

2013 TERREL H. BELL RECIPIENT

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A small, high-poverty, rural school whose mascot is a potato digger might not be the first place one would look for a highly sophisticated, tech-forward education. In his 12 years at the helm of Sugar-Salem, Jared Jenks has achieved just this, and more.

Through Jenks's efforts, Sugar Salem High School was the first high school in Idaho to implement the digital Idaho Education Network (IEN), a distance learning platform, and the first to require an online course as a graduation requirement. Jenks was also the lead creator of the state's first consortium of high schools that together provide a range of courses over the network. (Although

Sugar-Salem has a small staff and limited funds, students earned nearly 800 college credits last year.) Jenks was also instrumental in securing district grants to provide one-to-one laptops.

Jenks's first act on arriving at Sugar-Salem was to meet with every member of the staff. He asked about their individual needs and what they wanted and expected of him as principal—then went about finding ways to meet those needs and expectations. As one teacher said, "I had to be careful about what I asked for because he would find some way to go out and get it!"

All staff are invited to weekly "Digger" team meetings to brainstorm solutions for students who are struggling with any issue, from academics to bullying or substance abuse. Solutions have included programs to combat bullying, to welcome foreign exchange students, and to integrate migrant and Spanish-speaking students into Sugar-Salem life.

To help students who score basic or below on the Idaho Standards Achievement Test, Jenks initiated a remediation course staffed by Sugar-Salem teachers. He created after-school homework clubs for struggling students and created a new staff position in language skills development to help students for whom English is a second language. In concert with a local technical college and the federal Workforce Investment Act, Sugar-Salem also offers work study programs.

In hiring new faculty, Jenks interviews potential candidates with at least one department teacher and two or three parents. He empowers teacher leadership through opportunities to aid in implementing policies and initiatives such as Common Core, to design and use their own formative assessments, and operate their own departments. Teachers are part of the school leadership team, consulted on all aspects of school life, especially on changes and innovations.

Sugar-Salem has maintained a 100% graduation rate for the past five years. "There is only one path out of this school and that path involves a cap and gown," a district official noted. With a sharp eye to future needs, Jenks has worked with the junior high school to enable 8th grade students to take dual credit courses. The goal is to enable students to earn 46 credits before their senior year of high school—at which point the State will underwrite 36 college credits during the student's senior year. In the first year of implementation, 25% of 8th graders took advantage of this opportunity. Jenks intends that students will graduate from Sugar-Salem with an Associate's degree.