

# Oregon State University Extension Service

# METRO CONNECTION

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## Introducing our RECAN member Luis Nava



Dorila Nava, Kiyari Nava, State Rep Courtney Neron, State Rep Janeen Sollman, State Rep Susan McLain, Luis Nava and Ana Nava



Luis with preschool children from Play and Learn Together teaching science (STEM) in Aloha this summer.

If there's one word to describe Luis Nava it's passionate. Nava waves his hands and speaks intensely when asked about education, family and giving back to the United States -- and he never seems to run out of energy for these three areas of his life.

Originally from Peru where he lived in fear of violence and a volatile economy, Nava immigrated to the United States decades ago to raise his family. He gathers every Sunday for mass and lunch with 40 members of his extended family, including his wife, four children and four grandchildren. They pray together, catch up, and video chat with family members in other states and countries.

Nava has been an active volunteer since moving to America, currently serving on 11 boards, including the Hillsboro School District's Citizens Curriculum Advisory Committee, Washington County 2035 Vision Steering Committee, and of course, Regional Extension Citizen Advisory Network (RECAN), where he gathers information about community programs and distributes organizations he serves, hoping to offer resources and connect organizations with common goals. "I care too much about this country," he said. "Having the opportunity to live in this country -- it's an enormous freedom to have services and opportunity and breathe clean air, and this is what I do to pay back for all of that."

Nava's experience with Peru's educational system left him dismayed. There, all college hopefuls had to take a test, which allowed only those with the very top scores to pursue higher education. As his children began to move through school in America, Nava quickly realized the educational system in his new home differed greatly. He became involved in his childrens' educational journeys, helping with activities and study skills, and eventually with applications for colleges and scholarships. OSU's culturally relevant programming such as Juntos, which works to empower Hispanic families around education, quickly caught Nava's eye. He was inspired by the concept and became a dedicated volunteer on various educational boards, and eventually earned an associates degree in early learning education.

Astonished that thousands of Oregon high school students drop out each year, Nava encourages parents to implement early interventions to ensure student success and college preparedness, especially for Hispanic migrant families. "By the time students get to high school it's too late and middle school kids don't want their parents around so we need to start in elementary school" with interventions and a family emphasis on early education, said Nava. He has also been involved in the Washington County Early Learning HUB, which prepares young children and their families for lifelong educational success. "I want parents to understand the importance of their involvement, especially immigrant families who lack educational systems knowledge."

Nava considers himself a link between RECAN and the Hispanic community. "Many I share this information with are very receptive and it makes me realize I can make a difference," he said. "We can do a lot if we all give a little of our time. It is possible to give a few hours of the week to your church, community, school or neighborhood."

Not one to indulge in a lot of leisure time, Nava has taken two weeks of vacation in 20 years. "But I am happy," he said. "It's like food for me -- being engaged, knowing things -- that's what keeps me going."