



Innovation creates change

How one tiny school district has become a national and state leader in STEM education

Odessa.

It's a thousand person farming town located in eastern Washington in an area known as the Channeled Scablands.

It's not necessarily a place where you might expect to find an innovative, award-winning Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) program.

The tiny Odessa School District was recently chosen by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction as a Lighthouse School District. Along with five other Lighthouse schools, the Odessa School District will serve as a STEM mentor to other schools in the state.

Each was awarded a \$20,000 grant to promote and develop STEM education, including technical assistance and

advice for other middle schools and high schools that are creating their own STEM environments.

In this issue we present a closer look at the Odessa School District, and what we might learn from them.



Odessa student works in the science lab

Washington's Lighthouse Schools

Eastmont Junior High School, Eastmont School District

Secondary Academy for Success, Northshore School District

Science and Math Institute, Stewart Middle School, Tacoma School District

Toppenish High School, Toppenish School District

- The current enrollment in the Odessa School District is approximately 220 students in grades K-12.
- More than 80 percent of graduates continue on to college.
- 42 percent of students receive free and reduced price lunch.

continued on pages 5 - 6

View from the top

Encourage each other to think in “possibilities”



Mary Fertakis, WSSDA President

Recently I watched a program on CBS called “The Big Three’s Dramatic U-Turn” (Ford, Chrysler and GM).

As an industry, a year ago auto manufacturers were very much where many of us are now. They, too, sat through painful meetings where

budget cuts and service reductions were the main topic.

Then, a culture shift occurred. They didn’t stay focused on cuts as their only option, and this shift resulted in some amazing opportunities to innovate and create new solutions.

The change wasn’t easy, as some long-time employees in the industry mentioned. However, they are seeing the results in dramatic sales increases, resulting in the creation of thousands of jobs and a positive impact on the Detroit economy.

Directors are the local leaders who are in the position of changing a “We can’t do that — it’s not possible” mentality to a “Why can’t we do that? Why isn’t it possible?” approach.

The buck STARTS with us. I encourage each of you to help foster an atmosphere where creativity, ingenuity and collaboration thrive. If you model this for your school district, you are setting in motion a force that allows innovation to occur. This culture is at the heart of “hero work,” which we know is the most gratifying work.

We are in challenging times — which provide opportunities that haven’t been considered before. If you as a board are working with community, non-profit, and governmental groups to maximize each others’ skills and resources, you can not only form new partnerships, but come up with new POSSIBILITIES to support students that haven’t been considered before.

Our students are creative, inquisitive, collaborative workers who want to be involved in solving real problems, and so do we. Put on your hero suit and use your powers to be the innovation leaders in your local communities!

Effective listening, an essential board skill

1. Ensure your intent. You aren’t trying to change someone’s mind. The idea is to put yourself in the other person’s shoes.
2. Take ego out of the mix. This isn’t about you. No matter what the other person says, don’t get defensive or emotional.
3. Eliminate your own world view. Your religion, your morals, your politics should not filter or change what the person is saying.
4. Choose an environment free of distractions. Be sure your cell phone, TV and radio are off. Staying focused is difficult enough, so make it easier for yourself.
5. Ask questions, but only those that help you understand the person’s point of view, not those that will challenge the other person’s view.
6. Repeat ideas. This reassures the person that you do understand what he or she is saying.
7. Use tried and true techniques. Face the speaker, keep eye contact and be sure your body language is open and is communicating that you’re listening.
8. Act. Once you finish listening, your responses should be supportive to assure the speaker you understood each point. Then, act! Do something with the information.

NSBA publishes food allergy guide

The National School Boards Association has published a policy guide *Safe at School and Ready to Learn: A Comprehensive Policy Guide for Protecting Students with Life-threatening Food Allergies*, to help school leaders establish policies in this regard.

Developed with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in response to the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, this publication emphasizes the role of schools in protecting students with life-threatening food allergies. It focuses on the need for schools to partner with families and healthcare providers to identify and support individual student needs and prepare management plans. To access the publication online, and for further information on addressing food allergies in schools, visit NSBA’s Food Allergies & Schools webpage at www.nsba.org/foodallergy.

A great beginning: WSSDA and your work



Dr. Jonelle Adams,
WSSDA Executive
Director

A special welcome to our new school board members. You are now sworn in as a school director and this begins a relationship with WSSDA where we provide resources and support for your good work.

