



# Small Talk

the official newsletter of the  
**OREGON SMALL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION**

## Message from Board President



By: *Michael Carter*  
*OSSA Board President*

Greetings everyone!

I wish each and every one of you a most excellent end of the school year. I know that this time of year is very challenging for all administrators, school leaders and staff, but it's also the most rewarding time in the school year. We get to celebrate with our students moving into the next chapter of their lives, whether that is moving to the next grade level or graduation from high school, and we get to witness all the magic that has been accomplished over the past year come to a wonderful conclusion.

A lot has been happening in the Oregon Small Schools Association (OSSA) world as well. Our long-term Executive Director, Michael Lasher, resigned in early February. We thank him for nine years of leadership and wish him all the best as his journey continues. The OSSA Board and support staff have been running the organization as a team, which has been going really well.

In March, OSSA had our first Small Schools Conference in almost two decades, with almost 70 people in attendance in Bend, Oregon. It was an outstanding event with leaders from small districts from all over the state gathering together to talk, exchange ideas and learn from each other in a very

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*Please see Message on pg 2*

## Teaching the Value of Taking Risks Can Create Stronger Students

By: *Amber Doremus*, *OSSA 2019 Teacher of the Year*



Aristotle said what we must learn to do, we learn by doing. Often we interpret this quote to mean that active participation means better retention of skills. But I think that what he really meant was to take a risk, try something out, see what happens and adjust accordingly.

As I have matured in my teaching career, I have begun to see value in risk, because even failure can spur you on to the right idea or way of doing something. The past few years, I've traded social sciences and reading instruction to take on more math teaching. It is in this new adventure that I have learned some lessons I'd like to share with you in hopes you will consider taking instructional risks and reaping the benefits of failure, too.

"I'm not good at math," or "I'm not a math person," are phrases we read and hear far too often. Jo Boaler of Stanford preaches that this is simply untrue. Anyone can be a math person, and those who think they are not have likely had poor math experiences in the past. My sixth grade math students entered the year with very negative self-talk about math. I knew that my first task was to change their feelings about math, but that involved risk. What if all the standards

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short time period. Everyone left rejuvenated for the end of the school year with new leadership tools to use and implement in their various leadership roles. We hope to have our second conference later this year in October, in conjunction with our other educational partners, so stay tuned.

The biggest announcement the OSSA Board would like to make is about our new partnership with the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA). In a survey of OSSA membership, the vast majority voted yes to proceed with the COSA affiliate agreement. The OSSA will become an affiliate member of COSA operating under the COSA umbrella. This partnership will provide OSSA with additional support and greater recognition statewide, help maximize resources and increase overall impact and voice throughout the state. This affiliate status will help us better serve our membership, increase services and offer new supports for all Oregon small school districts, private schools and charter school members of OSSA.

OSSA will benefit from the sheer “economy of scale” and level of expertise that COSA brings to the table.

COSA is the premier organization in the state serving all school administrators - we will be proud to be part of this organization and look forward to a long and fruitful partnership.

At our June meeting in Seaside, the OSSA Board will sign all the necessary documents and we will operate under COSA as an affiliate member/partner beginning in July 2019. I thank all of our members and the board for their willingness to work on this important endeavor. I strongly believe this will take OSSA to the next level of success and influence throughout the state.

For concerns or questions, please contact an OSSA Board Member or michael\_carter@rsd.k12.or.us or 503-556-3777, ext. 264. It has been an honor to serve as your Board President this year, and I look forward to many successful years as we move into the next chapter of our wonderful journey. I hope to see you at the COSA Seaside convention in June.

Thank you for all you do for the students you serve in Oregon!

aren't covered? What if we spend a couple of days on an idea-building experience and do not get in enough prescribed content? What if they are not ready for state testing in time? It was hard to override these feelings of imminent failure in order to take a risk and do what my gut told me the kids needed, but I did it anyway.

I landed on this question: What if math were instead a journey? The first part of any journey is the desire to participate. I took a risk and decided to focus the year on building positive experiences in math that would increase confidence.

