

AFTER SCHOOL

Keeping students engaged

21st Century Community Learning Centers offer tutoring and activities

BY DANI PALMER
Of the News-Times

WALDPORT — It became a competition for them, but the students who made and then launched rockets at Crestview Heights School last week got an idea of what works and what doesn't as they learned about aerodynamics during their after school program.

In Lincoln County School District's 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the students meet for a couple of hours after school every day. They have tutoring "so (the program) helps with homework," said Crestview coordinator Tamara Rosser, and there's also an enrichment activity.

With just one teacher and about 30 kids in class during the day, "it's easier to get help" during the after school program, Crestview sixth grader Tylor Yakes said. And they do activities he enjoys.

"It's fun," he added, with fifth grader Morgan Greeninger concurring, as both made successful rockets.

STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) is a big focus. In Toledo, for example, they have a retired electrician who's brought circuit boards out for the kids to work on, county coordinator Joyce Thompson Graham said.

They also do projects centered around art and reading, and physical activities such as the yoga Crestview does once a week.

Thompson Graham added that they partner with multiple groups, such as Oregon State University and 4-H.

Some of the lessons are ones students may not get in class, Rosser said, like the aerodynamics they learned about while making the rockets.

"Programs like this help kids succeed when they get to high school," she said.

"They're going to remember it."

The hours from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. are when youth are most likely to develop risky behaviors, such as smoking or drinking, as their parents may not be home from work yet. So opportunities like the 21st Century Community Learning Centers keep them engaged and learning after school hours, Thompson Graham said.

The nationwide program covers grades one through eight, and the students who regularly attend are more likely to improve test scores, grades and overall academic achievement, according to the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

Michelle Mileham with the Environmental Sciences Graduate Program at OSU conducted an independent survey last year on Lincoln County's success. They found that:

- 92 percent of teachers saw neutral or improved student performance.
- 74 percent countywide saw improved academic performance while 66 percent saw students more motivated in class.

- 57 percent of teachers saw general classroom behavior improvement, and 66 percent saw positive change in students getting along better with others.

Last year was the first the program went countywide. This year, they've added a site at Newport Prep Academy, where 21st Century, partially supported by a federal grant, provides activities for seventh and eighth graders, and the school district's HELP Centers support those for students in grades nine through 12, allowing the collaborating partners to reach older students, Thompson Graham said. The program served 400 kids last year and has about 275 enrolled right now. Thompson Graham said they're always looking for volunteers to serve more children, as they want no more than a 1 to 10 ratio with volunteers and students. The cost is \$125 per 12-week session, payable monthly or weekly as arranged, and there are full and partial scholarships available for those who need them, so anyone can attend. To learn more about the program or how to volunteer, call Thompson Graham at 541-265-4767.

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OMSI will be in Newport Thursday, from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Lincoln County Fairgrounds, for "Lights on Afterschool." Admission is free, and activities will include hands-on experiences and demonstrations.