We would like to extend an invitation to be a member of the WSSDA new board member cohort of 2012 and, from what I've seen so far, your cohort holds

great potential as board directors. I'd like to direct you to some resources on our website and how to access our ongoing electronic communications. WSSDA is also initiating ongoing board development targeted for new board members as you experience the first year of your term. Our goal is to jumpstart your work, let you know what to expect and build connections to the network of board directors across Washington state.

WSSDA website: wssda.org

To take a look at our services for board directors:

wssda.org/Services

For new board members:

wssda.org/Resources/ForNewSchoolDirectors

Information regarding budget, conflicts of interest, policy development and advocacy

Legal resources: Publications:

wssda.org/Resources/Publications

Open public meeting laws, conflicts of interest and more

Webinars and podcasts:

<http://wssda.org/Resources/ForNewSchoolDirectors.aspx>

Topics: School District Policy Issues for 2011-2012, Superintendent Evaluation Process, Data Dashboards for School Directors and More

Legislation and advocacy:

wssda.org/Legislative

The WSSDA Forum:

wssda.org/Resources/WSSDAOnlineCommunity

The Forum is for school directors to network, share opinions and ask questions regarding topics of interest. You may view the posted messages and, to participate, register as a school director.

Up to date with WSSDA

There are two resources that provide relevant state and national news to our members.

- **Daily eClippings:** Members can register to receive a daily e-mail with links to pertinent news stories.
- **Legislative Update:** For members who want to keep up with what is happening in the Legislature, the Legislative Update is sent to them electronically. You can keep track of bills and keep abreast of WSSDA staff and board members' work on your behalf in Olympia.

To receive these electronic updates, please e-mail sbrand@wssda.org and ask to be added to the e-mail lists.

72nd Annual Conference
NSBA
BOSTON
APRIL 21-23, 2012

Lead the way to learning

The National School Boards Association's Annual Conference will help you become a better leader for your district. Get a national perspective on today's education issues in over 200 sessions:

- Hear updates on how the legislative agenda and federal court cases may impact your district
- Get best practices and new insights from your colleagues across the country
- See how technology can transform the learning process in the expanded Technology Track

Bring your leadership team to share insights and make a greater impact on your district.

a better tomorrow
STARTS TODAY
WWW.NSBA.ORG/CONFERENCE
REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Odessa by the numbers

Student enrollment

| | |
|--------------------|-----|
| October 2010 | 200 |
| May 2011 | 204 |

Special programs

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Free/reduced-price meals..... | 42% |
| Special Education | 13.2% |
| Transitional Bilingual | 0.0% |

Other information

| | |
|---|-------|
| Unexcused absence rate..... | 0.3% |
| Annual dropout rate (2009 - 10) | 4.4% |
| Estimated annual on-time graduation rate | 84.4% |
| Estimated extended graduation rate | 84.4% |

Teacher information

| | |
|---|-------|
| Classroom teachers | 19 |
| Average years teacher experience..... | 16.9 |
| Teachers with at least a master's degree | 78.9% |
| Total number of teachers who teach core academic classes ... | 22 |
| Total number of core academic classes | 89 |
| % of classes taught by highly qualified teachers | 100% |

Recent honors and awards

2012: Washington state STEM Lighthouse Award / Grant for Odessa High and Junior High School

2012: National Siemens Founders Award for STEM research in the classroom (Jeff Wehr)

2012: OHS Science Student Kira Powell earned position to present at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Vancouver, Canada)

2011: Washington State High School of Distinction

2011: Advanced Science Research Course earns first place awards in all Washington State STEM research competitions

Odessa's road to success



Odessa student experiments with a pendulum

How does the Odessa School District, a tiny district with 204 students located in a rural agricultural area, boast a “School of Distinction” high school and now a STEM Lighthouse District?

When you ask the Odessa School Board directors how they do it, they all agree. “It’s the teachers, and we have great kids. We just do our best to be sure they have what they need,” said Board Chairman Ed Deife. “We have an outstanding team of experienced educators who have a strong personal connection to each other and to our students.”

