

LINKING LOOP: Alternative High School; Commissioners support STEAM Programming; Chemeketa Partnership in the Works

2/19/2020

[0 Comments](#)

by Anne Scheck

February School Board Report

GROWING GRADUATES BY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

An alternative high-school program by Central District 13J is seeking to engage students who are likely to lose their chance to graduate. It's a more personalized approach being offered this year at the Henry Hill building in partnership with the Community Services Consortium, which was already providing learning options to at-risk youth there. The program was presented at the last school board meeting.

Central High School's graduation rate (81%) slightly exceeded the state average (80%), but there was a five percent drop in the number of male students who graduated from Central High School (CHS) in 2019 compared with the year before. Of 227 students, 26 were "non-completers," a group commonly termed "drop-outs," noted Superintendent Jennifer Kubista EdD.

Keeping some of those students in school is the goal, she said. Underpinning the need for this alternative form of education – or "Alt Ed" – is recent and better data-tracking of individual class credits for district students in grades nine through 12, which showed some lag so far behind they need a different strategy to earn a diploma. For example, a few who entered CHS in the last cohort had never been in school before; Others showed large gaps in their previous education. "That's really important for the public to understand this," observed school board member Jannice Link-Jobe, who previously served as principal for CHS.

CHS students who seemed suitable candidates for the program were identified, advised of this new "learning community," and offered the opportunity to "transition" to it after application and acceptance into it for the 2019-20 school year.

The presentation on the Alt Ed plan was given by Donna Servignat, CHS principal, and Jason Clark, project manager and director for the district's safety and risk management planning. The Alt Ed program is being financed with state funds.

STEAM PROGRAM RECEIVES COUNTY DOLLARS & KUDOS

A curriculum that includes training in "job-readiness," hands-on "experiential" learning and "outside-the-box" classes at LaCreole Middle School in Dallas got \$30,000 from the Polk County Board of Commissioners, who used those very terms to describe why they allocated the sum – and suggested the program could be exported to districts like Central School District 13J.

In one way, some of that innovation already is: A bus called the "STEAM Machine" – a vehicle

dreamed up by LaCreole's principal, Jamie Richardson – visits Independence and other communities; It's equipped with a 3-D printer, a robotics station and computers for on-site coding, among other features. (STEAM is an acronym often used in education to refer to Science-Technology-Electronics-Art-Mechanics).

However, the STEAM bus only represents an overall concept, said Principal Richardson. From laser-and-vinyl cutting to video production, LaCreole is offering elective classes designed to capture student interest in skills aimed at the future. "We think it can be a good way for students to find their areas of interest, even their passion," he explained. The "maker space" at the Henry Hill building in Independence offers similar opportunities through the Community Services Consortium (CSC), he pointed out. "You've got Mona K-Hinds over there doing some really great things," he said. (Ms. K-Hinds is principal youth advisor for CSC).

UPDATE

To be consistent with changes by the Oregon Department of Education, the non-binary pronoun "they" will be used in lieu of other gender terms, when appropriate, in policies and other documents in the district, Dr. Kubista said. In another follow-up development, a contract solidifying the growing partnership between Chemeketa Community College and the district is likely to be unveiled in the not-too-distant future, she said.

A FINAL WORD

The school board voted to accept revisions to a policy that clarifies bullying, harassment and retaliation; it now also includes language reflecting the definition of domestic abuse.