

District creates admin position ahead of Common Core

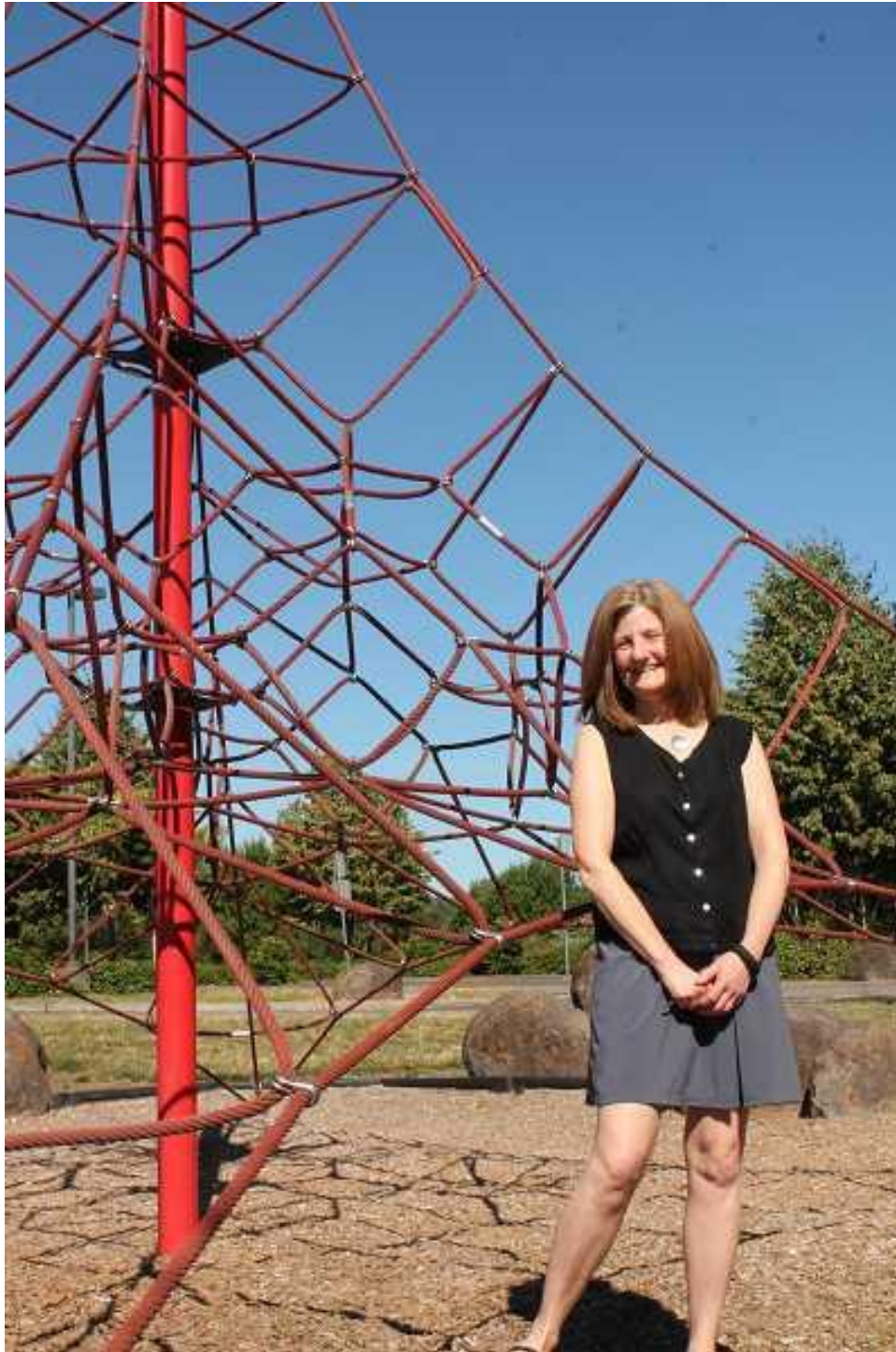
Created on Thursday, 31 July 2014 01:00 | Written by [Kate Hoots](#) |

Soisson moves from Wood Middle School to district admin position

The 2014-15 school year will bring changes to the West Linn-Wilsonville School District as, along with all school districts in Oregon, WL-WV teachers and administrators put in place a new set of standards for instruction and learning known as Common Core.

