

interaction

Reconnecting Youth:

MESD and component districts embark on a new approach to matching programs with students

By Mark Skolnick

MESD's first goal for 2009-11 states:

By the beginning of the 2011 biennium, MESD will connect 1,000 new under-served youth with key components for their educational success.

Despite an array of educational options, thousands of school-age youth in Multnomah County are not enrolled in any school or educational program.

At the same time, many alternative schools and educational programs in Multnomah County have unfilled capacity to serve these students.

Why? According to MESD Superintendent **Ron Hitchcock**, too many students languish in educational limbo because geographic boundaries, funding silos and inflexible rules thwart efforts to do what is best for students.

Now, MESD and component districts are taking a radically new approach to address this problem. As envisioned by the planners of the "Reconnecting Youth" project, students not enrolled in an educational setting will be identified and matched with programs that have both the ability to absorb new students and the educational model that best suits their particular needs.

What's different about this effort is that district boundary restrictions, traditional funding policies and bureaucratic red tape will not encumber the placement of a student.

"It's a moral imperative," said Ron. "But one that makes sense on fiscal and educational grounds as well."

Ron is not alone in his passion to blaze a new trail and break down customary impediments. All eight public school district superintendents have thrown their support behind in the initiative.

Reconnecting Youth

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Planning began in early 2009

In early 2009, Ron invited leaders from districts, community-based organizations and public agencies to come to MESD for a Reconnecting Youth summit after learning about successful models around the country, particularly in Orange County, California. At the summit, they heard from leaders of the Orange County model. Participants, many of whom are on the front lines of local efforts, were intrigued enough to commit to more meetings.

Over the summer and fall, a core group developed a vision for how a pilot project could get off the ground in Multnomah County.

The first key step, Ron points out, is to forge new agreements among component districts. This will allow students to enroll in any program or school in the county that fits their needs with funding from the State School Fund (SSF) following the student instead of stopping at district boundaries.

This means if a 17-year old living in Parkrose can find success in an alternative, charter or community-based school within Portland's boundaries, there will be no bureaucratic barrier to prevent that from happening.

If a 15-year old living within the boundaries of Gresham-Barlow is better suited to attend a Centennial program, the funding will follow to the new school.

It also requires that traditional all-day high schools are just one of the alternatives offered.

"Some of the youth are so credit deficient that it makes no sense to continue offering them a traditional high school credit recovery path," said Ron. "If we can get them into a setting where they are engaged for even for half a day, and if that day starts at 3:00 in the afternoon so they can continue to work, then that may be the best place for them. We just have to be flexible and realistic."

The devil is really in the details

Recently a work group composed of Helensview Principal **Kris Persson**, Alpha Principal **Peter Kane**, School Improvement Coordinator **Judy Custy**, Director of Instructional Services **Kelvin Webster**, Chief Program Officer **Barbara Jorgensen** and Ron sat down to work on the details of the plan. And if ever the expression "the devil is in the details" was appropriate, this was it.

The group spent almost three hours examining funding patterns, policies and past practices that must be changed

or eliminated so reconnection of youth can be successful. They looked at screening tools for students and programs, while also identifying immediate strategies to engage districts in placement decisions.

The next step is to work with each component district to identify programs and schools with existing capacity to take in more students. As far as finding the students, MESD's school principals feel that is the least of their worries.

"What we are not doing is building a new system, we're just making better utilization of existing resources and funding options."

"Finding the kids is the least of our issues," said Helensview Principal Kris Persson. "We already know of enough young people who want to attend a program

but who can't because of the barriers we have already identified. When we start to have some success in the pilot, we'll be flooded."

The work group also highlighted the importance of the intake process. "If we don't do a good job of assessing students or we don't have these placements immediately available, we lose all credibility," said Kris.

Early adopters as well as skeptics

Although superintendents support initiative, there is still uncertainty and some reservations. Ron acknowledges the skeptics but is very upbeat that they can be won over.

