

Chehalis Foundation Commits \$1.5 Million to School Initiatives

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In support of the Chehalis School District's Student Achievement Initiative, the Chehalis Foundation has agreed to a commitment of \$1.5 million over the next five years to help ensure students in the district are career and college ready.

The initiative began three years ago with the goal of preparing 60 percent of W.F. West graduates to go on to earn four-year degrees, compared to the almost 23 percent of students in the public school system nationwide.

The goal to improve, modernize and prepare has helped increase the number of students who are college and career ready.

According to Chehalis Superintendent Ed Rothlin, in 2013, the district had a goal to raise the level of powerful teaching and learning from 37 percent to 50 percent by spring 2015. The district achieved 60 percent at that time and asked themselves what else could be done to maximize the opportunity to achieve the goals of the initiative.

"Our emphasis is part of our entire student initiative, which is to improve our instruction in the classroom, modernize those instructional practices, and today prepare kids for career and college and college and career," Rothlin said. "We are looking at taking some responsibility for what happens to them after graduation. ... we want to make sure they are successful beyond and that's what this initiative is all about."

Three donors, Jim Lintott, and Orin and Kevin Smith, have committed to \$1 million, while the Chehalis Foundation board agreed to raise another \$500,000 toward the effort. One-hundred thousand dollars of the total will be directed to the emerging Boys and Girls Club of Chehalis.

The plan, which is backed by research from the nationally recognized educational consulting firm, the BERC group, has spurred the hiring of

three advisers who will help consult students at three different levels. Kerri Chaput has been hired on at the high school as a college and career adviser, while Katelyn Walsh was hired on as a math instructional coach for the K-12 system.

With approximately 50 percent of W.F. West graduates continuing their education at Centralia College, an adviser will also be put in place at the college to help the graduates with the transition.

Half of the counselor's time will be dedicated specifically to Chehalis graduates.

The plan includes College Peer Mentors, most likely second-year college students who graduated from W.F. West, who will work with students at the high school to better prepare them for what to expect.

Chehalis Superintendent Ed Rothlin said the partnership between the district, the foundation and the college is a positive one.

"The partnership with the foundation, and the district, and now Centralia College, it just makes so much sense," Rothlin told The Chronicle. Assistant Superintendent Mary Lou Bissett said the advisers will play an important role in making sure the students have help with the transition from high school to college. With almost half of the students heading to Centralia College, numbers show some students are not as ready as they should be.

"We need to do a better job at supporting those kids in that transition," she said. "... One of the things we know we need to do is increase the kids that are leaving us, our K-12 system, to be four-year college ready because one of the things Centralia College is telling me is the kids who walk in the door four-year college ready are more likely to be successful there."

By increasing the rigor of academic work in the K-12 system, those students can have better access to college level classes and be more prepared as opposed to students who spend time taking pre-college level courses once enrolled in the community college.

The target of the initiative is not only students who are college-bound. With successful programs within Chehalis' STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — program, students leave the school prepared to enter the competitive workforce after high school.

J. Vander Stoep, Chehalis Foundation Board member and chair of the fundraising effort to support the initiative, said the initiative in its entirety is going to give kids a better chance at success after they graduate from the Chehalis School District.

"This is going to give kids in Chehalis the best possible shot, all these actions together, and that's pretty amazing," he said.