

Josephine County Democrats

General Meeting Feb. 9 2022

Hybrid/Zoom and In Person

After a short business meeting wherein Chair Dorothy Yetter went through some news from the Democratic Party of Oregon DPO: mask mandates will be lifted by March 31, March 8 is the deadline for candidates to file to run for election, DPO delegates will meet in person this year in Sun River Oregon Oct. 29, time to file with the county clerk's office to be a PCP until March 31 and the primary election is May 17. Introductions were made so people on Zoom could know who was at the in-person meeting, since they can't see them. The Chair also announced that next month's meeting will explore the pros and cons of the Code Enforcement Ordinance passed recently by the Josephine County Commission and then challenged and put on the May ballot by a group opposing it. It will be important for PCPs to be in attendance because after the presentations by Commissioner Dan DeYoung, County Counsel Wally Hicks and Planning Director Mark Stevenson there will be a vote to determine if J C Democrats will support Code Enforcement.

Democrats, curious about how Josephine County schools are doing after the pandemic upset their routines, held a forum to find out. Three Rivers School District Middle School Science teacher Bob Bath, who's been in the classroom 33 years, started the discussion with a Power Point presentation about how teaching has changed over the last 40 or 50 years. In the 70s teachers dealt with subject content, learning theory, fire and earthquake drills, and technology was limited to a 35 millimeter film on a movie projector and an overhead projector helped lesson presentation. Then came PL 94-142, the Equal Access bill that brought special needs students into the classroom, sex education, anti-substance abuse education and enrichment programs for gifted students. Technology started expanding with email, software to learn, DVD players to figure out. Just about time they mastered those, YouTube and Smartboards came along.

Then schools started folding student's medical conditions, homelessness and custody agreements into a teacher's classroom concerns. Supervision needed to increase, so teachers were assigned duty stations around campus during class changes, lunch and breaks to make sure behavior didn't get out of hand. As if that weren't enough, active shooter drills, sexual harassment training, child abuse reporting requirements, campaigning for fund-raisers and levies to fix old, overcrowded schools became part of a teacher's portfolio. Standardized testing, with lesson plans for that squeezed into the curriculum, then STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics) and STEM (the same without Art), CTE (Career and Technical Education) emerged as students needed to prepare for increasingly complicated careers.

In addition, teachers trained to recognize mental health problems and ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) in students and incorporated lessons in manners, communication, SELs (Social-Emotional Learning) to help students deal with factors that may be preventing learning, all while teachers had to become familiar with new reporting software. Then the pandemic came along and more than ever before has been expected of teachers, Bath said. Parents started confronting schools about masks and vaccines, some teachers opposed mandates and left, while battles over LGBTQ issues, who uses what

bathroom, controversial books and accurate depictions of history in textbooks surfaced. Meanwhile, teachers had to find time for continuous training requirements.

So where does vocational education fit into all this? Bath said for a while they were cut because no one majored in shop in college, but they are making a comeback as the need for people who know how to build and fix things is becoming obvious. At Grants Pass High School now students can learn to make a beautiful guitar while learning the skills needed to do it. COVID variants stretched out all these issues as teachers and administrators deal with students acting out after spending too much time in dysfunctional homes.

Next speaker was Kevin Marr, who sits on the Three Rivers budget committee. He said the budget has gone up from \$39 million in 2010 to \$55 million now, and that the school is getting \$17 million in pandemic help. He said they do hear people complaining about administrators' salaries but few actually know what it's like to manage a school district or how much more people with these skills can make in the private sector. The state of Oregon distributes school funds but a county can add to that, he said, which is an important investment in the future.

Dropout rates, accelerated programs for advanced students, roadblocks to finishing high school and the future of vocational education were questions from those attending the forum, as was worries about exposing vulnerable children to COVID when the mask mandates are relaxed.

Constance Palaia, a school librarian, talked about how kids have been coping with COVID restrictions as well as controversies over certain books. It is stressful for some but staff at every level is doing all they can to help kids cope. As for the recent controversies, people opposing special consideration for LGBTQ students don't know how much this hurts those students. Schools are all about intellectual freedom and equity and that won't stop because some find it politically expedient to target books and curriculum in schools. You can still do a lot in a red place, she said.