

From Awareness to Action

Becoming an Agent of Change in the 21st Century

Addressing the Aids Pandemic at Home and Abroad

On Saturday December 11, 2004, the Beaverton School District hosted the World Affairs Council's first of three Global Action Forums for high school students, entitled The AIDS Pandemic. The Forums are a part of the Council's From Awareness to Action educational initiative, launched at the Council's International Speaker Series presentation with Bono on October 20, 2004. They are designed to provide students with in-depth learning experiences on important global issues and promote civic and global engagement.

The AIDS Pandemic Forum provided students from 9 area high schools with their first opportunity to engage fellow students in discussion on this critical topic while simultaneously developing important leadership and communication skills. Following a very moving presentation by Jenn Huffman, Founder of Nomad Charities, about the needs of AIDS orphans in Kenya, students from Beaverton, Canby, Columbia River, Gresham, Southridge, Sunset, Vancouver School of the Arts, Westview and Woodburn High Schools presented breakout sessions to each other on the Economics of Aids, the Role of Governments, the Role of NGO's and Non-Profits, US/UN AIDS Policy and the Role of Pharmaceuticals.

Each presentation was extremely well researched and presented. Discussions and questions raised showed the enormous compassion that these students for fellow human beings on the continent of Africa. In the afternoon, following a very informative presentation by Thomas Bruner of the Cascade AIDS Project about local issues, students put their "awareness to action" by creating Action Plans for their own high schools. They brainstormed on creative ways to engage the entire student body of their own school to "be a part of the solution" to this epidemic of global proportion. Plans ranged from adopting schools and making personal visits to raising the money to actually build a school or hospital. Everyone left empowered with the realization that together they could make a huge difference in the lives of those less fortunate than themselves. We are looking forward to the remaining two forums on March and April that will address issues around terrorism and sustainability. With these young people at the helm, we have enormous hope for a better world in the future!