

## Jerry Taylor Interview Transcript

This is an interview with Jerry Taylor, interviewed by Larra Morris May 15<sup>th</sup> 2003 at Century High School.

I'd like to know about your background regarding Century and your involvement this school year.

Well, I've been at Century since it opened I think it was 1997, I was a counselor here for this first...well I've been a counselor here all six years we been opened, the last three years I've been the coordinator of the counseling department.

In general how does this school year compare to other school years you've experienced?

Well (chuckle) this has been a very hard year, um, so many different problems all at once, the funding of course has been a big issue, the lack of a contract and the negotiations, the issue around...district wide, about scheduling and tri-mester and then of course, the scheduling issue we had here this spring. And now what were faced with is all the budget cuts that are about reducing staff. It's been a tough year.

On the wavier vote, could you tell more about that?

Well every year we have to waive our contract because our teachers teach six as opposed to five and to do that the union has specified that 80% of the teachers must agree to waive their contract that is high percentage that every year we have to get 80% vote. There have been years we have gotten just barely 80% and then there's years were we have gotten, I think, over 90% but each year there are different issues that face the school and so there are different view points about opposition to the waiver. This year with the contract problems that we had and the other buildings getting paid for teaching six really created a lot of tension in this building I believe as to weather we would vote for a waiver and then the first vote we voted it down and it didn't get 80% it got 76.

And how did you feel when it failed?

Well, disappointed. There was a bit of anger actually, initially, and I think the hardest part was interacting with staff, the most difficult part right after the vote was you knew some of the people who voted no and some people you didn't know what they voted but there was tension in the building around...how are we going to move forward? We voted no, we're not waiving our contract but what does that mean for us? What's the next step in...the principal, Dawn, had basically told us that we would go to an 8 period day. Well, many of us had lived with an 8 period day for most of our careers and know some of the limitations of the 8 period day and didn't really see that as being a good option for us. But that was the choice it was either stay with...our choice at the vote was either stay with our current schedule or go to an 8 period day and as the reality of the 8 period day became clear, to me anyway, I thought 'This is really not going to be good'. And so "what do we do next" was really the issue. Do we stay with this or do we do something

about it? My main concern at the time was how do we as a staff start working again, how do we move beyond this point.

What events happened that led to the second vote?

Well, that's a good question. From my perspective, I was trying to find a way to interact with the staff again. There happened to be a staff party that week, which, as it approached I wasn't even sure I was going to go because I was really dealing with my own anger and hurt and upset about this whole issue but in the end I decided to go to the party and it was probably the best decision I made. Because I actually started in a different setting, in a different setting away from school was able to start talking to a few people who had voted no. And we had a great conversation so that weekend when I was at home I thought, "Why can't we widen this conversation, why can't we bring more people in? And would these people be willing to discuss, and be willing to look at another way to deal with this?" Because to me the issue was: How do we really want to transition to a new schedule? Do we want to do it through an 8 period day or do we want to do it through our current schedule? And for me the answer was it would be best for our students and staff to do it through our current schedule rather than go to an 8 period day and then the following year possibly have an all together new schedule, so that would be three schedule's in three years, and I didn't think that was good. We never had a chance to plan with students about how they were going to decide on courses, and I didn't feel that that was fair for students. I mean, we had some students who actually had waited to their senior year to take 1 and 2 of a foreign language. Well, that was proving to be a very poor plan because under an 8 period day you can't do that. You can only take 1 level, you can't take 2 levels. So I was very concerned for our students, but to get back to the issue of the staff is that we need to start, I felt like we needed to sit down and start talking again and see if there would be if some of the no voters would be open to looking at another vote with the...um, stipulations. And the stipulations would be that this would be our last waiver vote. We would no longer vote for waiving our contract. So that got us started. That first Monday I met with and talked with a couple of people that I had talked with at the party that had surfaced as no voters and chatted with them to see if they would be willing to come to a small meeting and there were a couple of other voters that I think were yes voters that came to that meeting. We sat down in one of the conference rooms and I think there were six or seven of us and we put together what we thought would be kind of the parameters for how we might approach more staff in regard to this issue of another vote. So the next day we met again and there were more people at the table, in fact we met up at the library and there was quite a few people there. And there was support for moving on and trying to consider another vote. And it was decided at that meeting that we would do it through our union rather than through the Site Council. So we had an HEA meeting on the Thursday of that week where we met with members and discussed this and it was a general agreement the votes at the HEA meeting that we had, that we would go ahead with the second vote. The language and the wording of the ballot changed, but we did go ahead with a vote that basically said we would waive our contract for one more year, that we would not vote again next year for a waiver. Now the piece of this that is important is that in our current contract there is... I think it's 4d, section 4d of our contract that has to do with workload and that is being negotiated this