"Districts are expressing enough trust to allow us to try this. We need to start out in a pilot phase, work out the details and show we can be successful. Then I think we'll have even more stakeholders jumping on board," said Ron. "What we are not doing is building a new system, we're just making better utilization of existing resources and funding options. Find the kids. Ask what would get them connected. Put them in the program. Don't worry about graduation as the ultimate goal. Some of the kids have already given up on graduation because they are so credit deficient but they still have educational and career goals we can help them achieve."

Ron admits that there are lots of details to iron out about the funding streams, logistics and follow-through. But he says these concerns are not reason give up. "It is unconscionable that we are turning our backs on thousands of students every year."

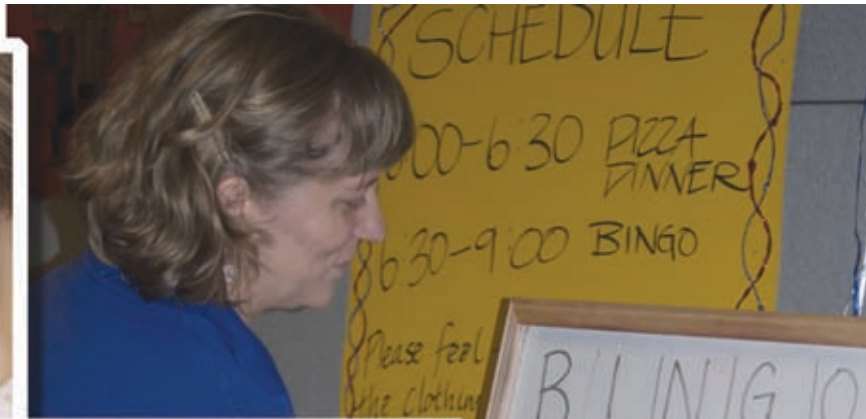
Referencing the Kevin Costner movie "Field of Dreams," Ron intoned the oft-repeated phrase: "If you build it, they will come." ■

Bingo family night a hit at Arata Creek

School Nurse **Pam Pestalozzi** and the staff at Arata Creek didn't know what to expect when they planned the school's first ever Family Night. Although they expected a good turnout, they were overwhelmed (in a positive way) when over 100 family members, students and volunteer staff began filling the gym in the early evening. With plenty of pizza, salad and drinks, and an impressive array of prizes (funded by an E2 Foundation Terra Nova grant),

the evening went better than anyone could have expected. Kudos to the planners and staff who provided a wonderful family experience. Said Arata Creek Principal **Henry Ramirez**: "When the families started to leave, everyone asked 'when can we do this again?'"

Here are some photos which show that you are never too young or too old to play bingo. 🍷



“Yes Virginia, there is a reason our buildings look shiny and new”

By Mark Skolnick & Janelle Emery

It was the night of a work-week and all through this place, no one was around, not even a trace.

*But what to my wondering eyes did appear?
Hard-working custodians who make it shine here!*

*...Off Andrew, off Kevin, off Marc and off John.
Off Gary, off Harold, off Jared and Don.*

*With Tekie and Danny to both be here soon,
we've never seen anything like it –
the most spotless of rooms!*

*...So think of our custodians asleep in their beds,
as visions of their hard work dance in their heads.*

*For they just finished work only eight hours ago,
as we kicked back on couches and watched TV shows.*

(Editor's note: Interaction caught up with six of MESD's ten custodians and so we could let everyone know a bit about some of the guys who keep our facilities in tip top shape and ready for students and staff each day)

It's 5:00pm on a weekday and you just logged off of your computer. You grab your coat and head for the door. You... are on your way home. For most of us, we call it “a day,” but for Ainsworth facilities night custodians **Kevin Scott** and **Andrew Jensen**, their day is just beginning.



