

Maritime focus sails in schools

Engle says it will keep young people here, build community connections

By Fred Obee of the Leader

When new Port Townsend School Superintendent Dr. David Engle came to Port Townsend, he spent some time surveying the physical, philosophical and political landscapes.

What he saw was an eclectic community with strengths and weaknesses, facing a basic demographic challenge.

"The median age is 52 and rising," he told a Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce luncheon crowd on Monday. "We have the smallest percentage of young people in the state."

He said he also understood he needed to create a way for the community to be drawn closer to the schools, and for the schools to capitalize on community resources. As he looked out over Port Townsend, the one thing that seemed to touch all the issues was the area's maritime heritage.

That idea now has come to fruition, and Engle said this week he plans to launch an effort to create a new maritime framework for the school district with connections at every grade level.

"We really want the school system well connected" to the community, Engle said. And, he said, he thinks artists, shipwrights, entrepreneurs and even food producers want a deeper, more informed relationship with the schools. Engle said he thinks a maritime framework for the school system will do that.

In school jargon, Engle explained, such a framework is called place-based education. Engle said he believes the district can weave the values, the maritime history, careers, recreation, art and even the food of this particular place into study at every grade level. In doing that, he said he hopes students will become

more connected to the place where they live and will become better citizens in the process. With support, luck and community collaboration, he said he hopes young people will see opportunities in this place, stay here and put a dent in the graying of Jefferson County.

Included in this new maritime framework is the creation of an



David Engle
superintendent
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actual maritime academy at Port Townsend High School where students use a maritime theme to focus their general education. In the academy, students learn about career opportunities in the marine trades in everything from the sciences to commercial fishing, technical skills, software, boat design and repair and even maritime law. There really is no limit to the number of possible paths, Engle said.

Engle said he knows the academy idea can work, because Ballard, Wash. created one at its high school and Engle said he was amazed by the student interest. Ballard has a long history of maritime trades and is home to a large commercial fishing fleet.

Some Port Townsend students exposed to this maritime framework

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will choose to follow a path to the marine trades, Engle said, but others will just take the experience and apply it in other areas.

"It's a launch pad approach," he said, that capitalizes on authentic connections in the community.

Engle said he has approached the Puget Sound Pilot's Association,

which is enthusiastic about the idea and willing to donate money to help the effort. Engle said he meets with marine trades workers this week to explore ways for schools and trades to make connections. He plans to videotape that session and use it to apply for grants to help implement the project.

So far, the reaction from the

school staff has ranged across the entire spectrum, from teachers who said they don't think it's a good idea to those who want to start tomorrow.

"The biggest doubt around this is whether there will be sustained support over time," Engle said.

Making sure that happens, Engle said, would be his responsibility.

College financial aid questions answered

Parent Financial Aid Night takes place 5-6:30 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 4, at the Port Townsend High School library.

A financial aid officer and a scholarship representative explain the process of applying for funds to continue education beyond high school.