

Ingredients for school success

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Five elements contribute to excellence in West Linn schools in 2014

As West Linn's population continues to grow, despite the lack of available land for new homes. Many people moving here say that one of their reasons for doing so is the great reputation of the city's schools. With that in mind, here are some of the trends we've noticed over the course of 2014 that are contributing to the schools' success.

Award-winning teachers

Although countless resources are required to run a top-notch school, success starts with the teachers in each school building. The West Linn-Wilsonville School District has a reputation for hiring qualified teachers and for ensuring their success with a strong district-wide new teacher mentorship program.

That support paid off in obvious ways in 2014, as numerous WL-WV teachers received national, statewide and city awards during the year. The National Art Education Association singled out two West Linn teachers for special awards in 2014. Rosemont Ridge art teacher Linda Kieling received the organization's Distinguished Service Within the Profession award. The award recognizes outstanding achievements and contributions in previous years to the field of art education and to national and state associations. The honoree is selected through peer review.

NAEA also honors an outstanding member from each state or province whose service and contribution to art education merits recognition and acclaim. In 2014, Lynn Pass, a former West Linn High School art teacher who retired in 2013, was named Oregon Art Educator of the Year after a peer review of nominations.



Photo Credit: TIDINGS FILE PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - Lisia Farley was one of several West Linn teachers honored in 2014. Farley teaches sixth grade at Rosemont Ridge Middle School.

Another teacher from Rosemont, Lisia Farley, was honored by the League of Oregon Cities for her work around government education. Farley was selected for the honor because of her work both in the classroom and outside it. The league cited two of Farley's projects: working with the city of West Linn to build her students' understanding of municipal affairs, including most recently the arch bridge redevelopment project, and her assistance in building the city's youth leadership academy, a six-month learning exercise.

Kids who care

West Linn kids have big hearts and big plans. With the support of their parents, teachers and school administrators, students at all grade levels identify needs and work together to raise money and donate time to fill them. Here are just a few examples of West Linn kids' generous hearts.

At West Linn High School, student leaders waged a yearlong campaign to raise funds for a special needs boy facing a life-threatening condition, complicated by his family's financial need. }



Photo Credit: TIDINGS FILE PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - West Linn High School's Angie Hammond got on board the student body's campaign to raise money to support Benny Hartley, center, and his family while the boy was undergoing treatment for leukemia.

Born with Down syndrome, Benny Hartley of Molalla was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia in 2013. Working with a nonprofit organization, Sparrow Clubs, that connects students with other organizations willing to donate \$10 per hour of volunteer service performed, the leadership class galvanized the student body to raise “bucks for Benny.” WLHS students were asked to donate a minimum of five hours of service each, and even teachers and staff got involved, with 100 percent of staff contributing to IT specialist Angie Hammond’s fundraising bike ride from Seattle to Portland in the summer.

It’s not just the “big kids” who make a difference. Grade-schoolers show their generosity and compassion, too. Last June, a group of fifth-graders serving on the student council at Stafford Primary School asked fellow students to participate in a “Pennies for Patients” fundraiser to benefit leukemia and lymphoma research. The students raised \$2,106 — a penny at a time.

Perhaps remembering the motto “Charity begins at home,” another group of grade-schoolers devoted their energy to raising money in honor of a favorite teacher diagnosed with cancer. Fourth-graders at Cedaroak Park baked, marketed and delivered dog treats throughout their school community. Their efforts netted \$388 and left a lot of local pets feeling very pampered, too.

Kids who compete

You can read about victories every week in the sports pages of the Tidings. But West Linn warriors are to be found everywhere, not just on the field. In fact, at West Linn High School, there is a veritable alphabet of competition, from art, band and cinematography all the way to yearbook. Some of the victories are very visible; others, while significant, may have received relatively little notice from the community.

Take the high school’s mock trial team for example — actually, there are two, and both competed in March at the state mock trial competition in Portland. The WLHS green team took first place among 18 total teams and earned the right to compete at the national level in May. The team, comprising two sophomores and six juniors, traveled with teacher adviser Matt Kellogg to Madison, Wis., for the national championships. The West Linn team emerged from that competition ranked seventh in the nation. The team’s efforts there marked the best showing ever by an Oregon team at the competition. With the 2015 season beginning soon, keep your eye on this young but experienced team.



Photo Credit: TIDINGS FILE PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - West Linn's Ryan Kelly, mechanical lead for FIRST Team 1425, keeps a watchful eye on the team's robot during a regional competition.

Another team you may not know much about is the high school's robotics team. Commonly referred to as "the Wilsonville robotics team," it actually includes students from both cities in the school district, although West Linn participants definitely are in the minority on the team. The future looks bright for Error Code Xero — FIRST Team 1425 — as the high school robotics competition season begins this month. Last year, the team won two of four district competitions, placing in the finals in one more before mechanical problems in the team's final qualifying match last April sank the team's robot and its chances of competing at the world championships. With strong support for robotics at the district administration level, this is another team to keep an eye on, and a good place to start to familiarize yourself with the team will come when the team again hosts a regional competition at Wilsonville High School this spring.

Another WLHS team delivered a strong finish to the year. The school's dance team, the Debutantes, took top honors in three categories at this year's State of Oregon Dance Category Championships. Competing with other high school teams from around the state, the Debs placed first in kick, second in pom and third in contemporary. Overall, it was a very strong showing for the team.

