

Rural Schools - Our Story



Nezperce School District

Who we are - “Learning Today for Tomorrow's Challenges”

Community of Neperce:

- Population 500
- North Central Idaho
- Dryland farming and ranching - wheat, barley, canola, legumes.
- Economy is entirely driven by Ag and Ag support
- Located on Nez Perce Indian Reservation.
- 95-100% Caucasian, many multigenerational families connected to agriculture.
- 0% ESL

Nezperce School District

- 150 students PK-12
- Elementary and Secondary building on same campus 100 feet apart.
- Targeted Title I School and GEAR UP grant recipient
- Generally hover around 50% FRL
- 70%+ Proficient Math and ELA ISAT
- 98% Proficient on latest ISIP(IRI)
- 55 miles from nearest college (Lewiston)

Who I am

- Moved to Nezperce in 4th grade (1990)
- Attended LCSC
- Originally certified through ABCTE program 2005
- Taught Science/Math/Tech at nearby Highland (Craigmont) and Nezperce (
- Wright Fellow (University of Idaho 11-12)
- Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow 13-14
- 18-19 First year Superintendent
- Married with 6 kids ages 3-15
- 5 kids in school grades 2, 4, 7, 8, and 10
- I have a passion for making, fab labs, student design, invention and creation



Challenges - Staffing recruiting and retention

This can vary on an annual basis, but we have difficulty filling professional support positions that may or may not be full time. Examples include:

- School Psychologist
- School Nurse
- Speech/Language Pathologist
- Special Education
- IT/Tech
- Admin
- Special Education

Challenges - Dual Credit and CTE pathways

Keeping up with the college/career opportunities and staying flexible/responsive for all kids

- Difficult to maintain dual credit programs as staff changes. We are forced to hire secondary staff who have broad endorsements rather than deep and narrow. This makes dual credit difficult.
- Pressure at state and federal level to create specific skill pathways for kids. I think pathways work well for larger or specialized schools. We prefer the cluster programs that keep options open for students (Welding/Floriculture/Vet Science)

Challenges - Early Childhood

Preschool and Kindergarten

- We currently utilize the same teacher to teach preschool, kindergarten, and Title I
- Monday, Wednesday, Friday all day Kindergarten
- Tuesday, Thursday ½ day Preschool
- Preschool is done at district expense
- Has had a positive effect on our kids and community. We originally had a cap on enrollment but several years ago we lifted it to ensure all could attend.
- Parents, teachers, and the community as a whole strongly support this program.
- Keeps a balance of school and parent involvement

Challenges - School Funding

We are concerned that small rural districts like ours will get lost in the shuffle with a new formula focused on a dollar per student model which may favor larger districts and charters in urban areas.

- We have successfully passed a levy of between 15 and 20% of our budget for the last 25+ years. Not all small rural districts can say the same.
- We realize that our dollars per student is higher but for us it is about ensuring that our students receive the same programs and opportunities that their urban peers receive.
- Our buildings have been well maintained, but they are now 60-70 years old. We are concerned about the day when they are no longer useable and how we will be able to replace them.

Overcoming Challenges - What we do

- Plan, train, and hire people who can be or are connected to the community.
- Support Professional development of current staff, encourage coursework for dual credit and a broad spectrum of endorsements.
- Alternate Authorizations when necessary
- Maintain cluster based programs but seek out pathways that meet current needs
- Grants, Grants, Grants!!!
- Communicate success and challenges - foster community buy-in and support of overall district mission
- Prioritize decisions based on what is best for kids with a focus on educational opportunities
- Empower teachers to feel valued and heard.
- Job and life satisfaction can beat out bottom-line salary and benefits regarding staff retention.
- Be flexible with programs and staffing.
- We prioritize a quality elementary and secondary education over the benefits of college and career track. We believe that a student with solid hard and soft skills will be successful in whatever post secondary path they choose.

Policy

- Ensuring an equitable outcome with new Public School Funding formula
 - Equality in \$ per student does not equal Equity of opportunity
 - I appreciate transparency and simplicity of \$ per student, but my kids will lose.
- Rural support for hard to fill specialist positions
- Matching grants for preschool and all day kindergarten
- Long term school facilities planning