to reach agreements that empowered his abilities by requesting a written report providing the IT department with possible security issues. We also began to have discussions about using his talents in ways he didn't realize were possible. Can I say he is totally reformed? No, I cannot, but I can say he is no longer in my office every day, which makes him as happy as I am.

I believe that trauma informed research and the practices that are being implemented are impacting the teaching profession and giving hope to many students who are suffering from trauma. I know it is impacting the classrooms in Umatilla, and our educational staff is experiencing positive results. We are still learning and trying new approaches to improve our school environment to help reach the needs of our students. It is a journey that is worth the invested time to develop an environment for students to overcome their past and look forward to a changed future.



Remember, Teachers are Human, Too

By: *Jordan Slavish, OSSA 2018 Teacher of the Year*

I am not a superhero.

The other day, I saw a poster that said, “I’m a teacher, what’s your superpower?” It grated on me, but at the time I just couldn’t pin down why. As

I watched the news and heard from my friends picketing and striking, a picture began to emerge of what seemed to me to be the number one symptom of our changing generation and the evolution of one of the world’s oldest professions.

First off, I’d like to state up front that despite what my mother might tell all her friends, I am not a superhero. I don’t feel like one; I don’t feel like I do any more than anyone else who signed up for a job knowing what they were getting into. I get up in the morning just like everyone else; I go through my day (and I admit, I really, REALLY enjoy this part) and at the end of it, I take a little bit of work home with me.

While I value feedback and ideation on ways to improve, praise makes me uncomfortable. I’m not a superhero; I’m just a regular dude, doing a pretty regular job that I happen to love.

By and large, I think if the average person was to sit down and really talk with the average teacher, this opinion would be pretty much universal. We’re tired, and we probably think we’re a little underappreciated, but none of us graduated with the impression that our next stop would be the Ferrari dealership. We’re here because we enjoy it, and we understand that a little sacrifice is part of the game.

The problem, however, is when that sacrifice becomes enshrined as part of the reason that we as a community respect educators. At one point in my early career, I was idly talking with an older family friend about what it would have been like if I’d been an engineer instead of a math teacher, and wondering how hard it would be to make a switch. Their response was along the lines of, “But think of all the children you’ve impacted, and the noble sacrifice you’ve made.” While their heart was in the right place, this mentality begins to normalize the idea that we are expected to give unceasingly, and that it is somehow our obligation to do so; if you don’t like that, maybe you shouldn’t have been a teacher.

As teachers, especially in small towns, sometimes it is easy to get caught up in the moment and to begin to internalize the praise we get from our community. I see motivational posters in classrooms, posts on Facebook and stories in the news about how much teachers are sacrificing and how incredible we are. The danger here is that when we internalize that idea, we begin to be chained to upholding that image. We begin to

feel that giving every last ounce of blood, sweat and tears to our job IS part of our job and ashamed if we feel frustrated by these expectations. When this happens, it becomes really, really hard to take that first step back and say, “Wait a second – I’m not getting what I need on a daily personal fulfillment level.”

As the education workforce changes, so too must the expectations placed upon those educators. When I first started teaching in 2009, an elderly teacher on the verge of retirement was routinely in his room grading papers until 6 or 7 pm. As an early millennial, this seemed a little excessive to me, but not that far outside the norm. As I saw newer and younger hires come and go, I became more aware of how backwards this practice seemed to these younger employees – some of them outright laughed at the idea of staying past 3:30, the end of their contracted time.



My wife will be the first to tell you, I’m frequently at school until six, seven or eight o’clock. The difference is that I am there running clubs that I’ve been given the freedom and funding to take and run with, and I’m not simply working under the “it’s the job, it has to get done” mentality. There is a fine line between giving our time for our own joy and fulfillment and giving it because we don’t want to be seen as not living up to the ideals placed upon us. It is difficult because so often we really, truly love what we do, but we must understand and identify this decision as a conscious choice. It’s imperative to our success that as educators we take ownership of that distinction.

I want to be clear -- I don’t necessarily mean asking for higher wages, benefits, lower class sizes or any of the usual grievances, although that can certainly be part of it. There are times however, when as teachers, we reach our breaking point, maybe due to outside factors, maybe a student has hit THEIR breaking point or maybe we’re just not feeling it today. The point is that’s okay, and you shouldn’t feel ashamed for being human. You’re a regular person, in a regular job and you have needs like anyone else. You don’t have to be Superman and you don’t have to try to catch that 747.