Andrew Jensen (l) and Kevin Scott (r)

What do we really know about Kevin and Andrew? As we hustle through our busy days we know we try to pick-up after ourselves and clean-up the messes we create. Somehow, when we walk in the door in the morning, it's just a little cleaner, a little brighter and little more organized than how we left it. We have Kevin and Andrew to thank for that.

They begin their shift at 3:30pm. They walk in the door with a smile on their face and kind words to say. Monday through Friday, week after week, they put their heart and dedication into their jobs and make our workplace spotless and clean, for us all to appreciate.

Kevin Scott grew up in New Orleans. The devastation from 2005 Hurricane Katrina separated, scattered and spread out his entire family throughout the United States. Fortunately for us, Kevin landed in Portland.

Kevin's father was a carpenter and taught him the business. Unfortunately, along with his family's homes, his father's business was destroyed by Katrina as well. For Kevin, the devastation meant starting all over again. He trained, educated himself and “reinvented the wheel” after everything Katrina took from him. One thing she couldn't take from him however was his faith.

Kevin's eyes light up and he smiles from ear to ear when he talks about his faith. He is proud that he is contributing something positive and impacting to society. He is an ordained minister and the director for a local outreach program. He helps homeless people, alcoholics, and prisoners who are trying to re-establish themselves back into society. He teaches them and provides essential skills and tools they need to apply for jobs and get back on their feet again.

When Kevin isn't working, he dedicates most of his time to the outreach program. “There is much paperwork, organization and structuring involved in what I do,” he says. “I love to help people. When I see someone in need, I help by listening to them and understanding their problem. It's good thing to help people.”

Kevin's faith is as strong as his background is extensive. Before working as a night custodian for MESD he wore many different hats ranging from assigned jobs by an employment agency to an air-conditioning and refrigeration repairman. He also worked in maintenance for a school in Louisiana.

Kevin loves to cook. He spent a great deal of time in the kitchen researching, developing and testing different recipes for friends and professional chefs.

Back home in Louisiana, a pinch of salt here and a dash of thyme there gave Kevin a name for himself in the restaurant industry. One favorite recipe Kevin developed in particular was his famous Louisiana gumbo. It was such a hit and was in such high-demand that it made its way to Philadelphia to an annual festival and was loved by many.

When asked, “Why do you like your job as a night custodian?” he simply replied, “I'm not in high-demand here like I am as a minister. I get to be me and just un-wind here. I like that.”

Although we can't help but feel a sense of sadness and empathy for Kevin and his family (due to the devastation Katrina has put on their lives) we are appreciative that Kevin came to Portland Oregon and is now part of our MESD family.

Andrew Jensen too loves the fact that his job as night custodian is low-stress. He grew up in Salem, Oregon and lived there until he was 18 years old. From there, he moved to Seattle, Washington and lived there for three years. Andrew moved for a short while to Portland and re-located to Silverton, Oregon to be closer to his roots. Andrew now lives back in Portland where he feels settled and “at home.”

Andrew keeps himself busy by taking nine credit hours at Portland State University on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. He is in school to earn his bachelors degree in geography, which is another interest for Andrew.

When asked, “why geography?” He answered: “There is just so much you can do with a geography degree. It’s such a broad field.” Andrew only has just a year and a half to go until he graduates.

He too has worn many different hats when it comes to background work experience. He worked in a record store, in landscape maintenance and even worked as a customer support representative in a call center for a cell phone company.

He spent five years working at Chemeketa Community College as a night custodian and enjoys the low-stress impact of this type of work. “All I have to do is focus on my job here. I don’t take any stress home,” he says.

Andrew’s true passion is music. When he’s not working, going to school or studying, he’s playing the drums and developing his own beat. He’s a one-man-band and loves to play local shows now and then. Andrew pre-records his guitar sounds and drum-beats that he solely creates himself. He then combines the separate sounds into one, great song and he has many songs he’s created. He prides himself on doing all of this on his own and his desire is to be in a successful band.

