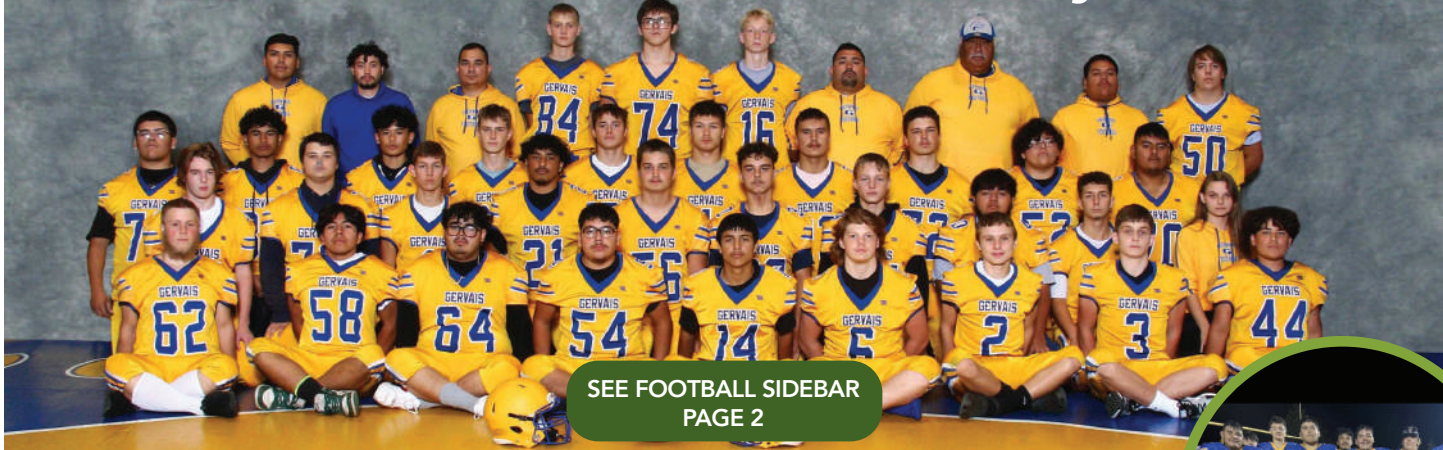


Community Connections

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



A Football Season for the History Books



SEE FOOTBALL SIDEBAR
PAGE 2

It may be well into the winter sports season, but there's still a buzz around Gervais about the high school football team's fall season.

It was an extraordinary feat: an 8-1 record and the first time hosting the playoffs in more than 70 years.

"We're doing something that hasn't been done," Coach JJ Navarrete said. "I told these boys four years ago, if you work hard and you give everything you've got, then I promise you the only thing you can do is be successful."

Navarrete, a 2002 Woodburn High School alum, took over the coaching gig in Gervais seven years ago, along with his brother Eric Navarrete and longtime friend Claxton Fernandez. The trio has coached together for 20 years, starting in Woodburn where they worked to build a fifth- and sixth-grade team along with a middle school team.

The Road to Success

The momentum to the 2023 season started in 2020, when the team was only assigned four games due to Covid - they won two and lost two. But the following year, they spiraled to a 0-9 record. Navarrete explained that was

because they had lost 12 seniors and were playing against big schools.

"The one thing I prided myself on (that year) was they kept showing up," Navarrete recalled. "If they keep coming back, then we're doing something right, they're believing something is going to happen."

So Navarrete didn't give up hope, even after the team only won a total of three games in 2022.

"I told the boys, look what we accomplished last year - you worked hard but I think you could work harder," he said. "And when summer came along, I had 26 kids in the weight room, the biggest group I had ever had, and this was an offseason workout."

The team was elated just to be invited to North Marion's jamboree over the summer.

"We're not competitive, no one wanted to give us a chance," Navarrete said. "But little 2A Gervais shows up (to the jamboree) and they were phenomenal and won every one of their games."

The team that normally plays 9-man football beat North Marion, Woodburn, and Jefferson in 11-man ball. This was "just the tip of the iceberg" of great

things for the team, Navarrete said.

His words proved to be accurate, as Gervais' preseason game against Nestucca resulted in a 42-0 win, followed by a game win against Corbett.

"Everybody was wondering what was happening," Navarrete chuckled. When the team stumbled against Regis High School, Navarrete recognized another turning point.

"I told the boys, 'Keep your heads high. You guys are better than that, just not today. But I believe you're the best team in our league,'" he recalled.