First, I asked the students to participate in a free online course through Stanford University that is designed to promote positive thinking about math. Then I tried treating math problem-solving like a story: we have this situation, what are the characters trying to figure out, is there missing information, what more do we need to solve it, how will we solve the problem? This approach engages students more fully. Next, I incorporated more

real-world problem solving into our curriculum. Solving problems like determining the height of a flagpole can incorporate more math and problem-solving skills than a week of traditional study. And it is more rigorous.

Finally, I purposely created an atmosphere of risk taking. My students now know that trying to solve a math problem is valuable even if the answer is wrong. I constantly tell them, “If we are wrong, what is the worst that can happen? As long as we are physically safe, the worst that could happen is we figure out the source of the error and fix it. If you build a cabin in the woods and miscalculate your roofing materials, you'll know, you'll recalculate, you'll fix it and you'll be wiser on the next opportunity.”

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***I have begun to see value in risk, because even failure can spur you on to the right idea or way of doing something.***

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Taking risks in a safe environment, being allowed to be wrong and reworking the solution is perhaps the best way we can teach our youth about math and about life. Risk, learn, repeat. Learn by doing.

Aristotle was right.



# Almost Graduation: Supporting Seniors Until they Reach the Final Step

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

I recently watched the movie “Unbroken”, which recounts the life of Louis Zamperini. The opening scene shows Louis in a plane making a bombing run in World War II. The scene is very intense, and each crewmember displays a gamut of emotions. You can feel their anxiety as they search for their target and their longing to get their job done so they can turn for home.

To make matters worse, the plane starts to shake as anti-aircraft bombs start to go off around them, and fear turns into doubt as they wonder if they can even make it. You begin to see their relief and excitement when the target is located and the bombs are released, but it lasts for only a moment as their attention turns to getting home safely. What should be smooth flying turns into a fight for their lives as they take on hits from enemy aircraft. Their plane is damaged and the landing gear will not go down. Members of the crew are shot and wounded. As they approach the landing strip, each of them is wondering if they made it all this way only to crash and burn on the landing strip.

This scene, though totally different in context, bears similar emotions to a cohort of high school seniors in their last three months of school. The pilot of the plane is like your college-bound student. They have studied hard and passed their classes. Their GPA is where it needs to be and they have built their resumes to place them in the driver’s seat. No need to worry right?

However, the unknown rocks their smooth sailing. For many of them, that fear of the unknown allows doubts to shake their normal confident selves. They deal with many emotional feelings as they await what their future will hold. Some of them begin to doubt that they can perform at the next level. Some of them wonder what they will do without their friends and the comfortable confines of the school they have called home for the last four years. Even these students who are driving their future need support to help them land safely at their next landing strip.

Now let’s look at our students who represent the co-pilot or bomber. They are the students who have all the skills and abilities to succeed at the next level, but there may be obstacles in their lives that keep them from being able to take full control of the plane and fly. In our high schools, these students may not have a role model to follow or they may not see how to get themselves out of the box of circumstances life has placed them in. They need someone to invest in them and mentor them to reach the potential they have within. Without this encouragement,

many of them will settle for a life of what could have been, or they will take the long road through life that will eventually get them to their landing strip.



The bulk of the crew is made up of men who fill a role on the plane that may seem to some as not important, but in reality the plane is doomed without them. In our high schools, these students are in the position of limping to

graduation or are in a real panic about not graduating. They are your chronic absentee students who in most cases never thought that there would be a consequence for not being at school. They may be the students who, for no fault of their own, suffer from moving from school to school and now don’t have the credits needed to graduate. There are some students who now admit they should have applied themselves better in class - they know they could have and should have done better over the last four years. They now hope their renewed focus will be enough to lift them out of their circumstances. Then there are our wounded, students who bear the emotional wounds of neglect and abuse, the students who are fighting addictions or those who are caught within the struggle of citizenship and a real unknown future.