Danny Moreno: Finding a home at Pathways

You can find **Danny Moreno** at Pathways Community School every day from noon to 8:30 p.m. But you do have to look quickly because he’s a whirlwind of activity. It’s his job to make sure the school is sparkling clean and ready each day to welcome students.

Dan and his wife have two grown daughters who live in Oregon. Three years ago, after living in southeast Portland for many years, Danny and his wife relocated to Troutdale. While the east county lifestyle suits him well, the hour and a half round trip commute to his job every day was just too much driving. Two years ago he took his position at MESD. Danny is thrilled that his drive has been whittled down considerably.

Originally from Visalia, California (near Fresno), Danny enlisted in the Navy after graduating high school in 1981. His two tours of duty, four years each, took him around the world. Danny took two long trips aboard ship while in the Navy, one lasting six months and one lasting eight months. He recalled seeing Bob Hope and Barbara Eden perform in a USO show in Bahrain.

Here are all the MESD custodians:

- Andrew Jensen, Ainsworth
- Kevin Scott, Ainsworth
- John Dunn, Thompson
- Tekie Kifle, Thompson
- Marc Staino, Helensview
- Harold Lu, Helensview
- Jared Wood, Edwards
- Don Oni, Arata
- Gary Jorgusen, Alpha
- Danny Moreno, Pathways



Danny Moreno

On the longer world-wide journey, he said the crew spent four solid months “seeing just water.” He wasn’t too sad about getting out of the Navy after that experience.

When he left the Navy, his ship was in dry dock in Portland. He stayed here and adopted Portland as his home (and met his wife, who grew up in Tillamook). After working at local shipyards, and seeing employment in that area contract, he developed his career in building maintenance.

Danny likes to travel and this summer took a road trip with his wife that took them to Boise, Idaho Falls, Bryce and Zion National Parks in Utah, Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon and finally back to Visalia to visit with family.

He’s thrilled to be working at MESD and especially delighted that during all the school breaks and summers he gets to work a regular day shift.

John Dunn and Tekie Kifle: Keeping Thompson ready for Early Childhood

Thompson School Custodian **Tekie Kifle** hails from Eritrea, a small East African country in the Horn of Africa bounded on the west by Sudan, on the south by Ethiopia and on the north by Djibouti. It has been a volatile and war torn region due to Ethiopia’s efforts to annex it as it’s 14th province. The 30-year war against successive Ethiopian governments ended in 1991 and Eritrea gained independence and international recognition in 1993.

For Tekie, the conflict meant almost certain conscription in the Ethiopian army, which was not a future he envisioned for himself. Fleeing across the border to Sudan in the late 1980s, Tekie gained refugee status and at 29 years old emigrated to the United States in 1989.

Arriving in Portland, with no knowledge of the English language, Tekie embarked on his new life. Taking English classes at Portland Community College, he eventually assimilated into a new culture. Still working on his English, he worked at the Red Lion with many Spanish-speakers. Having grown up with a father fluent in Italian, Tekie actually understood Spanish better than English.



John Dunn (l) and Tekie Kifle (r)

Custodians *Continued from page 5*

With his English skills much improved, Tekie was self-employed for ten years. When the economy took a nose dive, he went to work for a temp agency and was placed at Alpha School. He did such a good job that Alpha Principal **Peter Kane** encouraged him to apply for a permanent position within Facilities Services.

Eventually, Tekie traveled back to Eritrea, married and brought his wife back to the United States. Now Tekie and wife Mihret have three children two boys, ages 12 and 11 and an 8-year old daughter. His sister also lives in Portland and his brother lives in California.

Although his children were born here, Tekie has made sure that they understand their roots. He took his children back to Eritrea in 2004 where they stayed for three months with family.

When **John Dunn** turned 57 years old, he found himself in the unenviable position of being without a job. Laid off after years as a warehouse technician at Boise Cascade, he couldn't see himself starting over at an entry level position in his field. His wife, **Shirley**, who works at MESD in the School Improvement Program, suggested that he look into opportunities in MESD's Facilities Services Department.