"Eremay Avgi, our quarterback, comes up to me in tears after that and says, 'How do I get better? I don't want to win two games and be done. I want to be excellent.'"

Seeing that spark, Navarrete encouraged the senior quarterback to practice even when official practice is over, to get his teammates and run through plays over and over again.

"I told him, they know you're the leader, so if you can convince them, you can convince everybody," Navarrete said.

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'Tis the Season: Gervais Middle School Gives Back

Like many schools, Gervais Middle School has an annual tradition of making sure that local families feel some of the holiday cheer this December.

The school's annual canned food drive is run by the school's leadership class, with support from advisor Lucas Hill and counselor Fenya Aman. Aman galvanizes the classified staff to help with packaging and distribution.

All students and staff are encouraged to contribute to the food drive. Recipients are local Gervais families who have signed up to receive gifts.

Hill said that last year, the food drive gathered and distributed more than 1,000 food items. That figure is this year's goal, as well.

To make giving even more fun, the school adds a little competition between homeroom classes, with a prize for the winners.

In addition to the food drive, the school's staff also takes a look at how to help families in need for the holiday season. They hold a Secret Santa project, run through the administration, that supports the students most in need.

"We start with the students that are flagged as Title IX, which is considered homeless," Aman explained. "From there, staff sign up for a student or two to buy a gift with their own money for and bring it to the office."

Secret Santa gift distribution is scheduled for the last day before the holiday break.



Football Sidebar:

Success despite challenges

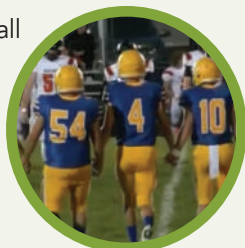
The Gervais High School football team just had a banner year, but Coach JJ Navarrete reflected how that magic happened in spite of the space the team occupied.

When the team decided to dedicate their summer to training, they were in a non-air conditioned weight room, even on days that reached triple digits outside. When they wanted to practice for the playoffs, they practiced at Woodburn High School's field so they wouldn't risk any injuries on the muddy, divot-filled Gervais field.

"When we played Toledo at home (in playoffs), you were sliding everywhere," Navarrete said.

He also notes that the locker rooms haven't been updated since the school was built 60 years ago. Ultimately, Navarrete's biggest fear is that families will simply see the amenities that nearby school districts offer their athletes and will send their kids there.

"I can give them the things they need as a coach, but at the end of the day, I can't convince anyone to stay when you could throw a rock and be at a different school," he said. "I'm happy the kids don't look at it that way. You're here to get a good education and do what you can. We're positive and can do everything we need to do as a staff, but we really need the help of the community."



Highlights from:

Gervais Elementary School

After School Club: About 70% of Gervais Elementary School students are participating in After School Club. Thanks to the ODE Latinx Student Success Grant and staff who serve as club advisors, students have been able to join clubs such as art, board game, leadership, Legos, Minecraft science, photography, sewing, soccer, and violins.

Community Partnerships: On Oct. 17, the Woodburn Kiwanis Club visited the school with a wide selection of books and set up a display in the lower gym. Every student was able to pick out a brand new chapter book and picture book. Students were so excited when they heard they could keep them forever! On Oct. 26-27, OHSU nursing students were able to conduct health screenings for Gervais Elementary students. They had a variety of stations with engaging lessons about student health and wellness.

Field Trips: Elementary school students enjoyed the Gervais High School FFA pumpkin patch, that also included fun activities at the FFA barn. In November, fifth-graders had the chance to visit the Oregon Gardens in Silverton, where they participated in some hands-on learning activities about ecosystems and plant and animal adaptation. These were extension lessons to what they have been learning in the classroom during science.



Science (and ELD) Experiment: Setting Up English Language Learners for Success in Science

When a student is an English language learner, teachers are faced with a daunting task of somehow making sure the student not only learns English, but also has an understanding of the other required subjects.

"One of the biggest obstacles teachers run into is time," said Stephanie So, a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) at Gervais Elementary School. "We only have so many hours in a school day, and the amount of content we need to cover is extensive."

So, who specializes in STEAM subjects (that is, science, technology, engineering, art and math), said science, in particular, is difficult to teach because of the complex vocabulary and concepts required to learn it. When fifth-grade teacher Jayme Poissant suggested the idea to integrate English language development (ELD) lessons with science lessons, it seemed like a no-brainer. So and ELD teacher Raul Gomez got to work and, starting this year, combined ELD and science curriculum in a pilot program that appears to largely be successful.