In the final moments of the opening scene in “Unbroken”, the crew on the plane banded together to help ensure they made it to their final destination. In our high schools, the final three months of school are busy with many

*Please see Supporting Seniors on pg 4*

people performing their roles to ensure our seniors reach a milestone that will be their launching pad for life. Counselors are like your medics. They are patching the wounded, they are encouraging the doubting and they are supporting the college bound. Our teachers are with our students each step of the way. They build the relationships that help students learn more about themselves and what the future can hold. They are the encouragers who keep students moving forward toward a goal. Educational support staff provide the helping hand that makes our schools such caring places. Our administrators get involved to help ensure that parents, students and staff stay the course and see that we all work to the end.

It is very important for our seniors to hear and feel support. What if everyone within a school system committed to seeking out an opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation with a senior about how they are doing and what their hopes are for the future? I am willing to bet those seniors who hear your words of encouragement will be lifted higher and, in some cases, will find a renewed sense to carry on. Sometimes we never know how a two-minute conversation changes someone's future. It would be nice for all of our seniors to walk out of our schools at the end of their four (sometimes five) years, celebrating an accomplishment that will launch them to a future you had a part in creating.



## Legislative Update

*By: Justin Martin, OSSA Lobbyist*

Thank you for the opportunity to share an update on the 2019 Legislative Session.

House Bill 3115 relating to dorm school funding was heard before the House Committee on Education on March 27th and passed with a unanimous do-pass recommendation to the House Committee on Revenue. Burnt River School District Superintendent Lou Lyon did an amazing job of sharing information about the importance of Oregon's dorm schools. Representative Lynn Findley (R – HD 60) also testified in support of the bill. HB 3115 removes the sunset to secure permanent funding for Oregon Small Schools Association dorm schools, which include Burnt River, Paisley, Mitchell, Spray and Ukiah.

We are also working to insert an extension of the small high school grant, which sunsets in 2020, into the omnibus education package.

The Oregon Legislature has passed the April 9th deadline requiring that a bill be scheduled for a work session in the chamber of origin, which has slowed the pace of activity. The pace will likely continue to lull until the Revenue Forecast is released on May 15th. Following the forecast release legislative work in finance committees including



*From left: Representative Lynn Findley (R-HD 60), Burnt River School District Superintendent Lou Lyon and OSSA lobbyist Justin Martin speak during the public hearing for HB3115 before the House Committee on Education in March.*

Ways & Means will ramp up as elected officials work to meet the June 30th constitutional deadline for sine die.

We look forward to continuing our work on behalf of OSSA this session and during the 2019 interim.

## OSSA Executive Director Resigns

After providing many years of leadership and direction to OSSA, Executive Director Michael Lasher resigned in February. The OSSA Board extends a huge THANK YOU to Michael for his years of dedication, guidance and service to the organization, and we wish him the very best!

At this time, the OSSA Board continues to run the organization and collectively make decisions. Please direct questions to Board President Michael Carter or any of our board members. A list of board members can be found on our website at <https://oregonssa.org/board-directors>.

*Thank you*

## Amazon Program Provides Computer Science Opportunities to Students

Two high schools in eastern Oregon were recently chosen to join the Amazon Future Engineer program. Ukiah School and Umatilla High School will receive funding from Amazon to start offering computer science classes to students in fall 2019.

The schools are two of more than 1,000 high schools across the country currently signed up for Amazon Future Engineer, a national program aimed at making computer science accessible to all students. With more than 1,000 high schools signed up, Amazon Future Engineer will serve tens of thousands of high school students.

The computer science classes are offered through curriculum provider Edhesive. Amazon's funding provides preparatory lessons, tutorials and professional development for teachers, fully sequenced and paced digital curriculum for students and live online support every day of the week for both teachers and students. These full-year courses are designed to inspire, prepare, and propel students in their pursuit of computer science education. All students participating in this program will receive a free membership to AWS Educate which provides them with free access to computing power in the AWS Cloud for their coding projects and content to learn about cloud computing.