Lucky for John, in August of 2006 there was an opening at Edwards School in southeast Portland. After a stint there, he eventually settled in at Thompson where he teams with Tekie to keep the building clean, safe and in good working order. He really enjoys his work and feels great about furthering the MESD mission with very young children in need.

Recently, John and Shirley endured a long period of time worrying about their younger son Staff Sergeant Clay Dunn who completed two tours of duty in Iraq. "When Clay was in the 82nd Airborne, we wouldn't watch the news because it was too worrisome," he explained. Clay had a combat assignment and was in harm's way on a daily basis. However, earlier this year Clay made it home safe and sound and has since left the military for a job in civilian life.

"It's going to be a great Christmas this year," said a relieved John.

Gary Jorgusen: Let's get ready to rock

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is in Cleveland, Ohio, but you don't have to go that far to get a lesson in music history. Just spend a few minutes with MESD's Alpha School Custodian, **Gary Jorgusen**. The man has seen hundreds, maybe thousands of concerts with all the rock gods, from ZZ Top to Johnny Winter to the Beatles. Beginning as youngster, in the 50s, Gary began cultivating his musical garden of memories.

"My parents weren't into music, but I started listening to Jerry Lee Lewis way back when I was really young," Gary explains. Since then, Gary's list of concerts reads like a who's who in the world of popular music: the Beatles in Seattle (couldn't hear a thing over the screams), the Grateful Dead known then as the Warlocks (in a club in San Francisco), Crosby, Stills and Nash recently at McMeniman's Edgefield.



Gary Jorgusen

When MESD put on the Milestones of Achievement event last spring with a rock and roll theme, the planners turned to Gary for some decorations. Out came posters, many of them signed by the artists, to adorn the walls of the auditorium. While Gary parted temporarily with some of his memorabilia, his real treasures remained in his house within a gallery that would put most music museums to shame.

Gary is a native of Portland and attended both Madison and Grant high schools. He graduated from Mt. Hood Community College with an associate's degree in culinary arts. After living in San Francisco for six years and working at San Francisco State University, Gary came back to Portland and eventually went to work for MESD on March 17, 1986. Now, nearly 24 years later, Gary is beginning to contemplate retirement. After years of taking care of the Ainsworth Building, Gary transferred to an opening at Alpha School this year since it's closer to his home in Cascade Locks.

Anyone interested in reminiscing about the formative days of rock and roll should sit down with Gary. He's a gold mine of little known facts, music trivia and a great historical perspective. Rock on, Gary J! 🎸

TERRA NOVA

With fall, 2009 Terra Nova grants: E² Foundation helps in many ways

With this round of awards, the E² Foundation has now given out 320 grants for \$203,658

From speech therapy, to after school activities, to family nights to rain ponchos...this fall's E² Foundation Terra Nova grants are helping MESD students and staff in many ways. Twelve grants totaling \$10,568 were announced recently by Lori Luckart of the E² Foundation.

Here's the list of recipients:

MESD Prom - Functional Living Skills Program

Submitted by: **Brett Bingham** – Pathways Community School

Amount funded: **\$900**

Funding for Pathways Community School to host a prom for all MESD high school and transition classes from component districts.

Speech Activity Bags to Go

Submitted by: **Heidi Wilson** – Multnomah Early Childhood Program – Thompson

Amount funded: **\$750**

To provide speech therapy learning materials to assist Speech Language Pathologists help students meet their speech and language goals. Bags are available for check out by SLP and are easily transported in a portable bag.

Laptops for College Students

Submitted by: **Geof Garner** – Alternative Pathways

Amount funded: **\$1,500**

Alternative Pathways College Transition Advocates will award deserving students who are enrolled in a postsecondary learning institution with a laptop during graduation ceremonies to be used for college.

Project Cover Up

Submitted by: **Shelly Saunders** – Pathways Community School

Amount funded: **\$1,250**

To provide rain ponchos for students at Pathways community school who rely on wheelchairs for their mobility. For these medically fragile students, getting wet and cold is often a catalyst for illness and absenteeism from school.