"We started lessons in September and have been refining and improving since then," So said. "The students really inspire our work. As we've seen them tackle lessons and devour the science content with such enthusiasm, Raul and I always look at each other and ask, 'What worked? What didn't work? How can we do better?'"

This hybrid course consists of three science units that cover all grade-level standards: life science, earth and space science, and physical science. The two-day lesson model focuses on speaking and writing about a specific science concept. On the first day, students are learning new vocabulary and practicing oral language skills as they explore the new science concept. On the second day, students then take those new language skills and apply them into written form.



"This course currently addresses grade-level science standards while intentionally teaching the language that students will need to discuss and write about what they have learned," Gomez said.

Elementary school is the best time to tackle this kind of integration to set up students for success, both Gomez and So said, partly so they can become proficient in English more quickly, and also so they can master scientific knowledge before engaging in higher level concepts in later grades.

"I believe that it's particularly important at the elementary level as these are such formative years, years where they internalize beliefs about themselves," Gomez said.

There won't be any statewide assessments in English language and science until the end of the school year, so the program's success is being measured through occasional science expos and is evident by the students' growing self-confidence.

"We have fourth- and fifth-grade students speaking like scientists, students who, month after month, internalize that if they can speak and write like a scientist, then they just might be one," Gomez said. "The narrative of what's possible for them is

exciting and motivating."

Gomez said he thinks this is just the beginning of hybrid learning styles like this.

"This program was intended for English language learners, but I am increasingly convinced that even English-only speaking students can benefit from this framework," he said. "Students explicitly learn the language required to articulate their thinking and share their knowledge."

For So, the desire to support ELD students in science goes back a generation.

"My work with English learners is greatly inspired by my father who came to the United States at the age of 9," she explained. "His teacher had him sit in the back of the class and do origami because she didn't know what to do with him. He ended up learning English playing with the kids from Mexico on his street. I want to send a different message to my students than what my father received. What we are doing is not just helping students gain proficiency in English and develop really powerful scientific knowledge. We are also instilling the identity that all of our students can be scientists, and confident scientists at that!"

A football season for the history books

continued

Standout Performers

Avgi must have been convincing, because, thanks to him and other strong leaders, the team made it to the playoffs with an 8-1 record.

Other standout senior leaders included wide receiver Gotti Ramon, who Navarrete said, “he doesn’t talk about it, he’s just about it.” He also commended wide receiver Daniel “DK” Kuznetsov, who Navarrete called a leader and a great physical attribute to the team, and offensive linemen Josiah Cruz, Diego Gonzalez, Edgar Lopez, and Ashtyn Sattergren for being anchors.

Navarrete is also excited to continue to watch running back Johnny Mariano and offensive lineman Angelo Ferreira, both sophomores.

“Johnny is going to be something to be reckoned with and Angelo is very young but very experienced,” Navarrete said, adding that with 25 touchdowns this year and 2,000 career rushing yards, Mariano is in position to break school records.

Making Playoff History

The 2023 postseason is also one for the record books: It was only the fourth playoff appearance by Gervais in school history, the last being 10 years ago. Before that, the last playoff appearance had been in 1953. And when Gervais High School hosted the first playoff game, it was believed to be its first home playoff game since 1951.

Doug Loiler, who had just taken the reins of athletic director two days earlier, could feel the excitement of the entire community, despite the rainy evening.

“From the time I got here, the energy of the entire student body was everywhere,” he said. “It just brought everybody together. They were excited for each other and excited for the guys playing.”

Gervais, which was ranked No. 7, won that first playoff game to No. 10 Toledo on its home turf, 24-12.

The following week, though, Gervais fell to defending state champion Oakland at Sutherlin High School. Gervais started the game strong, with a 12-0 lead after the first quarter, but Oakland’s larger team meant they could wear down Gervais.

“(Gervais) never stopped battling and played hard all the way through,” Loiler recalled. “They seemed very proud even after they lost. You could tell they were down but they still showed the other team full respect.”

Navarrete pointed out that had they not made a couple mistakes, he’s sure that his team could have gone all the way to the state championships.

“I don’t think this year was a fluke,” Navarrete said. “I believe we’ll get back again, I believe we’ll accomplish something that hasn’t been done.”



The Secret to Success

Navarrete said that although Gervais students don’t have what kids from surrounding districts have - upgraded locker rooms, an air conditioned weight room, a turf field – what they do have is more important.