The respect goes both ways. When asked why his high school functions so well, Principal Ken Schutz credits the teachers and the school board. He says, “Our school board members work well

together and when we tell them what our needs are, they work hard to get what we need. We update them regularly and they understand where we’re trying to go, and support us.”

Where are the Odessa graduates going? More than 80 percent of the graduating class goes on to college. More than 27 percent of the students plan to pursue a STEM-related career in engineering, health sciences or other high-demand occupations.

The emphasis on STEM began eight years ago, when new Odessa High School principal Schutz and science teacher Jeff Wehr were hired by the district. Schutz is a former high school science teacher with a passion for inquiry-based science instruction. Wehr was also committed to inquiry-based learning. The two clicked immediately on ideas for where they wanted to take science instruction in the district. The partnership expanded later to include other math and science teachers.

“When kids understand ‘why’ they are learning something, they are much more motivated to learn. In the beginning we said that it was the teachers who made the difference, now we believe we have come far enough that the kids are now taking ownership of their own learning,” Schutz says.

Another key difference at OHS is a purposeful decision to make learning fun for both the teachers and students. “This helps keep people engaged, when there is something to look forward to every day,” according to Schutz. “Let’s face it, math and science can get a little dry — we try to pump real-life examples into the lessons.”

Odessa’s teachers and students are winning awards, but Schutz believes that what is most important is that students understand “you have to be the best at something in today’s economy. Whether they plan to become a car mechanic or a physicist, we let them know that they need to become the best to survive in this world today.”



Odessa school directors, left to right, Ed Dief, Chairman and Markus Horak, Vice-Chairman. Standing, left to right, Karma Henry, Travis Wagner and Joe Schlomer.

Odessa school directors' perspectives

The Odessa School Board includes directors who grew up in Odessa and graduated from Odessa schools. Four out of the five current members were originally appointed to their jobs, and were elected in November, 2011.

Chairman Ed Dief “We’ve got a great school board,” says Chairman Ed Dief. “The most important thing to do is get great teachers. Most of ours have been here a considerable amount of time. Small class sizes and small schools help. You cannot convince me that small schools don’t make a difference.”

Director Mark Horak (Graduated from OHS in 2005) “It’s hard to get somebody to run for the school board,” Horak said. “We’re all so darn busy, that it’s hard to make the time to do this work. At the same time, I know how important it is.

This board works well as a team. We respect each other, the staff and the students. If you don’t have that level of respect, you can’t make it work.”

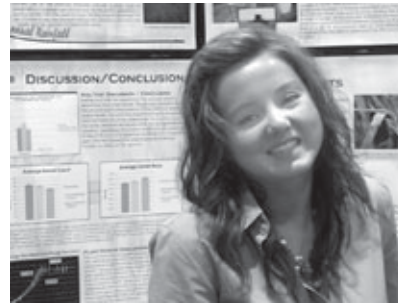
Director Karma Henry (Graduated from OHS in 1997) “In a big school, you can’t get the support, the one-on-one attention that our kids get,” said Henry. “Our teachers go above and beyond to help students and they don’t let the students who are higher need fall through the cracks. We’re a pretty good team!”

What is a Lighthouse School?

STEM Lighthouse schools originated in 2010 with the Legislature’s passage of House Bill 2621.

The bill directs the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to designate as many as three middle and three high schools each year as Lighthouse Schools. The schools serve as resources and examples of how to integrate the following best practices:

- Small, highly personalized learning communities
- An interdisciplinary curriculum with a strong focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), delivered through a project-based instructional approach
- Active partnerships with businesses and the local community to connect learning beyond the classroom.



Meet Odessa student Kira Powell

Building a model volcano was not even an option for Kira Powell. Her high school science fair

project focused on finding a way to save scarce rainwater on dry land wheat fields before it evaporates or flows away.

Powell, 16, found a simple solution: spread the powdery material used in disposable diapers on a wheat field and it will soak up and hold water. That discovery has won some international attention for the junior at Odessa High School.

“The root comes in contact with the powder,” Powell said. “It can suck up the moisture and use it as it needs it.”

Powell presented her research at the National Junior Science and Humanities Symposium in San Diego, winning first prize, a \$12,000 scholarship and a trip to London to present her work.

Last May, Powell presented at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in Los Angeles. She won the top prize in the plant science category and \$8,000 in prizes in a competition that drew 1,500 students.

