

Klamath school retools

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Focus is still on standards, community



Bernadette Johnson, the dean of students at Klamath River Early College of Redwoods, talks about some of the changes at the school that seem to be working for students. *The Daily Triplicate*/Bryant Anderson

Klamath River Early College of the Redwoods has gone through some major changes this school year.

The charter school's founder Geneva Wiki handed over her role as director to Sarah Supahan, who works part-time as superintendent of Burnt Ranch School District, and Bernadette Johnson, the dean of students.

Supahan and Johnson have tried a few new ways of doing things at the high school in Klamath and believe that through trial and error they found a system that works. KRECR teaches students California-mandated standards and offers them the classes they need to go to college while offering the opportunity to earn up to an associate's degree (tuition-free) while in high school.

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— Sarah Supahan, school director

Students at KRECR not only learn what they need to get into college, but, being on the Yurok Tribe reservation, learn about the tribe's language and culture. Starting this school year, the school became strict about students being in class “when they're supposed to be,” Johnson explained. By Christmas break, students were rebelling against that strictness, she said. So, the school decided to try some new things in 2010.

Some stability and freedom

Each day at KRECR starts and ends with a “community meeting,” Johnson said, where the entire school meets to discuss what students are working on or accomplished that day. This is also a time to learn the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) word-of-the-day, she said, and settle any problems. Monday and Wednesday mornings, students are broken up into two “cohorts,” which are kind of like home room, Johnson explained. “It creates more stability,” she said, because each cohort teacher “knows what's going on.” Each cohort teacher makes sure the students are learning the standards and working on their individual projects. Some students take wood shop Monday and Wednesday afternoons and are building a handicap-accessible ramp for a family. Tuesdays and Thursdays, subject teachers do lessons with students and Johnson teaches a college-level class about leadership and learning how to be a college student. Then students go back into their cohorts. Fridays are dedicated to student projects.

Students have time to attend College of the Redwoods classes in Crescent City. Next fall, the school plans to have CR instructors once again conducting classes at the Klamath campus. The school also started a recreational basketball team this year and wants to have volleyball and a running club in the future. The flexibility of the new schedule at KRECR gives students

and a running club in the future. The flexibility of the new schedule at KRECR gives students ample time to work on their projects in between learning the standards. “They’re not missing class,” Johnson said. “They can go out into the community.” The changes have been positive, she said, adding that “everyone seems happy.” “It’s an opportunity for the kids to pursue things they’re interested in and have a passion for,” Supahan said. However, the standards are still at the forefront, she said. There are currently 28 students at KRECR. Before admitting new students, Johnson and Supahan interview each one to determine readiness for independent study.

Finding their own answers

Danielle Carmesin is the cohort teacher for students who are close to graduating from high school. Part of her role is making sure students are learning the standards for the annual state standards tests. “My goal was to create a curriculum guide and pacing schedule with tips and tools for state assessments,” Carmesin said. There are hundreds of standards for each school subject broken up into grade levels. An example of an English standard is being able to figure out what an unfamiliar word means by knowing how words originate. Cohort teachers look at what standards students are succeeding at and what they need more help in, Johnson explained. Carmesin said she doesn’t just give students the answers, she wants them to take the initiative. “I want them to find the answers,” she said. “Life isn’t like, ‘Here’s the answer,’” Johnson added. The school day at KRECR has become not about how much time students spend in class, Johnson said. Students move at their own pace and are responsible for learning what they need to in order to graduate. “We can tell them the way to meet the standards,” Supahan said, “but we’re putting the responsibility for their education on them.”

Helping out and building skills

Student-driven work is also one of the main focuses of the charter school. Students work in small groups to address an issue in the community, such as watershed restoration on the Klamath River, preserving Yurok language and helping other teens. They are also learning about different career paths by doing fellowships with local organizations. By working on projects and participating in fellowships, students can network with adults, Carmesin said. Some of the projects students are working on include making and selling jewelry as a business and restoring Ah-Pah or Blue Creek, a traditional Yurok village. In addition to doing projects, students are asked to convey to other people what they did. Students do a project each trimester, Johnson explained, and have to complete a portfolio and do a presentation about what they “accomplished that term.” Instead of waiting until senior year to do a project like some schools do, Johnson said, KRECR students are building their skills over time. “We want them to be pros at this stuff,” she said.

A new director



Sarah Supahan, the director of the charter school, sits in one of the school's daily meetings. The Daily TriPLICATE/ Bryant Anderson

Sarah Supahan worked in Indian education for 21 years in Hoopa and is still working part-time as the superintendent of the Burnt Ranch School District, which is farther inland than Willow Creek on U.S. Hwy. 299.

She said she was drawn to the director position at KRECR because the school mixes native culture with academics. The school is standards-based because the community felt that was important for students to learn, but students also have a chance to do community projects and learn that way, she said. One of Supahan's main goals is to find a "permanent home" for the school and is looking at places in Klamath and Crescent City. In the meantime, the current facilities have undergone a facelift. Another goal is to grow and become self-sustaining, Supahan said. With more students, the school can receive more state funding and not have to rely on the help of grants. "You can't do that in a small building," she said about growing the school. In addition, Supahan would like students to do more fellowships and "job shadows" that will give them experience with what it's like to have a job and work with other people. "So they're prepared for the bigger world," she said.