“They show up every day with a smile on their faces,” he said. They’re willing to give it their all. The last time I saw that was in 2011 in Woodburn when they made their first playoff run. When I see them eager to get better and they don’t have the nicest things in the world, it makes the theory ‘home is what you make it’ more real. They believe it.”

Not only do the students believe it, but Loiler noted that he sees what Coach Navarrete is instilling in them.

“He’s almost a dad to the team,” Loiler said. “He teaches a lot about respect and watching out for each other. He’s really creating youth into men. He teaches them about life beyond football, giving them something to look forward to and using athletics as a tool for that. I saw that in just the short time I’ve been in Gervais.”

Football coaches were father figures to Navarrete, who grew up in a single-parent household. He wouldn’t be the coach he is today if not for the guidance of Coach Gary Johnson, who he still calls his mentor, and Claxton Fernandez, who gave him his first coaching gig and then stepped aside to support Navarrete as a head coach.

“He was the one who guided us into climbing the ladder,” he said about Fernandez. “Not having a father didn’t matter because I had great mentors to teach me the meaning of family and life and love.”

Navarrete is working to add a feeder program for fifth- and sixth-graders to learn football in addition to the middle and high school teams he’s already working with.

“The successful programs are doing that,” he said. “I have to allow other growth somewhere else. That middle school team is what’s gonna funnel that program at high school, and if I can get them started even younger, then that’s only going to make us better.”

He also wants to elevate three staff coaches who are Gervais alums.

“I want to continue that tradition for them,” he said. “They’re the best ones to tell the story back to the kids. One guy won four games in his entire Gervais career. Who better to tell the story (to the players) than those who lived it.”

Ultimately, it all comes down to a mantra Navarrete grew up hearing over and over.

“It’s all about family, friends and football,” he said. “I used to laugh when the coaches would say it, but it makes sense now. That’s our passion.”



Bond UPDATE

December 2023

Dear Gervais School District Community Members,

During the last several months the district has continued to engage community stakeholders in conversations around school facilities and the need for additional funds to create educational spaces that are safe, secure and meet the needs of staff and students.

Here are some frequently asked questions or commonly heard statements from the Gervais community. We hope that addressing these statements helps clarify the situation the school district is now facing.

Statement

"The bond amount was too large. We just need to stick with the basics and not get everything you want."

Response

The district conducted a facilities assessment paid for by a grant from the State of Oregon. That independent third party audit determined the following:

- Moderate/High Needs to be addressed in all three schools (119 projects): \$60,313,000
- Future Needs—which included a new elementary school: \$47,489,093

When the first Pre-Bond Planning Committee met in August 2021, they knew that these amounts were too high to present to voters. Over the course of several meetings with input from parents, staff, students and other stakeholders, they narrowed the priorities to **\$35 million** (46 projects).

The district asked voters to consider a bond for **\$31 million** during the May 2022 election.

When this was defeated, the Pre-Bond Planning Committee came together again and further narrowed the projects to **\$28,495,125** (22 projects).

The district asked voters to consider a bond for **\$24.495 million** during the May 2023 election. This was also defeated.

In the coming weeks, the district will continue to seek input on priority projects. Please look for a mailing that will allow you to rank project priorities.

The district is at a critical juncture. The state's education allocation to each district is meant for yearly operational costs and does not provide enough money for districts to do major renovations or repairs. This was recently shared at a November Gervais School Board meeting by representatives from the State of Oregon. This is why communities pass bonds to pay for facilities. The fact that the district has been able to function for more than 30 years without a bond speaks volumes to the efforts made to preserve what we have.

Statement

"Why doesn't the district get federal or state grants to pay for upgrades?"

Response

The district has attempted to secure other funds to help pay for facility improvements including:

- Renew America Infrastructure Grant — \$5.5 million—did not receive
- Oregon Seismic Rehabilitation Grant — \$2.5 million—did not receive

- Facilities Assessment Grant--\$20,000—received
- Facilities Long-Range Planning Grant--\$20,000—received
- Capital Funding Project Grant--\$2.8 million—not funded due to legislative walk-out
- CTE Revitalization Grant--\$250,000—pending
- Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program--\$8 million—received but had to return due to bond failures.

Statement

"There is talk that the district may close if another bond is attempted but defeated. Why would this happen?"