"We are honored to receive this support from Amazon," said Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe. "We have provided STEM opportunities in Umatilla for a number of years and this opportunity strengthens current offerings and provides a direct pathway to employment. Amazon is playing a large role in economic development for our region and we are excited to see how these opportunities will assist us in better preparing students for workforce needs."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2020 there will be 1.4 million computer-science-related jobs available and only 400,000 computer science graduates with the skills to apply for those jobs. Computer science is the fastest growing profession within the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) field, but only 8% of STEM graduates earn a computer science degree, with a tiny minority from underprivileged backgrounds. And, underprivileged students are

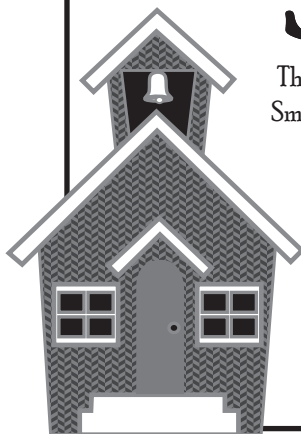


8 to 10 times more likely to pursue college degrees in computer science if they have taken AP computer science in high school.

Amazon plans to add 1,000 more schools to the program in the coming months.

Launched in November 2018, Amazon Future Engineer is a four-part childhood-to-career program intended to inspire, educate, and prepare children and young adults from underprivileged, underrepresented and underserved communities to pursue careers in the fast-growing field of computer science.

For more information about the program, visit [www.edhesive.com/amazon](http://www.edhesive.com/amazon).



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Michele Madril, Editor

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## OSSA Announces 2019 Teacher of the Year

In October, the OSSA named Amber Doremus as its 2019 Teacher of the Year. Doremus is a sixth and seventh grade teacher at Weston Middle School in the Athena-Weston School District in eastern Oregon.

Doremus has taught math, reading, science, social studies, P.E. and health. An early proponent and implementer of the Eureka Math curriculum in the region, she also developed an honors math program. When her school's science program was faltering, Doremus got involved, participating in a Next Generation Science Standards Leadership Network.

Ann Vescio, Principal at Weston Middle School, said, "Amber's leadership has been critical to reinvigorating science instruction. She works tirelessly with the other middle level science teacher to organize hands-on science lessons, design note-taking strategies that promote critical thinking skills and develop a series of STEM lab experiences for all middle school students."

Doremus teaches a section of sixth grade girls' P.E. and has developed a program focusing on goal setting, cardiovascular health, weight training and positive body image. In 2017, Doremus and the other P.E. teacher helped secure a \$100,000 grant for a school fitness center geared toward youth, which benefits the entire community.

Described as a true school and district leader, Doremus also serves as the school's technology coordinator for grades 6-8, has designed and taught after-school technology classes for teachers and spearheaded efforts to purchase student technology.

Vescio said, "In executing so many ordinary tasks well in order to create for her students the same opportunities that exist in larger, more urban areas, Amber is truly

extraordinary. Most importantly, her positive impact on students is enormous - not because she excels in one area of teaching, but because she ensures excellent instruction and ample opportunity for her students one ordinary endeavor at a time."

Last fall, Michael Lasher, former OSSA Executive Director, said OSSA was pleased to choose Doremus as the 2019 Teacher of the Year. "Recognizing a teacher like Amber Doremus, who is a clear leader in her district to improve instruction, think outside the box and increase student success, is very positive for our small schools. OSSA is proud to recognize one of the truly great teachers in Oregon," Lasher said.



Doremus received her award in November at the OSSA breakfast during the OSBA Annual Convention in Portland.

*The purpose of the OSSA Teacher of the Year Award is to recognize the dedication and contributions of teachers who serve small districts. Some of the criteria include instructional accomplishments, leadership in the classroom, school and district and innovation in the classroom.*

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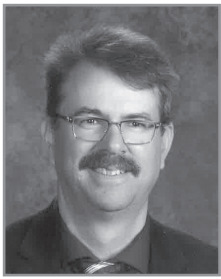
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## Sowing Seeds: Students Make Connections Through Stewardship of School Gardens

By: **Sean Gallagher**, Brookings-Harbor School District Superintendent and OSAA At-Large Board Member

It's springtime on the southern Oregon Coast, and the greenhouses of the Brookings-Harbor School District's two gardens are abuzz with student and community volunteers prepping pots and growing starts for the coming season.

Trays of peas, beans, lettuce, winter squash, flowers, kale and tomatoes stand ready to be transplanted. Outside, raised beds have already been planted with garlic, potatoes, leeks, onions, and shallots.

