



AASA LEARNING 2025 Lighthouse District Vignette: Hermiston School District, Oregon

Hermiston School District (HSD) is the largest school system in Eastern Oregon. Its shifting demographics reflect both a growth in enrollment and a dramatic increase in its Hispanic population, which has grown to 56% during the period from 2011 to 2021. The district was selected in 2023 as an AASA Learning 2025 Lighthouse District for its outstanding work with community collaboration and alignment.

HSD engages in authentic family and community engagement as a central tenet of its mission and vision. It mobilizes family and community assets so that these groups recognize the school as a hub of learning and community development. At the heart of this process is an ongoing focus on the inclusion of diverse voices and multiple perspectives as part of the decision-making and problem-solving process. Key components of its successful family and community engagement outreach and partnership is its incorporation of the assets and needs of school, family, and communities in district and school improvement planning.

Its work in this area includes engaging community partners in working teams focused on specific issues identified in the district's needs and assets assessment process, including out-of-school time programming mentoring, and mental health services. HSD uses student-centered data to guide opportunities and support for educators to assess program quality and progress and develop strategies for improvement. Significantly, engaging students as co-authors of their own learning is an essential pillar for community alignment, with community partners ensuring access and opportunities for all students. This priority is complemented by the alignment of school and community services and supports to ensure students' academic progress in alignment with their physical, mental, behavioral, and social-emotional health and needs.

Community engagement commitments include language translation and interpretation services, including access to a full-time family engagement specialist responsible for reinforcing connections with Spanish-speaking families. Programs include "Nuestro Futuro," serving a group of parents whose primary home language is Spanish. The program helps parents of high school students who are not on track to graduate to learn about school policies and procedures, graduation requirements, and ways to support their students.

Similarly, the "Next Steps Transition Program" is designed for students 18-21 years of age who receive Special Education services and have not completed a standard high school diploma. It teaches students vocational and adaptive skill sets to assist in their transition to post-secondary work, living, community participation, and future training. This community-based program provides a curriculum tailored to moderately to severely disabled students. It seeks to engage participants in hands-on activities consistent with identified ability levels, including life skill instruction, work setting protocols, and social skill instruction.

To reinforce students' and staff members' physical safety, HSD employs three full-time school resource officers who engage with student to build relationships and provide support to both learners and their families. For example, the Umatilla County Fire District # 1 provides training to all seniors as part of the health curriculum. Similarly, Umatilla County and HSD provide a coordinated and integrated social service delivery system. It promotes the health, safety, education, and general well being of all students. Known as "CARE," this program provides community services that include counseling, housing options, medical services, basic needs, and transportation. At the high school level, the district's Director of Athletics and Activities has started SALT, a student athlete leadership team focused on developing leadership skills, including visits to elementary and middle schools to provide K-12 connections.

Communication and outreach are essential components of the district's approach to asset building involving families and the community. It uses a range of tools and opportunities to communicate with students, families, and the broader Hermiston community. Regular communication includes sharing key information with school stakeholders as well as requesting information from stakeholders to evaluate current district programs.

As an agricultural community, Hermiston has many parents who work in the fields for long hours during the summer months. To ensure sufficient quality care and access to supports during the summer break, HSD offers a comprehensive summer program that incorporates transportation, childcare, and three meals a day. In addition to academic support, the district partners with the city's Parks and Recreation Department to offer swim lessons and other sports camps. Through a partnership with "Champions," HSD offers childcare until 6:30 p.m. to accommodate parents who work longer hours during the summer months. Similarly, the district partners with Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start to offer a "Little Pups" pre-school program to provide preschool to children who don't meet incomes guidelines for Head Start.

Perhaps most importantly, Hermiston School District emphasizes the student as the center of his or her own learning process, including multiple programs and opportunities to ensure the success of all learners. These programs reinforce student engagement and efficacy, including a "Think Big Space" (in partnership with Amazon Web Services and Blue Mountain Community College), focused on providing resources related to STEAM education. High school students are offered a robust selection of elective courses as well as six different programs of study offering eleven different career pathways. The district is also in the process of developing a pre-apprenticeship program in collaboration with the Operating Engineers Local 701 to provide an additional pathway to students.

Finally, the school district is committed to aligning its services with local governmental and resource agencies. It offers extensive parent seminars, family mental health resources are available free of charge via the district website. HSD also has a designated Wellness Clinic at Hermiston High School to provide non-emergency care for individuals with medical conditions. It also partners with the Umatilla County Health Department to provide both vaccinations and immunization clinics for students and staff. Four full-time social workers and three behavior specialists are available. If students need increased levels of support, they can meet with a counselor from Community Counseling Solutions during the school day.

According to district leaders: "As we look ahead to the future, Hermiston School District is committed to a vision that puts students and families at the center of everything we do. Our journey toward creating a future-focused school district has

been marked by innovation, collaboration, and a deep sense of purpose. We understand that the world is rapidly evolving, and our responsibility is to prepare our students for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.”