Success isn't only about teams, however. One student in West Linn made history when she competed for the title of Rose Festival Princess and won. Emma Waibel, a senior this year, became not only the first Rose Festival Princess from West Linn but also the first Princess from outside Portland to become Rose Festival Queen. With the calendar page just turning over to January it may be hard to think ahead to May, but when those warm days finally arrive, look for Emma Waibel to again represent her city of West Linn as Queen of the Rose Festival events leading up to the new queen's coronation in June.

Schools that excel

For an objective measurement of how good schools are, you have to look not only at factors like those described above but also at facts and figures. Although scores and rankings cannot capture the feel of a school or the measure of its student body, they do fill in part of the portrait of West Linn schools.



Photo Credit: TIDINGS FILE PHOTO: VERN UYETAKE - The class of 2014 celebrates on graduation day at the Chiles Center. West Linn High School routinely graduates a majority of its students on time, with 97 percent of the class of 2013 graduating in four years. That is the best on-time graduation rate in Clackamas County.

Standardized test scores are one of those measures, and students in WL-WV improved their performance on standardized state testing in the 2013-14 school year. Test scores rose across the board in WL-WV, with the biggest grade-level gain, 6.6 percent, occurring in the fifth grade. Overall, 79.2 percent of WL-WV students met the state's standards in math, 83.3 percent met state standards in reading and 83 percent met state standards in science. Broken down by grade level, WL-WV's 2013-14 test scores showed increases ranging from approximately 3 percent to 6 percent over 2012-13 scores. In third grade, 73.1 percent met or exceeded state standards in 2013-14, rising from 69.8 percent in the previous year. In the fourth grade, 82.4 percent met or exceeded, compared to 77.8 percent in 2012-13. In fifth grade, 80.6 percent met or exceeded, compared to 74.0 percent in 2012-13.

At the district's middle schools, sixth-graders posted the biggest gain, with the number of students meeting or exceeding standards rising to 75.3 percent from 70.4 percent in 2012-13. Seventh-graders posted gains of 3.3 percent, with 81.6 percent of students meeting or exceeding, as compared to 78.3 percent in 2012-13. Eighth-graders also improved, with the number meeting or exceeding rising to 77.9 percent from 73.9 percent the previous year.

The gains were solid at the district's high schools as well, with a combined 83.9 percent meeting or exceeding at the three high schools, a rise of more than five percentage points from last year's 78.6 percent. That number rose to 88.4 percent meeting or exceeding at West Linn High School, a gain of 0.3 percent over the previous year.

The school district's ultimate test of its instructional success, however, is its graduation rates. And in 2014, WLHS posted a best-in-the-county graduation rate, according to a report released in February by Oregon Department of Education. The report analyzed on-time graduation rates for the class of 2013 throughout the state. Overall, WL-WV reported a 90 percent four-year graduation rate for 2012-13, meaning for students who entered high school in 2009. At WLHS, the four-year graduation rate for the class of 2013 cohort was 97 percent, up from 93 percent the previous year.

Community support

It's impossible to tell the story of West Linn schools' success without mentioning the support received from parents and the community at large. In the November election, voters in West Linn and Wilsonville approved two school bond measures, renewing the local option tax levy and approving a new capital construction bond. The years ahead will be busy ones in the school district, as plans develop for improvements and upgrade at all schools, including a remodel of the 700 Building at WLHS and the replacement of Sunset Primary School.

Community support is not always measured in dollars, though — as important as financial support is to schools. Two groups, in particular, deserve recognition as 2014 closes.



Photo Credit: TIDINGS FILE PHOTO - The annual career day for eighth-graders at Rosemont Ridge Middle School is one of the events that makes Rosemonts PTO the best in the nation.

First, the Parent Teacher Organization at Rosemont Ridge Middle School. The PTO won national recognition — again — over the summer. PTO Today, an organization providing support for PTOs nationwide, selected Rosemont's PTO from a field of 240 groups to be its 2014 National Parent Group of the Year. Rosemont received the same honor back in 2004, making Rosemont's the first PTO ever to be named the nation's best two times. Rosemont's PTO was selected, according to PTO Today, because of the numerous creative events the group sponsors as well as its adaptability. Three annual events at the school were particularly cited: Rosemont Survivor, an orientation event for sixth-graders; Halfway to High School, for seventh-graders; and an eighth-grade career day.

Another group, the West Linn Community Task Force, continued its commitment to keeping kids safe with its annual drug-education and -awareness events at WLHS. Two separate events are presented at the high school, the first for students and the second for adults only. Both students and their parents heard from a panel of experts that included an addiction specialist, a deputy district attorney, a police officer, a family counselor and a recovering addict. Follow the panelists' presentations, audience members had a chance to ask questions of their own — anonymously, if desired. WLCTF also sponsors a teen advisory board that visits West Linn's middle schools each spring to talk about substance abuse and bullying prevention. Community involvement is welcome; learn more online at westlinncommunitytaskforce.com.

These are only a few of the standouts from a year of success, fun and learning in the city's schools. Read the Tidings each week on Thursdays — and online at westlinntidings.com — to stay abreast of what 2015 brings.