If you are not a teacher, the next time you see one – skip the praise. You don’t have to thank them for the huge sacrifice in personal time you think they’re making and don’t feel like you need to tell them how much of a difference they’re making in the youth of tomorrow. We know; we are happy to give what we can and we (generally) enjoy doing it. Instead, just say hi with a big smile, give a pat on the back and if they look like they’re struggling with that 747, offer a hand.



What's on your leadership list?

By: **R. Michael Carter**, Superintendent of Rainier School District & OSSA Board President

Browsing the Internet and library shelves, you can find hundreds of books and resources about leadership: "The Top 10 Leadership Qualities," "Five Traits of a Good Educational Leader," "7 Characteristics of Effective Education Leaders," "15 Educational Leadership Skills for New School Administrators," "The Eight Characteristics of Effective School Leaders". We seem never to have a shortage of lists and tips for leaders.

As we work during this school year, as leaders we need to ask ourselves what is on our individual leadership list. We need to ask ourselves what kind of leader does my school district/ community need in order to reach the true potential of our organization?

Research and practice confirms time and time again that without a committed and skilled instructional leader in a school district, there is little chance to create and sustain a high-quality learning environment. A quality leader shapes the teaching and learning in a school district, and the major leader in the process is the building principal. The building principal must be the "chief" instructional leader and the superintendent must support the principal in this important mission.

My personal list is composed of six essential skills or attributes of leadership in a school district:

- Remember that everything I do is for the benefit of individual student success, and keep students in the forefront of all decision making.

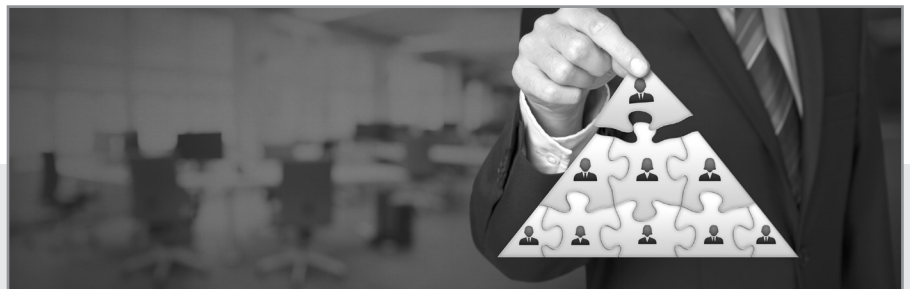
Other leadership thoughts:

- Develop a learning environment based on caring and trust.
- Take action to promote the vision and inspire others toward that vision.
- Lead by example.
- Provide a clear picture of where to go, what success looks like and how to achieve it.
- Be active -- actions are the real indicator of character.
- Have integrity: do what is right, even if it is the difficult thing to do.
- Retain a sense of humor. The ability to laugh promotes and builds camaraderie.
- Embrace failures and manage setbacks.

- Communicate and connect resources to teachers, various programs and classrooms.
- Build trust and empower those in leadership roles.
- Be persistent and committed to the cause.
- Work to take out the "DIS" in Disadvantage. Any disadvantage can be turned into an advantage for achievement. Model this behavior and demonstrate this in all that I do.
- Truly care; it is part of my DNA. Others can give up on a student, staff or program, but I can't and won't.

Here are some inspiring leadership quotes to help you develop your leadership list:

- "Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence." - Bernard Montgomery, British Field Marshall
- "Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit." - Conrad Hilton
- "The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people." - Theodore Roosevelt
- "A good leader takes little more than his share of the blame and little less than his share of the credit." - Arnold Glasow



- Inspire and grow people around you to build a successful team with individual talents.
- Be an effective communicator, which includes being a good listener.
- Be totally committed to your mission.
- Show compassion and care for your employees and your community.
- Display confidence using non-verbal communication by standing tall and making eye contact.

I hope your 2018-19 school year is successful, and I look forward to hearing about your leadership experiences.



Legislative Update

By: *Justin Martin, OSSA Lobbyist*

Thank you for the opportunity to share an update. The Joint Interim Committee on Student Success held its final meeting earlier this month. The committee has worked hard this year, traveling throughout Oregon to gather

information through public hearings and roundtables with members of both the education and business communities. Co-Chair Senator Arnie Roblan noted at the final meeting that student participation at hearings has been exceptional, and reported that the committee will introduce legislation in 2019 that helps to create an education system in Oregon that provides the best opportunity for all kids to succeed.