London is quite a leap from Odessa High, which has 65 students in grades 9-12. Powell has lived in Odessa all her life. Her father is an economic development official and her mother is a doctor. She plans to go to college to pursue studies in engineering or the sciences.

Legislature reaches halfway mark

By the time *WSSDA Direct* reaches your mailbox, the Legislature will have completed half of the 60-day session that started January 9. Unfortunately, it is unlikely lawmakers will have addressed the most pressing issue — how to close a projected \$1 billion shortfall and leave some money in reserve.

The next revenue forecast is February 16. That's about the time the House and Senate will start unveiling their budget proposals.

Behind the scenes, budget negotiators are meeting on how to

align expenditures and revenues for the biennium ending June 30, 2013. In addition to some smaller measures, the Governor proposed cutting four school days (\$100 million savings) and reducing Local Effort Assistance (\$150 million).

With the *McCleary v. State* decision last month, lawmakers in the House have made it clear cutting days is off the table. And in the House, budget chair Ross Hunter, D-Medina, won't have the 50 votes needed to pass the budget if LEA is cut.

So, what to do?

It's unclear where the Legislature will make cuts to education, but there will be cuts. The gap is too wide and the alternatives too painful to hold public school funding harmless.

It is critical that school directors contact their legislators and share how previous cuts have been handled and the impact on students, schools and staff. And don't be a stranger in Olympia. Legislators like to hear from constituents, so contact Marie Sullivan (M.Sullivan@wssda.org or 360.252.3010) if you have a day or a couple of hours to spend at the Capitol.

Regional Meetings: Spring schedule announced

Every spring and fall, WSSDA members, along with staff and presenters, gather in regional settings for an evening or afternoon of networking on district issues.

WSSDA's 2012 Spring Regional Meetings have been scheduled in 12 locations around the state to make them as accessible as possible for association members. A complete schedule of the regional meetings and their locations is found at wssda.org/Events/RegionalMeetings.

Each WSSDA Regional Director is organizing a program geared specifically for their region. (Contact information for your representative is found at wssda.org under "WSSDA Information.")

Weekday meetings, including dinner, are held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. and Saturday meetings, including lunch, are scheduled from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Registration is required, and the only charge is for your meal. Those indicating "no charge" offer a hosted meal.

Workshops offered in conjunction with Regional Meetings

Two-hour *Renewing Foundations* workshops will precede six of the WSSDA Spring Regional Meetings. They are marked by asterisks (*) in the list below. These interactive workshops focus on essential practices for board success. WSSDA staff will deliver background information on each of the four topics below, and provide tips and tools for your implementation.

- Board protocols: developing agreements on how to work together
- Board self-assessment: conducting meaningful assessment and using the data for goal setting
- Board goals: establishing goals for your board's work
- Board meetings: learn how to navigate some of the most challenging aspects of board meetings.

Renewing Foundations is a great opportunity to build your board/superintendent team. We encourage full board/superintendent teams to attend.

Spring Regional Meetings

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|----------|
| Edmonds (DA-1) | March 1 | Manson (DA-7) | March 8 |
| Tukwila (DA-2) | March 29 | Moses Lake (DA-7)* | March 21 |
| University Place (DA-3)* | March 20 | Union Gap (DA-8)* | March 13 |
| Port Angeles (DA-4) | March 17 | Hunters (DA-9)* | March 7 |
| Tumwater (DA-5)* | March 14 | Cheney (DA 10)* | March 6 |
| Battle Ground (DA-6) | April 11 | Richland (DA-11) | March 5 |

Register online for WSSDA Regional Meetings: wssda.org/Events/RegionalMeetings

Register online for *Renewing Foundations* workshops: wssda.org/Workshops

What's on your nightstand?

We asked the WSSDA Executive Committee what they are reading.



Debra Long ~ *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, by Diane Ravitch

This is a must-read for any stakeholder in the future of American schooling.

Rating: Highly motivating and well worth your time. Truly there were times I did not want to put it down.



David Iseminger ~ *Integral Psychology*, by Ken Wilber

It's not necessarily an education policy book, but it has a vein of wisdom and personal insight that few books I've read have. Wilber's books have an uncanny grasp on the holistic experience of human existence that few seem to have. That doesn't mean I agree with everything he writes or does, but I've found this pretty interesting.

