

Presentation to Forest Grove School Board
January 22, 2007
Delivered by Terry O'Day, Vanessa Gray, Robin Lindsley

Intro: (Terry)

Thanks for taking the time to read our proposal and hear our presentation. Though you probably have a good idea by now about the how's and what's of our school, we would like to take a bit of time to give you the why's – why we have spent the better part of 2 years taking on the enormous task of starting a charter school here in Forest Grove. Though there have been many many people who have volunteered their time to help us get to where we are today, the 3 of us on the steering group have been the main architects of this proposal. Though we share a common vision for the school we propose, each of us has different backgrounds and different reasons for our involvement in this project. These reasons correspond to the 3 core developmental goals we have for the students who will attend this school – Scholarship, Stewardship, and Citizenship. We will now address each of these values and talk about why they are so important to us and how they have inspired us to travel this path.

Scholarship: (Vanessa)

I'm a parent of 2 small children and am training to become a secondary math teacher. Before that I spent 8 years working in colleges as an administrator. So, my entire life I've spent in schools—one way or another. And so it's not surprising that I'm deeply interested in education. In particular, the question that interests me is Why do we send our children to school? What is our desired outcome? This is an endless topic w/a multitude of opinions. But everyone agrees that we want our children to be well educated—however that's defined—so that they will be able to pursue their interests and address their needs. And this is generally the answer we give our children and students explicitly or implicitly when they ask us why do they have to go to school, why do they have to learn this, why is school the way it is?

Becoming educated—this is a long-term goal—one we imagine taking at least 12-16 years. But what about the meantime, what about the "getting there" part to that goal? Our answer—this long-term goal of becoming educated—suggests that every year, every day is a stepping-stone to that ultimate goal. You need to do well in 1st grade to be ready for 2nd grade and you need to do well in 2nd grade to do well in 3rd grade, and you really need to do well in high school to succeed in college, and so on. We are essentially asking them to make a leap of faith for 12 years. Do what we say and eventually you'll see the wisdom behind it. But, if we acknowledge that students only learn by their own volition and industry then we must accept that to become educated, students must desire it. They must become partners in their education. And so we need to be able to make their education relevant to them now, not ask them to wait 12 years to be able to see the relevance and importance.

Having a meaningful and authentic context for learning is a way to do that. Place-based education is one form of contextualized learning. It uses the local community and environment as an integrating concept for learning. With PB learning students see that what they are learning is applicable today in their community and in the world beyond.

As a future math teacher I'm prepared for the inevitable question when teaching algebra: Why do we have to learn this? Usually, the answers are the leap of faith kind—you may use it later if you decide to enter a technical or scientific field, or you need it to be well-educated. With PB

learning, I would approach it differently: An example: Students may be studying the effects of global warming in a local context by studying the effect of local temperature increases on the behavior of migrating birds. We can look at local temperatures for the past 20 years and use data from organizations that track the return of migrating birds to Oregon. Together we could develop formulas to help us understand the data. This is algebra and by using a real-life example students can see the importance of the subject and they can learn it by doing it. In a PB school, all students are learning content this way in every class every day. The integrating concept is pervasive and all-encompassing

We chose PB learning because of its ability to engage students by using an authentic context but also because it was congruent with our desires to educate students to be stewards and citizens. Exploring, understanding, learning about what's local seemed to us to be the best way to do this. But PB learning is also consistent with new understandings about how people learn best. There is a vast body of brain research that shows how the brain organizes knowledge and shows that learning is more thorough and faster when it is presented in meaningful and familiar contexts with an experiential component.

Personalized Learning

Over the past two years we have all had innumerable conversations with families interested in a new school. These families are searching for the right fit for their child. And their children have been all over the academic spectrum—high achievers, low achievers, and everything in between. But there is a common unifying element to most families, and that is a desire to find an education that can be personalized to their child's interests, needs, strengths and weaknesses. As we've planned this school, we've implemented several elements designed to make personalized education a reality:

Small Class size

With a planned student-staff ratio of 25:1, teachers will have the ability to really get to know their students. When paired with **Looping Classrooms** in which one teacher stays with a class for several years, there is no doubt that teachers will be able to develop an educational and personal relationship with students that will benefit the student. We also have included a structure for **Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs)**, through which teachers, families, and students will lay out the student's academic goals and objectives. This is really the vehicle for delivering a personalized education for students. Starting with state benchmarks and school objectives and then adding to that the student's interests and focusing on their unique learning needs, the teacher, student and family lay out the student's plan of study. **Advisors** work with students on a daily, weekly and monthly basis to assist students to stay on target but also to make adjustments to their PLP when needed.

So, small classes, looping classrooms, PLPs, and advisors—these elements are designed to make this school a place where all children benefit from an education that is tailored to them. We believe the opportunities for personalized education will be beneficial for all children and that the families we've talked to thus far will find in this structure a way for their children's needs and interests to be met and well served.

Stewardship: (Terry)

My name is Terry O'Day. I have 3 children who started school at Dilly, became homeschoolers for 2 years, and currently attend City View charter school as 5 and 6th graders. I teach Ceramics

and Jewelry in the art department at Pacific university. Though all these facts are related to why I'm involved in this project, what I'd like to do right now is talk about how my work as an artist is connected to the development of a school that seeks to foster in its students a sense of Stewardship over their community and the natural world they live in.