As a recap, during the 2019 short legislation session we were successful in passing the Dorm School legislation. Since we were given only a one-year extension from the 2017 Legislature, we had to once again go in and extend the sunset date to continue being able to offer this to our districts in Burnt River, Paisley, Mitchell, Spray and Ukiah. We were able to extend the sunset for two years, but this will require additional legislation to give our districts some certainty around their budgets. We will once again be working on this in 2019, as well as working on the extension of the small high

school grant, which has a sunset date of 2020.

We are currently in the final weeks of the election, and I have been attending legislative fundraisers and talking with both elected officials and my colleagues about education and the upcoming session, which convenes on January 22, 2019. As the session approaches, we will continue to have opportunities to inform our Education Committees and Legislative leadership about our agenda and priorities.

I look forward to continuing to use the interim to keep pushing our values and ideas to benefit our students and our districts.

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PLEASE JOIN US NOW!

GOALS

- **COLLABORATIVE NETWORK:** OSSA will work with other professional education organizations for the improvement of education in Oregon's small schools.
- **EXCELLENCE:** OSSA will promote and celebrate excellence that is exhibited in small schools.
- **LEGISLATIVE ACTION:** OSSA will advocate for small schools' interest before the legislative assembly with an emphasis on school funding. OSSA employs Justin Martin as our lobbyist.
- **PROVIDE ASSISTANCE:** OSSA will be a resource for advocating small schools to address instructional, curricular and operational tasks promoting their unique needs.
- **STAFF DEVELOPMENT:** OSSA will promote and facilitate excellence in education by providing staff development opportunities.



ELIGIBILITY

K-12 Districts (ADM of 1650 or less).

ESD's are eligible to join.

Individual school: Individual schools from a non-member district can join as a school. This includes a small school within a larger district, private independent and charter schools. Individual school building population for elementary schools is limited to 60 ADM per grade level and high schools limited to 500 ADM with no voting rights for individual school memberships.

County School District: Schools within a county school district that meet the small schools membership criteria are eligible for membership and shall have voting rights.

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Tim Sweeney Selected as 2019 Oregon Superintendent of the Year

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Tim Sweeney, OSSA Board Member and Coquille School District Superintendent, has been named the 2019 Oregon Superintendent of the Year by the Oregon Association of School Executives (OASE) and the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA).

Sweeney has been the superintendent in Coquille since 2010. In more than 30 years as an educator, he has been a substitute teacher, high school soccer and basketball coach in Medford, a Social Studies teacher and Athletic Director at Eagle Point Junior High School and a principal and superintendent in the Butte Falls School District before beginning in Coquille.

In Coquille, Sweeney has faced the challenge of providing a quality education with extremely limited resources in one of Oregon's lowest socio-economic counties. Under his leadership, Coquille students now have a comprehensive alternative school for grades K-12, an early learning center, classes in Adaptive Life Skills for K-12 and reduced class sizes.

"In his eight years as superintendent of the Coquille School District, Tim Sweeney has shown that one person can be the change agent for not just a school system, but for an entire community," said Randy Schild, Tillamook School District Superintendent and OASE President. "As a community leader and a catalyst for early childhood education, he has committed himself to making his small community one of the best places in the state to raise kids," Schild said.

His colleagues and staff admire his resolute philosophy to always improve conditions for the students and

families he serves. Sweeney's dedication to improvement has resulted in a graduation rate that rose from 70% in 2009 to 90% in 2016; 50% of those graduating seniors in 2016 had also taken at least one college class prior to graduating. Additionally, the percentage of ELL students in the district meeting AMAO requirements has increased from 17% to 77%.



In his nomination of Sweeney, Coquille School District Special Programs Director Wayne Gallagher underscored Sweeney's commitment to excellence when it comes to meeting the needs of Coquille families and students.

"The Coquille School District transformed from a district of declining enrollment and scarcity to one of hope for the future. Tim led the change movement by reconfiguring the entire school district's approach to learning," said Gallagher. "The Coquille School District is a prime example of a rural school district with limited resources that has been transformed into a shining example of success by a visionary leader."