Arata Creek After School Activities

Submitted by: **Susan Hoelzer** – Arata Creek School

Amount funded: **\$1,250**

To provide students at Arata Creek School additional opportunities to learn, gain confidence and develop social skills. Activities are designed to engage and stimulate students in inspiring activities after school.

Alpha Photography

Submitted by: **Linda Antolic** – Alpha School

Amount funded: **\$300**

Many Alpha students do not have access to a personal camera. Funding will be used to purchase two additional digital cameras to be used in Alpha's well-established photography course.

Alpha Open Gym/Basketball Team Practice Facility

Submitted by: **Michael Lancaster** – Alpha School

Amount funded: **\$750**

Over one-third of Alpha students love to play basketball. This funding fund gym and basketball rentals, allowing for a reliably dry, warm place for students to play when whether doesn't permit play outside at their school.

Alpha Sandwich Repair

Submitted by: **Jenn Dolan** – Alpha School

Amount funded: **\$1,456**

Creates a garden-to-table program, training students to provide access to fresh, well-prepared, campus-grown produce to all students at lunch time.

Terra Nova Grants *Continued from page 7*

Computer Access Utilizing Wheelchair Driving System

Submitted by: **Monica Crea, RN** and **Dominique Harrison, RN**

CESD Life Education Enrichment Program

Amount funded: **\$846**

The CESD LEEP program received a donation of a power wheelchair with an Adaptive Switch Laboratories Driver Control System. The movement and steering of this power chair is done with a driver control system accessed by 3 switches imbedded in the wheelchair headrest. Their goal is to have the students who use this system to drive their power wheelchair also to be able to use it to operate the computer. Funding from this grant will pay for an ASL Mouse Emulator to allow them to use their wheelchair driving system as a mouse interface on the computer.

First Aid Fanny Packs for Classroom Outings, Padlocks & Batteries

Submitted by: **Monica Crea, RN** and **Dominique Harrison, RN**

CESD Life Education Enrichment Program

Amount funded: **\$200**

Funding will fortify a project started two years ago to provide on-going continuity with basic first aid supplies in each of the 19 Life Education Enrichment Program (LEEP) classrooms. Educational staff will be supplied with a fanny pack full of medical supplies and secured by a padlock for school outings.

Arata Creek Family Fun Night

Submitted by: **Pam Pestalozzi** and **Julie Bramman** – Arata Creek

Amount funded: **\$750**

Funding to host two Family Fun Nights featuring pizza and bingo entertainment for parents and students. The purpose of Family Fun Night is to model family meal time and conversation, to offer family strengthening activities through game play and to connect families in need to community resources.

Mobile Office/Classroom and Health Assessment Tools

Submitted by: **Kathleen Wecks, RN**

Amount funded: **\$616**

Funding will supply a locking mobile office cart that is needed at Four Corners School, a behavioral and Transitional School where nursing services are given in locked classrooms to students struggling with behavior control and life skills deficits.

With funding from an E2 Foundation Terra Nova grant, Alpha School teachers **KC Reuman** and **Jonna Schuder** collaborated on an innovative project in which students artistically enhanced ordinary chairs with designs of their choice. This is the second year that Alpha students have participated in the art project. Last year, when KC got the idea from a Portland Schools Foundation project, he asked his students to research an artist and then design a chair that reflected the artist's style. This year the project was open to the whole school and students were free to find their own muse. The chairs were displayed for parents on student conference night. 🎨



Nikkita Hathaway with pink stool



Israel Aldama with black chair and Jackson Pollack design

INTERACTION

is produced by the Multnomah Education Service District Communication Services Department.

Editorial Staff: Mark Skolnick, Janelle Emery

Design & Production: MESD Printing & Graphic Services

Contributors: Janelle Emery, Lori Luckart and Mark Skolnick