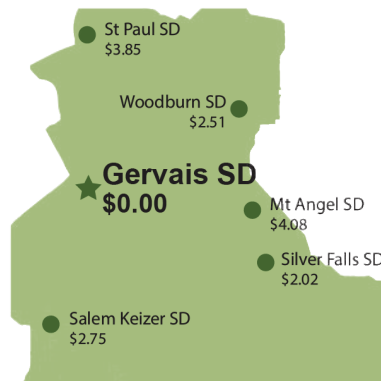
Response

The district is at a critical crossroads. The continued decline of the buildings is accelerating and there are many important infrastructure issues that cannot be repaired but instead must be replaced. The district does not have the money without a bond to be able to do the following:

- Preserve critical facilities through comprehensive repairs and replacements
- Update learning environments by renovating/replacing classrooms
- Enhance school safety and security through strategic upgrades

Should another bond fail, the school board has determined that closing the district may be necessary. This means that Gervais School District students would go to other districts, and residents' properties will become part of neighboring school districts. This also means that whatever bond rate the neighboring district has will be passed on to residents in what would be the former Gervais School District.

The graphic below shows what other districts are paying per \$1,000 in property taxes. All of these rates are more expensive than the proposed bond rate from last May's election (\$1.97 per \$1,000).



Please visit the bond webpage (scan QR Code) for updated information and participate in the community feedback opportunities.

Sincerely,

Dandy Stevens
Superintendent

Staff Spotlights

Doug Loiler Fills the GHS Athletic Director/Vice Principal Seat

Gervais High School has someone new in the vice principal/athletic director role, and in his short time with the district, he's already feeling the positive Gervais spirit.

Doug Loiler joined the administrative team at the high school Nov. 1. This is Loiler's first time in public schools, "and I love it," he said.

"Being a new person coming into the Gervais scene, I can see it truly is a big family and I've felt that from day one," Loiler continued. "The community itself is pretty special. And we have great kids, we really do."

He said Gervais reminds him, in many ways, of his own upbringing in Coburg, also a rural farm town.

"I know what it is to work hard at school and then after school, you go to work again," he said.

Attending Harrisburg High School, Loiler was active in sports, particularly in basketball. As he was deciding what to do with his life, he knew he wanted to do something in athletics. So education seemed a natural route.

"I fell into it, really," he said. "I took a subbing job and that made me want to go back to school."

After getting his degree at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington, Loiler spent nearly two decades at West Hills Christian School in Portland. There he served in multiple roles, from PE teacher to athletic director to middle school principal to K-8 principal. But he was ready for a change from private to public schools.

"The professional development and teacher support is much better in the public school system, I think," he noted.

Additionally, Loiler feels like an educator can have more of an impact in a public school setting.

"My heart has always been with the socioeconomically disadvantaged," he said. "At a private school you were there to support. But these students need people who believe in them and want to support them and guide them through life. I want to push and work with these young men and women, to see them be successful in life."

Already, he's seeing great potential in the athletic department.

"The sky's the limit," he said. "They could be really good with the right drive and high expectations. The better you do, the more people want to participate. I'm hoping to get coaches with longevity in the program and actually build each sport to the best it can be, to give kids something to look forward to."

Loiler said he is driven to ensure the middle school has a quality coaching staff so the program can build from there.

"My main goal is just to be good people on the court and off the court," he said. "Our culture today needs positivity and people doing hard work. I can see the coaches that we have right now are great people. I'm really excited."



Courtney Utter, RN

A school district without a school nurse would be a recipe for disaster. Luckily for Gervais, Courtney Utter is filling the slot.

Utter started this year as the district nurse, covering preschool through 12th grade, after two years working on a critical care unit at a hospital in Corvallis.

"I have always had an interest in school and community-based nursing," she said about why she made the career switch.

Utter has a degree from OHSU School of Nursing in Monmouth. She even came to Gervais School District as a nursing student, conducting health screenings at the elementary school.

"I remember thinking then how great the kids, staff, and community were to work with in Gervais," she recalled. "When this position became available in a great school district closer to home, I jumped at the opportunity."

Since taking on the role in the fall, Utter spends her days interacting with students, staff, and parents, working mainly out of her office in Gervais Middle School. But her job consists of much more than attending to sick or injured students. She spends most of her time writing and updating student health plans, providing staff education and training, and holding workshops for students on various health topics.

"One thing that people might be surprised to learn about what I do is that along with managing day-to-day illnesses and injuries, I work to educate and prepare staff to respond effectively to any emergencies that may happen within the student population, such as seizures or allergic reactions," Utter said.

Describing what she loves about the job so far, Utter explained, "I appreciate the connections that can be made with students and their families, and the positive impact that this role can have on the overall health and wellness of the community."

