

# Despite upgrade, theater arts teacher exits stage left

By **EFFIE JANULIS**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**WEST CALDWELL** – The show will go on at James Caldwell High School (JCHS), but it will do so without theater/drama teacher Jensyn Modero, as the part time teacher has elected to leave the district despite an upgrade in status.

At the Monday, June 2 meeting of the Caldwell-West Caldwell Board of Education, West Caldwell resident Roseanne Hansen spoke about the loss of Modero, who had a grass roots campaign of parents and students lobbying for her to be given a full time, tenure-track position.

"I am aggrieved. This is a huge loss to the theater program. It will be hard to find someone to replace her," Hansen said.

A group of about 50 parents and students attended the Monday, May 5 Board of Education meeting to urge the board to grant Modero, the theater/drama teacher at (JCHS) and Grover Cleveland Middle School (GCMS), a full-time, tenure-track position.

One by one, various students, including college-bound seniors, and parents took turns at the May 5 meeting, addressing the board as they spoke words of praise for Modero, her programs and instruction, and shared stories of how she touched their lives.

Karen McIntyre, president of the Caldwell-West Caldwell Education Association, also spoke at the May 5 meeting, countering that the association has asked for additional fine art teachers because fine arts enrollment continues to increase, but that theater arts enrollment has remained consistent from year to year, and that it caters to a "niche" group of students.

The resulting action from the board on May 12 was to approve upgrading Modero's position from teaching 1.5 classes to teaching 3.5 classes, at an annual salary of \$36,362, effective Sept. 1, 2014 and running through June 30, 2015.

Modero had been teaching one

full-year course at GCMS and a half-year class at JCHS while choreographing and directing bi-annual theatrical productions at JCHS. Under the new position, Modero could have continued teaching the half-year "Intro to Theatre" class at JCHS, the full-year drama course at GCMS, plus two other year-long courses at GCMS.

Further details regarding the replacement of Modero, or whether Modero left for another district were not available.

## Media Specialists Unite

District media specialists from all four elementary schools, Grover Cleveland Middle School, and James Caldwell High School, as well as Scott Klepesch, director of instructional services and anti-bullying specialist, contributed to a board presentation on new curriculum and technology initiatives being rolled out.

Washington School media specialist Cynthia Kellenberger said the new curriculum, which the team has been developing for more than a year, "will provide upgraded and updated help for our students to embrace technology, as well as other components, such as love of literature."

According to Cindy Hagen, media specialist at Wilson School, the new curriculum aims to foster an active partnership among students, parents, and educators. She cited the social learning platform Edmodo as an example. It serves as an online forum for posting and checking grades, sharing information, embedding video clips, uploading assignments, and other classroom-related activities.

Doreen Golembeski, media specialist at Lincoln School, said the new curriculum emphasizes digital citizenship, love of reading, information literacy, and inquiry instruction as specific components. However, she noted the absence of the word "technology" from this list.

"Technology is not an individual component. It's something that should be infused, not a subject in and of itself," Golembeski said.

Golembeski demonstrated the "tool kit" in a box that media specialists will use to show elementary students what goes into good digital citizenship: a padlock, which represents choosing secure user names and passwords; a toothbrush, to teach students not to share passwords, just as they would not share toothbrushes; toothpaste, to illustrate that you can't "take back" something once it "gets out" online; seeds, to show students that whatever they share online impacts their future and leaves their "digital footprint," and the importance of understanding legal and ethical use; a bar of soap, to remind students to "keep it clean" online; and an electric cord to remind kids that it is ok to unplug themselves sometimes and seize the opportunity "to just be a kid."

Other related items include plagiarism, understanding how libraries are organized, such as the traditional Dewey decimal system, and research approaches increasing in complexity from the elementary through high school levels.

## Scout Project

In other news, Louie Lombardi of West Caldwell, a sophomore at James Caldwell High School and member of Caldwell Boy Scout Troop 6, proposed an Eagle Scout project he aims to complete by the end of this summer. He told the board he was interested in turning a 24-foot area of unused land in the rear of GCMS into an outdoor classroom/reading area by leveling the land and building/installing stationary benches there.

Superintendent James Heinegg told Lombardi that the board will vote on his proposal and announce their decision at next week's meeting.

Next week's meeting, scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Monday, June 9 at Harrison School, will also include annual renewals, a business secretary/treasurer's report, a presentation by Paul Marrone's JCHS Genetics class, as well as student and staff recognitions.