Rating: I recommend it, and it's only a couple hundred pages.



Patty Wood ~ *See Government Grow, Education Politics from Johnson to Reagan*, by Gareth Davies

This is the history of the partisan politics behind the development of ESEA, the creation and attempt to dismantle the Department of Education and education policy up until Reagan's administration.

Rating: While a quasi-policy wonk like me loved it, I would highly recommend it for my peers in FRN, particularly in light of the upcoming reauthorization of ESEA.



Nancy Merrill ~ *The Anatomy of PEACE: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*, from The Arbinger Institute (by the authors of *Leadership and Self-Deception*)

This is a relatively short book reflecting on how we make decisions and live our lives, both at home and at work, and can systematically impact culture. So, it is not directly an education book, but is related to how we move culture around us by how we react and live.

It is written as though you are present at a retreat for parents who are leaving their children at a six-week survival camp for rehab.

Rating: Fascinating and challenging my perspective/actions immediately in the relationships and meetings I have had this week.



Mary Fertakis ~ *The Global Achievement Gap*, by Tony Wagoner

(Mary has been busy doorbelling and hasn't yet had time to finish the book.)

Rating: Would definitely recommend it at this point. The NSBA president strongly recommends it.



Mari Taylor ~ *The Trouble with Black Boys and Other Reflections on Race, Equity and the American School System*, by Pedro A. Noguera

A good read and I recommend taking time to reflect as you read it.

Using data effectively in decision making

Data First for Governance is in-depth training in data use specifically for school board members. The face-to-face training helps school boards use data effectively in their governance role. WSSDA has three separate units available for full board training:

1. **Building the foundation** provides easy-to-understand principles for how to interpret and communicate school data, and explores how boards can set data-informed policies that are likely to result in higher student achievement.
2. **Teacher quality and distribution** explores data and policies that help boards assure all students have access to highly effective teachers. It also helps board members understand the direction our state is taking to improve evaluation practices.
3. **High school and beyond** examines data and policies directed at ensuring all students graduate with fully prepared for success after high school.

These training materials were developed by NSBA's Center for Public Education and state school board association trainers. They have been piloted and improved and identify clear and refreshing ways to look at data and discuss it among your board. The resources also equip boards to make data-informed presentations to their community members.

WSSDA staff members and consultants received training in how to facilitate the Data First training last year and have been sharing their learning with select boards across Washington state. For more information or to schedule Data First training for your board, contact WSSDA's Colleen Miller at C.Miller@wssda.org.



WSSDA Direct is published monthly by the Washington State School Directors' Association to provide information of interest to school directors and the education community. The views expressed in opinion articles appearing in WSSDA Direct are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent WSSDA policies or positions. If you have a disability and need this publication in an alternate format, please contact the WSSDA Communications Department.

| | |
|--|--------------|
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| | |
|---|----------------|
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- WSSDA Resolutions Committee Meeting March 3
- WSSDA Regional Meeting, Edmonds (DA-1) March 1
- WSSDA Regional Meeting, Tukwila (DA-2) March 29
- *WSSDA Reg. Meeting, University Place (DA-3) March 20
- WSSDA Regional Meeting, Port Angeles (DA-4) March 17
- *WSSDA Regional Meeting, Tumwater (DA-5) March 14
- WSSDA Regional Meeting, Battle Ground (DA-6) April 11
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- *WSSDA Regional Meeting, Cheney (DA 10) March 6
- WSSDA Regional Meeting, Richland (DA-11) March 5

WSSDA Regional Meetings held on weekdays are from 6 to 8 p.m.
Saturday Regional Meetings are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

*Meetings that include the *Renewing Foundations* workshop are marked with an asterisk. Workshops are from 4 to 6 p.m.

WORKSHOPS & CONFERENCES

- NSBA FEDERAL RELATIONS NETWORK CONFERENCE
Washington D.C: Feb. 5 - 7
- WASA SMALL SCHOOLS CONFERENCE
Yakima: March 4 - 6
- NSBA RURAL/SMALL DISTRICT FORUM CONFERENCE
Boston: April 20
- NSBA NATIONAL CONFERENCE
Boston: April 21 - 23
- WSSDA ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Spokane: Nov. 14 - 17