My past work as an artist has explored concepts related to how we make decisions, human life cycles, and biological and cultural continuity.

In doing this work I became acutely aware of the fact that the global environmental systems we rely on to provide us with life essentials such as water, air, and food, are severely stressed and are rapidly becoming more so. There is ample research by highly respected scientists from all over the globe telling us that climate change, compromised ecosystems, water scarcity, and disease are all challenges that our children will likely face in the course of their lifetimes. In addition, because of the diabetes and overweight epidemic, the life span of today's younger generation is expected to decrease for the first time in modern history.

In my view, these problems are all related to what the Hopi refer to as Koyaanisqatsi, which translates to the phrase "life out of balance". Our lives are out of balance with ourselves, each other, and the intricate and complex ecosystems that support us.

As an artist who is committed to the idea of the artist as a public servant, I searched for ways to address this imbalance. My current work seeks to raise awareness and understanding of the complex nature of the challenges we face as well as promote community action towards cultural change that will enable us to address these challenges in a positive way. What better way to engage the community in that conversation than through a school that has at its core the goal of developing the value of stewardship in its students and, through them, the community that they are part of? We all care deeply about preparing our children for the future and school is one of the primary ways our culture does this. In bringing this proposal before you, we have engaged in the process of asking our community to actively evaluate and question the content of the curriculum we use in our schools in relation to the future our scientists and economists predict for our children. It is my hope that this process will continue far into the future as we bring our children and their families through the place-based curriculum we have chosen for our school.

As I mentioned earlier, the socioeconomic, political, and natural structures we are talking about are complex, intricate and interrelated. In order to develop in our students the critical and systems thinking methods necessary for effective analysis of these structures, we will approach academic learning in the same way. Thus our emphasis on project-based interdisciplinary learning. One example of this approach that has recently been the focus of several newspaper articles are the learning garden and kitchen we have incorporated into our school design. By using the growing, preparing, and eating of food as a organizing theme, we can address subject matter related to math, science, history, cultural diversity and aesthetics to name just a few. In addition, we can help our children learn healthy eating habits that will serve them well throughout their lives.

Though this curriculum will promote a high level of academic achievement for all of our students, it will also serve to connect our students to the place where they live in many ways. By first instilling in our children a sense of joy and wonder at the natural world around them when they are young, and then by helping them to achieve a sense of responsibility and agency for that

world as they grow, they will emerge from their school experience ready and able to continue the conversation we have started by working within their communities as leaders and collaborators.

Citizenship: (Robin)

I'm glad I finally get to tell you why I've been attending your meetings this last year! The district people probably think I'm nuts, but I've enjoyed the meetings because they've given me a view of the district that I couldn't have gotten any other way.

I am a parent of two grown children and one lively three-year-old granddaughter. I moved to Forest Grove four years ago, and have been immersed in stewarding my little piece of heaven, BerryLost Farm, ever since. I've got 6 acres of projects and I'll need to live to be 140 to get them all done.

A little over a year ago, I attended a community outreach meeting that Terry, Steve and Vanessa held in town, because I was intrigued with the idea of a new school that promised to involve the community – and focus on our good green earth as well. As a retired teacher with 25 years of service in public schools, and a child advocate as well, I am a firm believer in the idea of the Village Raising the Child.

I was a teacher in north Portland's inner city for 23 of those years, and it became very clear to me that unless the majority of the citizens in a community are actively involved in the education of the children and youth, the village generally just doesn't know what's going on in the schools. Especially if they don't have children attending schools, most people have only the information they get through the media and the memories of their own school years. We have a cultural deficit, a society too far removed from a foundational need in a democracy: the excellent rearing and education of our children. So how do we involve more community members in our children's education?

I want to share an epiphany I had while on a visit to Reggio Emilia, Italy, in 1994. I was visiting the internationally known Reggio Emilia preschools, where little 3- and 4-year olds, among other activities, create the most astounding sculptures and art to express what they experience in their neighborhood explorations. The teachers spend a great deal of time discussing each child's expanding learning and how they can take that child to the next step of constructing their knowledge. The parents and other members of the child's family are also kept involved by the teachers' constantly sharing this information through elaborate documentation of children's growth.

But even this wonderful program was not the cause of my epiphany. It was the realization that the people in that TOWN had an intimate knowledge of what was going on in that program, and that they expected to be informed about how well things were going.

Now here's the cause: the citizens of Reggio Emilia have a deep understanding of the value of these little people as they will some day be in charge of the village. They truly value each of those children as a future citizen. Reggio Emilia, and probably the society of Italy as a whole, raises its bambinos.

At our proposed school, our children and youth will become the citizens we expect them to be. They will practice the skills of democracy in the school by developing expectations and rules for

living together as a community of learners. They will also learn how to collaborate with the citizens of Forest Grove – the school people, the business people, the homeowners, and the government officials – to solve actual problems that keep this town from being the best it can. That is real citizenship, the foundation of this democracy. Education is for COMMUNITY development in addition to individual student development. Equally important is the belief that students can be a resource TO the community, and not just objects of the educational process. This is the promise of Place-based Education, and it's happening all across this country. It's a strong effort to truly help our village raise its children.

We are looking forward to our continued collaboration with Forest Grove School District in the development of this forward-looking program for the young citizens of our town. Thank you.