Sweeney will be honored at the 2018 Oregon School Boards Association Convention November 8-11 and at other events through June. This award qualifies him for the National Superintendent of the Year Award from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

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State Tackles Absenteeism

The Oregon Department of Education has recently been addressing Chronic Absenteeism and what it means for students across the state.

What is Chronic Absenteeism?

It is missing at least 10% of school days in a school year for any reason, excused or unexcused. What does 10% look like? If a school district is on a five-day week, 18 days during the year is considered chronically absent. In a four-day school week, it's 14 days. So, if a student misses just two days a month, this is chronic absenteeism.

Nationwide, an estimated five to seven and a half million students miss 18 or more days of school each year, or nearly an entire month or more of school.

In Oregon, the chronic absenteeism rate for all Oregon students in 2017-18 was 20.5%, an increase from the previous year. One in six of Oregon children is chronically absent and chronic absenteeism in Oregon has a disproportionate impact on American Indian and Alaska Native students, students with disabilities, students of color, students experiencing economic disadvantage and students who have received at least one out-of-school suspension.

Attendance matters at all grade levels. Administrators, teachers and school staff know that students who attend school regularly are more likely to read at grade level and build a strong foundation for academic success from preschool to high school.

Chronic absenteeism is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful predictor of those students who may eventually drop out of school.

What is Oregon doing?

The 2015 Oregon Legislature enacted House Bill (HB) 4002 which directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Chief Education Office to develop a joint statewide education plan to address chronic absenteeism. The first step was hiring Chronic Absenteeism Coordinators, who work in each region



of the state with area school districts to improve attendance.

In October, the ODE launched the Every Day Matters (www.every-day-matters.org) website, with information and resources. At the local level, the ODE plan includes support for local action and coaching, school improvements and data use. Regional coordinators partner with the school districts to develop strategies that will work for those students in that district.

ODE understands that partnerships with local and state health agencies, community based organizations, community and business members and families must be leveraged to provide essential wraparound support to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism for all students.

What can schools do?

Build Relationships: students do best in a safe and welcoming environment. Schools and families can help with this by:

- Ensuring every student is connected with an adult within his or her school who can watch for issues and help with solutions.
- Building relationships with classmates and peers.
- Planning for success by having attendance goals and addressing possible obstacles in advance.

What is the overall goal for the Chronic Absenteeism initiative?

The State of Oregon wants to reduce the chronic absenteeism rate to 17.8%.



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OSSA Names Bob Lorence as 2018-19 Administrator of the Year

This past June, the Oregon Small Schools Association chose Bob Lorence as its 2018 Administrator of the Year. Lorence is the principal of Umatilla High School, where he is starting his third year in that role.

Known for his steady demeanor and reserved leadership style, Lorence has helped his school achieve a graduation rate of 82%, five points above the state average. The rate also marks the first time the Umatilla School District has exceeded the state average in every single student group. The Umatilla School District has a high population of students who live in poverty, and the high school's graduation rate has been historically below the state average.

Lorence's leadership brought the high school staff together to establish a "no excuses" mindset to work on boosting the graduation rate. They started by using data effectively to monitor individual students and implementing an early warning student system, meeting individually with students to review their academic progress and embracing Wraparound and outside resources to provide a "whole child" support system.

Heidi Sipe, superintendent of the Umatilla School District, said, "Bob understands that rural educators must wear many hats, and he embraces each role he must fill. He

is the model of servant leadership and I appreciate all he does for our schools and community."

Lorence has worked in the district for 27 years, starting out as an elementary teacher, then vice principal and principal of the elementary school. According to Julie Hunt, special education director for the district, Lorence is sincere, dedicated and empathetic, setting high expectations at the school, which has resulted in increased morale. "In looking for influential individuals, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence and energy. Mr. Lorence has all three," Hunt said.

Lorence received his award at the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) Conference at Seaside in June. "This award is a reflection of the hard work my staff and I have achieved together by building relationships and believing in our students' abilities. I set the vision and together we have worked

with the students to take pride in their school and to reach for higher goals," Lorence said.

OSSA recognizes one school administrator each year who excels in his/her leadership position. Criteria include integrity, leadership, commitment to community, scholarship and student achievement.



Join us!

Oregon Small Schools Association Breakfast

During the OSBA Convention
Saturday, Nov. 10, 2018 • 7:30 a.m.
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Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront Hotel