summer. When they decided on our contract, the union and the management couldn't agree on the language of 4d. They said they could agree on all the other things in the contract they said "We're going to leave this one thing out and we'll re-negotiate that in June" so this June the language in 4d is going to be negotiated. And we don't know the outcome of that but the language could change that would allow the possibility of us keeping some kind of schedule like we have today. It may not. The 4d language may be such that a schedule like we have would not be workable and then we would have to come up with another schedule the following year that would be within the parameters of 4d. So that was the part that was hard for folks, because we don't really know what the language of the contract is going to be in terms of workload. So we know what our schedule is going to be for next year but because of the second vote... I'm kind of meandering through this...second vote came when we returned from spring break and we were able to get I think 84% and that allowed us to keep our schedule one more year. So this schedule we going to have next year is going to be like the schedule we have this year but it could be...it very well could be the last time we have this 8 credit, 4 by 4, AB schedule that we have at Century, this unique hybrid schedule. The following year, that would be 2004 to 2005 will be a schedule that will have to meet parameters of our contract. So what's ever decided this summer and is agreed upon, we will have to have schedule that will meet those parameters.

What do you think the effects have been, of the first vote and the second vote how do you think that effected students and staff morale-wise this year?

Well, I don't know for the students, you might have more of an accurate read on that. I think students are happy that were having one more year of the schedule at least and as well they should because the process is going to be worth it. It's important that we all communicate with the students that this schedule might not continue. That, as students plan for next year they shouldn't be thinking 8 credits necessarily. Now that could turn out that we might have an 8 period...I mean 8 credit, system next 2004-2005. But student shouldn't be planning that. But I think the students were pretty pleased to hear that we were going to be on the same schedule. There was a sigh of relief, I think, in general from the staff that the transition to whatever we do is going to be smoother. But it's a rocky road. The morale in our building, I think, was improved by just having a conversation and having the staff talk to each other. I think that was the most important piece to this, at least it was for me. I think actually when it got to April 2<sup>nd</sup> or whenever it was, the day we voted, to me we had already met the goal, weather we voted yes or no, because the staff had started to talk to each other again. And to me that was the most important piece to this whole second vote. We didn't go off with our head down and our tails between our legs going "poor us". We came back and we talked, in fact we had the conversation during the 2<sup>nd</sup> vote that we probably should have had the 1<sup>st</sup> vote, but we didn't. Before the first vote I only knew one person spoke at the staff meetings that was opposed to the voting yes for the waiver. But in the second vote there were other people that spoke up and it was good. People who voted no voted no for very good reasons. They believe in those reasons, and I respect those reasons. I think we had a wonderful conversation and I feel really good about the staff and the people who work here because we agree on probably 95% of what we do here. We're here for kids; we're here to

morale /  
waiver vote

educate, to do the best program for our students. Without a doubt our staff is on the same wavelength when it comes to most of the issues. Schedule is one of these things that. A schedule should be something that gets you to our goal working with kids. What it's become is each year we vote for this waiver and it's consumed our time, we aren't talking about what's important for the students anymore, we're not talking about how we can make our programs better, how we can build a community here, we're talking about schedules. We need to shift the conversation back to what's best for students and away from scheduling and voting. So it's healthy for us now to be in a position to say "we're going to work within our contract and we're going to find the best schedule for our students, and then we're going to work for our students and we're going to talk about programs and what's happening in the classroom and how we can work with students in a better way. That's what we're going to do now."

You said the people in opposition to the waiver vote had valid reasons. Could you talk about those reasons?

I think the main reasons for folks, and you might want to talk to someone who voted "no", because there's more than one reason. I think some people feel you should never waive your contract, that it not something you should be in the business of doing. So there was a group of people that had always voted "no" that continued to vote "no" and think that you need to work in changing the contract and not getting people to waive their contract. And that's just a philosophical belief and I respect that. I think there are people who really feel that this is not a good schedule, that's it's a flawed schedule. I being a counselor and seeing kids and the choices kids make, I first hand experience the flaws in this schedule, this schedule is flawed, and I think their points are well taken. I appreciate their viewpoint. I think those are the two main reasons.

Talking about working for the students in programs, and things like that, how do you think that the budget cuts are going to affect those things?

Cuts  
This is the worst thing that has happened to us ever since I've been in education. What we're going to experience is absolutely horrifying. When you return to school next year the class sizes are going to be 35 to 40. We're going to have classes that are absolutely huge. We will not be able to run our programs like we always have. We have two VPs that are not going to be able to do all the dances and activities and sports. It's just not humanly possible for them. We got three counselors next year, we cannot provide the level of service that we've provided before. We cannot be able to sit down students and look at preference changes at the beginning of the school year. When you get your schedule it's going to be your schedule. It's just really one of these thing that I think with cuts people hope the services can continue, but these cuts are so severe I just don't see how that's possible.

How do you feel about national coverage of our budget cuts like in the Washinton Post, New York Times, and Doonesbury?



National  
Coverage

I think it's good that we're getting national coverage, because it's really made Salem notice. It's one thing to do what they're doing and feel like they're getting away with it without too many repercussions but when national news and papers are covering it, it makes them think twice. It's much more powerful for the New York Times to put in an editorial about Hillsboro School District than it is for the Oregonian to write an article. I think they did a better job than the Oregonian did. I think they hit the nail on the head and they said things that haven't been said. We did fund schools