

## NEXT GENERATION | SCHOOL NEWS

## Report on the Applegate Educational Landscape 2023

BY AMBER BISHOP

So many wonderful things are coming together for education in the Applegate!

Woodland Charter is back in session with in-person classes. Williams and Applegate Elementaries are still schools “where everyone knows your name.” And, of course, Ruch Outdoor Community School (ROCS) is making waves with their outdoor education program in partnership with Oregon State University and local nonprofits to bring Medford’s high schoolers into meaningful watershed restoration projects. After years struggling to stay open, ROCS is now a premiere school that Medford kids travel *here* to attend—they even boast a waitlist!

The homeschool community enjoys support through LOGOS, REACH, and virtual schools, including TEACH-NW. In fall of 2022, the latter implemented a successful partnership with Pacifica Garden, providing local homeschoolers with a *full day* of in-person classes *each week* for grades K-8 (in addition to their usual educational offerings!). Kids are learning team building, yoga, writing, sciences, history, ceramics, and more. More than 50 kids travel not only from the Applegate Valley, but from all over southern Oregon each week to attend these fantastic classes!

Private micro-schools and co-ops are springing up and thriving, particularly in Williams and Grants Pass. I’ve counted at least 10 private programs on the west end of the valley, from “downtown” Applegate to the edge of Grants Pass: Mountain Montessori, Forever Flowering Children’s Garden, Earthwise Forest School, etc. There is clearly a great opportunity for micro schools on the east end of the Applegate!

The A Greater Applegate (AGA) Board recently selected and released the first round of Innovation Grants supporting education. Here’s the list: a new theater group led by Corbin Brashear called Kindness Matters, Phase II of Geoff Fisher’s popular primitive-skills program for kids, a local flora and fauna coloring book project at ROCS spearheaded by Thalia Truesdell, and yet another round of listening sessions specifically for Applegate youth led by Community Website Partnership.

After three years of listening sessions and visioning—first by the Ford Family Foundation and, later, by AGA—our community’s education goals and needs have been clearly identified and

documented in the Applegate Community Master Vision. To attend to these matters, AGA has formed several working groups, including the long-awaited Applegate Educational Working Group.

The first order of action of the Education Working Group is to create an education page on the Applegate Connect Website to improve accessibility of information regarding available educational programs. In summary, the educational vision reads:

“To create a range of educational opportunities that offer safe, healthy, meaningful, and fun experiences for youth, young adults, and continuing learners to better equip them with skills, knowledge, and confidence by broadening professional and technical career pathways to diversify our local workforce, increasing student exposure to the work of local organizations, developing community partnerships, and exploring the possibility for a Community Learning Center.”

There are, of course, a few key considerations and challenges to achieving these goals. Given that our valley is not officially a “place”—spanning three counties, two school districts, and even two states—we’re often on our own with regard to sorting out the boundaries, overlaps, and alternatives when it comes to institutional services. Another factor is transportation—how helpful might it be to have a shuttle bus traversing the valley along Highway 238 on the hour?

Furthermore, our community has expressed time and again the need for a more centrally located *local* high school—not only for our kids’ sakes, but for the community, and to allow our high schoolers to remain rooted in and available for community connectivity. With today’s technological advantages, with the post-COVID collective *Aha!* regarding the viability of alternative approaches to education, and with our community’s particular richness in possibilities for hands-on education, we are well positioned to create something truly masterful!

Please stay tuned and certainly reach out to me or anyone in the A Greater Applegate Educational Working Group if you have contributions to make toward cultivating the vibrant educational landscape here in the lovely Applegate Valley.

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## Limpy Creek Forest School to open this spring

BY MELINDA TROMBLEE

The Limpy Creek Forest School (LCFS) is excited to announce that they will be opening this spring at the end of March! The program hosts seasonal sessions for children three to five years old. The school was started by the founders and landowners Colby

Tromblee and Jeff Otto. They have nurtured this dream for the past seven years and are thrilled that the land and school are ready to be shared with their newfound community! The couple bought the raw land in 2021. It had no facilities, drinking water, roads to drive on, or power. It has been a labor of love to prepare the land and school site to welcome children and families. Colby and Jeff each play a unique role in making their forest school dream come to life.

Since childhood Colby has been a deep lover of nature. Sensitive to the negative impacts humans can have on the Earth, her lifelong mission has been to help protect nature by teaching children how to be in a symbiotic relationship with it. Colby earned an associate of arts in early childhood education (ECE) at Cabrillo College, which hosts a world-renowned ECE program for students and children. Their child development classes involve hands-on experience for students, with an anti-bias and social justice approach. She then went on to earn her bachelor of arts in human development from California State University, East Bay. Colby shares her love and knowledge of high-standard early childhood education with her amazing staff. At LCFS, they are redefining the paradigm on how the US currently views childcare and education during the early years.

Jeff Otto has been involved with helping children connect with nature for over two decades. A specialist in soil science and land stewardship, Jeff has put in countless hours preparing the land, using his many years of experience building and operating machinery. He even dowsed the land to find water and was able to locate the spot where their new artesian well was discovered! His role at the school is primarily site maintenance and farm supervisor, assuring that the space is safe and fun for the children to enjoy.

Together, they see themselves as land stewards, tending 83 acres of one of



the most diverse ecosystems in the area, honoring the Native Takelma peoples who first inhabited the lands they now call home. Their intentions are to foster the land and create resilient and skilled generations of children who honor

and respect the earth.

The Limpy Creek Forest School fosters every child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Children will develop a relationship with the land, themselves, and each other in a supportive community of learners. The teaching approach is focused on seasonal sessions of exploring nature, doing crafts, promoting literacy, and engaging in earth science.

The school also practices emergent curriculum, which allows for the children’s arising interests to guide the content they learn. The program is play-based and offers children diverse experiences in a natural forest setting. This means that rather than focusing heavily on academic readiness, teachers allow children to play and learn through their concrete experiences in the natural environment. The school offers a low child-to-teacher ratio, assuring that the children get the care and attention they deserve.

It has a fully outdoor and nature-based program that engages children in outdoor spaces in all types of weather. The school has a 38-foot canvas Skylodge, which serves as a covered learning space and outdoor living classroom. It has a composting toilet, handwashing station, and outdoor kitchen facilities to accommodate all of the children’s needs. All at the school strive to create an environment that nurtures the children’s growth and facilitates their lifelong learning.

At LCFS, Colby and her team cannot wait to share the beauty of the land and the creek with the children and local community, co-creating an unforgettable experience of magic and wonder that is so important during childhood and beyond. LCSF is currently enrolling preschool-age children for the spring session, beginning March 27.

To learn more, visit the website at [limpyschool.com](http://limpyschool.com).

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*Voices of the Applegate*

Spring Concert performances will be held:

♪ Friday, April 14, 2023, at 7 pm at  
the Historic Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville

♪ Sunday, April 16, 2023, at 3 pm at The Lindsay  
(formerly Applegate River Lodge) in Applegate

Rehearsals are Tuesdays at 7 pm at Ruch Library.

Questions? Call 541-821-1129 or email [dmfrank29@gmail.com](mailto:dmfrank29@gmail.com).