Students pass by the gardens on their way to sports and activities practices, linger at lunchtime on benches while chatting with friends and participate in numerous class projects to maintain the gardens or engage in hands-on science or social studies lessons about the plants and organisms found there.

The gardens have become an integral part of the school environment since their construction - the second garden

was completed with student labor in 2013.

Within the school district, the gardens play a key role with student enterprises, such as Big Wave Catering, which gives high school students the opportunity to practice food preparation, serving and business skills. The BHHS Youth Transition Program cultivates and harvests food from the garden and prepares produce for sale at the local farmers' markets and produces items such as canned preserves for donation to the local food bank.

Oregon State University Extension Office Master Gardeners, 4H Youth Programs and community volunteers helped build and develop "The Bridge Garden" at the high school and the "Little Bruin Patch" at the elementary school. Monetary support for the gardens includes \$15,000 in grant funding from All Care Health and numerous donations of supplies from local businesses.

*Please see Sowing Seeds on pg 8*

## OSSA Spring Conference

This spring marked the first time in almost two decades that OSSA organized a Small Schools Conference. The event was on March 14 & 15 at the Riverhouse on the Deschutes Conference Center in Bend. The conference welcomed almost 70 participants and offered informative sessions and networking opportunities.

After an opening reception on Thursday evening, events on Friday kicked off with a breakfast sponsored by OSBA and a welcome by OSSA Board President Michael Carter. Bob Lorence, OSSA Administrator of the Year, gave a short presentation, followed by a Round Table Discussion entitled "What are the Issues Affecting your Small School?"

Other sessions during the day included topics of Growth Mindset, Community Involvement, Health and Wellness of your Admin Team and more.

"The conference was an outstanding event with leaders from small districts from all over the state gathering together to talk, exchange ideas and learn from each other in a very short time period," said Michael Carter, Board President.

OSSA is planning another conference for October 2019.

## Scholarship Program Begins

OSSA recently established a student scholarship program. The \$1,000 scholarships are for students of OSSA member districts. Two scholarships each will be awarded in 1A, 2A and 3A districts.

Students eligible for the scholarships must be enrolled in a school district that is a current OSSA member, must be a senior graduating in the 2018-19 school year and must have a minimum cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.

The deadline for this year's scholarship was April 8th. We have received about 60 applicants, which is a great start for our first year of this program.



Applications are currently being reviewed, and scholarship recipients will be notified by May 15th. Thank you to the Scholarship Committee, which consists of four OSSA board members.

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*Sowing Seeds... continued from pg 7*

However, by far, the biggest impact of the school gardens has been the ability to incorporate fresh, seasonal items into school lunches (especially in the early fall and late spring). Sourcing quality and affordable fresh foods is a constant challenge for the district due to its location in a remote section of the Oregon Coast with few food farms that produce on the scale needed for a large commercial customer.

The district's free Summer Food Program incorporates produce from the school gardens into the salad bar daily. Starting this summer, thanks in part to a \$20,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Education, the district will also provide outdoor kid-sized seating in the garden area adjacent to the high school cafeteria and host enrichment activities with hands-on opportunities to learn about gardens, local food and nutrition through a partnership with "Ag in the Classroom."

The success of the school gardens has led to deeper explorations about food systems across the district - truly a gift that just keeps growing. In fact, Kalmiopsis Elementary is one of only two schools in Oregon with a "Monarch School USA" designation for its efforts to preserve pollinating species and educate students and the community with activities centered around its "Little Bruin Patch" garden.

Planting food on campus engages students in the process of growing food from cultivation to consumption - and to see and build other connections to their classwork and the natural world.



*For several years, BHHS students have swept most of the awards at the Curry County Fair in the food and land products departments with entries from school projects.*



*During mid-summer, the "Bridge Garden" on the Brookings-Harbor High School campus is in full bloom with beds of vegetables and tubs of hydroponically grown salad greens.*



*Fourth graders from Kalmiopsis Elementary in Brookings discuss what makes a good habitat for pollinators in the "Little Bear Patch" garden on the school grounds.*