Typically described as “rigorous,” the new standards establish nationwide language arts and mathematics baselines designed to ensure all students in the United States graduate high school ready for college or work. According to Oregon Department of Education, Common Core State Standards “raise expectations for students, rely on strong content knowledge from teachers and will require a shift in how and when some content is taught. Transition to these new standards will no doubt require hard work.”

WL-WV’s students, parents, teachers and principals will have a new resource to guide and support them in that “hard work.”



by: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: KATE HOOTS - After 13 years at Inza R. Wood Middle School, Barb Soisson has taken an administrative position with the WL-WV school district. Since July 1, she has served as the district's director of curriculum, instruction and research, a new position created this year, as the district moves into its first year of implementing Common Core State Standards.

Since July 1, Barb Soisson has been occupying a newly created position at the district administration level, serving as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Research.

June 30 was Soisson's last day as principal of Inza R. Wood Middle School in Wilsonville, a position she held for 11 years; she also served two years as Wood's assistant principal. Her new position as a district administrator will have a broader focus and an important goal: to raise achievement districtwide.

The time is right for Soisson's new position, WL-WV Superintendent Bill Rhoades said, not only in response to curriculum changes but also because the district is enjoying a moderately improved financial outlook as West Linn and Wilsonville, along with the rest of the state, rebound from the recent recession.

"Personally, I believe it's always the right time to invest in the deepening of our learning and improvement of our practices," Rhoades said. "When it comes to learning, most would consider the investment in supporting a high quality teaching corps the most important investment we could make for children. (But) when resources get tight, support for professional development is often one of the first things to go."

The district has long prioritized professional development and has taken a creative approach toward securing it. In 2013-14, Rhoades said, the district leveraged grants from ESD and federal and state funds to meet professional development needs.

"Our district vision clearly notes the value we place on supporting our professional learning community," he said, "and staff learn a lot from each other in well crafted, well facilitated sessions. ... We have been able to systematically and strategically add staff to address class size and program issues over the past two years, and it is important that we also now plan for resources to support the professional growth and development of these wonderful educators."

In addition to supporting teachers and principals, Soisson said that her new responsibilities would include keeping a close eye on students' learning.

"We really want to know what our students know," she said.

That will be especially important as the district adjusts to the new testing system, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. SBAC is widely considered to be more rigorous than the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) that WL-WV students are accustomed to. States that have begun using SBAC have seen students' scores drop, sometimes dramatically, and even ODE has warned that Oregon students' results may fall.

"They have to do more with the information. Taking the test is a more complex act," Soisson said. "The idea behind this is worthwhile. There is going to be a shift, if you just look at headlines and scores, instead of (looking) at the classroom and school level to know how students are doing."

One of Soisson's priorities will be to improve the district's ability to "make learning visible," Rhoades said, by collecting and organizing test results.

"We have always prided ourselves on being an inquiry and action research driven school district, and we look forward to the opportunity to improve our ability to answer the question, 'How did our efforts improve our learning?'" Rhoades said.

Soisson's master's degree in curriculum and instruction and her doctorate in educational philosophy and methodology are not her only qualifications for the new position.

"She has tremendous knowledge of processes for curriculum development and in developing best practices for instruction and assessment," Rhoades said. "Her 11 years as principal of Inza R. Wood Middle School have given her the opportunity to think about all levels of curriculum and instruction and to work with teachers and leaders from across the entire district. Importantly, she is a genuine and enthusiastic 'lead learner.' She has earned the respect of staff and the community. She is a skilled facilitator, a consensus builder, a servant leader, and Barb always keeps the wellness of children at the heart of her work."

Soisson cited the children she serves as her main inspiration on the job.

"I believe in them," she said. "Wood is a great school because of them. There's no limit to what you can do and are doing here."

The district announced July 18 that Jim Severson would take Soisson's place as Wood's principal. Severson has served for two years as the assistant principal at West Linn's Rosemont Ridge Middle

School. Before the interviews began, without knowing who her successor would be, Soisson had some advice for him.

“The sky’s the limit,” she said. “Putting your work into recognizing what children can do and what this staff can do — and then exercising the leadership to bring that forward. If we’re saying that, then of course we’re continually improving.”