

SPS: Wow Moments

Near-Peer Mentoring Pairs High Schoolers with Younger Students

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- The inaugural group of near-peer high school mentors.

As adults, we've all likely tried to give helpful advice to a teenager or two and watched as that advice went unheeded. So, how do we reach our 8th- and 9th-grade students to help them be successful as they transition to high school? We pair them with older students with similar backgrounds and experiences.

It's called near-peer mentoring, and Springfield is using \$180,000 in funds from an Oregon Department of Education Student Mentoring, Monitoring, and Acceleration grant to implement the program. The overall goal is to help boost student achievement and graduation rates.

How It Works: Staff will identify 8th- and 9th-grade students who are thought to be at risk of

struggling in high school. Indicators used to identify students are poor grades, low attendance and other education-related risk factors. Each student will be paired with an upperclassman and meet with their mentor weekly over the course of two years.

An aspect of near-peer mentoring that sets it apart from other mentoring programs is the focus on pairing students with mentors of similar cultural backgrounds—the “near” in near-peer. By pairing students of similar cultures, the district hopes to have a more profound affect on participating students and, ultimately, keep students engaged throughout high school.

“The idea is that this becomes one thread in the fabric of support we provide our students. If we can find ways to engage kids before they fall behind, we can help them graduate on-time be ready to move on to post-secondary education or into their chosen careers,” said Assistant Superintendent Matt Coleman.

Mentors must have good grades and good attendance and, eventually, the mentees will become mentors themselves as they enter their junior year.

Kick-Off: Students will be involved in the program got a chance to meet each other for the first time at a May 6 kick-off event at the University of Oregon Ford Alumni Center. Nearly 160 students from Thurston and Springfield high schools as well as the district’s four middle schools attended, engaging in group-building activities while learning more about the program.

The program will begin in full swing this fall.



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