

Growing Latino population means new outreach efforts

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
Staff Writer

Oregon's Latino population continues to grow, spurring communities to improve their outreach.

A report by the Oregon Community Foundation titled "Latinos in Oregon" estimates 12 percent of the state's population is now Latino, compared to 8 percent in 2000.

In some Eastern Oregon communities, the growth has been even more rapid.

Umatilla School District superintendent Heidi Sipe said 65 percent of her students are Latino and 70 percent have a mixed ethnic background. In 2001, 42 percent of the district's students were Latino.

"What families need at 42 percent Hispanic is far different than what they need at 70 percent Hispanic," Sipe said. "We're always adjusting."

She said the district publishes all of its communications in English and Spanish, and provides translators at parent nights and other events.

Being Latino is about more than speaking Spanish, however. The report notes that, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, about half of Oregon's Latino population is bilingual and speaks English "well or very well." Another 31 percent speak only or mostly English at home, leaving 19 percent who speak only Spanish at home.

Sipe said Umatilla is working on programs that acknowledge that sometimes just providing a translator isn't enough. When Umatilla families go on college visits through the Gear-Up program, for example, Sipe said a translator is provided but the visits still seem "primarily geared toward Caucasian families."

As a result, the district is working with Washington State University on a college visit specifically for Hispanic families.

The district is also working on recruiting more Latino teachers as role models for their students. And in high school classes such as civics, students talk about equity and ways to remove



FILE PHOTO
Martha Ortega, Claudia Ortega, 10, Guadalupe Talavera and Daphne Castro, 17, make homemade granola to be used in a parfait recipe in December 2016 during a Cooking Matters for Families cooking class in Umatilla.



FILE PHOTO
Jedwin Torres and Anthony Torres, both of Hermiston, eat shaved ice at the 2014 Cinco de Mayo festival in downtown Hermiston.

barriers to equality in their community.

The Latinos in Oregon report states that about 41 percent of Oregon's Latino population does not have a high school diploma, and another 24 percent have a high school diploma but no college experience. As such, many of Oregon's Latino residents are drawn to jobs in agriculture.

Obdulia Munoz, who works for the Migrant Education Program in Eastern Oregon, said the federal program's services are offered to any student who moves frequently because they or their parents work in an agriculture-related

job. Some of the students served are white, but many are Latino. She said the program works to help encourage parental involvement in the child's education and encourage the child to stay in school.

"We see a lot who don't finish because they need to help their families so they start working. And once they start working they usually don't come back to school," Munoz said.

In 2012 the city of Hermiston decided to address the needs of its growing population by creating a Hispanic Advisory Committee that provides information to Latino residents and also represents those residents'

concerns to the city.

Clara Beas Fitzgerald started on the committee and is now a Hermiston city councilor. She also works in Boardman for the Morrow County School District, and said she is proud of both communities for their efforts to be more inclusive to their Latino residents.

Nick Bejarano, communications director for Good Shepherd Health Care System, said the hospital has seen an increase in Latino patients over the years. In response, the hospital and clinics offer a combination of translation services for patients over the phone, in person or via video conference on a laptop or tablet. They also offer educational classes on topics like nutrition in Spanish.

"Many of our employees do speak Spanish too," he said.

The Latinos in Oregon report shows 29 percent of Latinos in Oregon are uninsured, compared to 13 percent of white residents. Bejarano said Good Shepherd provides information in English and Spanish on payment plans with lower rates based on need.

"We make our services available to everyone," he said. "If we realize there is a barrier, such as a language barrier, we do everything we can to help overcome that."



STAFF PHOTO BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
SMART volunteer Joshua Nokes reads with a Head Start student at Hermiston's Victory Square on Thursday.

Hermiston volunteers help young readers

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
Staff Writer

It only takes one book to get hooked: That's what SMART coaches are hoping to teach kids about reading at an early age.

Joshua Nokes, a volunteer in Becky Sanchez' Head Start class of three- to five-year-olds at Hermiston's Victory Square center, sits down with a student and starts reading her a book about colors. She listens as he reads, enjoying his expressive rendition of the story.

SMART, which stands for "Start Making a Reader Today," is a statewide program that organizes volunteers to come into classrooms and read one-on-one with students. The goal is to encourage kids to enjoy reading and strengthen their literacy skills at an early age. Throughout the state, students between pre-kindergarten and third grade participate in SMART.

Locally, SMART is run through the Head Start programs. There are three locations — two in Hermiston and one in Pendleton.

Julie Sanders, director of the Umatilla-Morrow Head Start program in Hermiston, said the program is essential to encouraging literacy at an early age — which is often a predictor of academic achievement in later years.

"A good foundation in literacy is essential to success everywhere else," she said.

Sanchez, who has taught with Umatilla-Morrow Head Start for nine years, said she notices the difference in her young readers from the time they start read-

ing with volunteers to the end of the year.

"A lot of people worry that they don't read well," Sanchez said of people hesitant to volunteer. She insisted it's more important to demonstrate a love of reading.

"They just need to see that literacy is very important in their life," she said.

Currently, Sanchez has about four volunteers that come to the class weekly and spend about 15 minutes reading one-on-one with each student. Twice a month, children also get to choose a free book to take home with them.

"When we give the kids books, we put their name on a sticker on the book, and tell them, 'Nobody can read it without asking you because it's your book,'" said Jorge Colon, a coordinator for the SMART program at Victory Square. "A lot of kids don't have books, so it's special to them."

Colon said he'd love to see the program extend to elementary schools in Hermiston.

The statewide SMART program recently received the Walt Morey Young Readers Literacy Legacy, an award presented to a person or group that has contributed to literacy efforts for Oregon kids.

The program is in need of volunteers, Sanchez said, and would benefit from both English and Spanish-speakers.

"It's really easy to get cleared, but it's difficult to get people to be here," Colon said, looking around at the four regular volunteers reading with students. "This is our really dedicated group."

Colon said anyone can sign up to volunteer for the SMART program at getsSMARToregon.org.

Flu eases off, not gone yet

One child died of flu-related illness in Umatilla County

By **KATHY ANEY**
Staff Writer

Flu hit Oregon hard and fast this year, but the virus appears to have peaked.

Hermiston boy Jasper Duree McKenzie, 4, died at the end of December after respiratory failure and a flu-like infection, said Umatilla County Public Health director Jim Setzer. He said the virus is now waning in

the area, but still could do additional damage.

"We're on the downside, but it's still happening," Setzer said.

He said the county still has plenty of vaccine left for those who wish to lower their risk.

Pam Schulz, infection control prevention nurse at Good Shepherd Medical Center, said she hasn't noticed a huge change yet.

"We seem to be kind of hanging in there," Schulz said. "We're maybe down a nubbin."

Flu Bites, Oregon's public health flu tracker, shows

a gentle downturn statewide. For the week ending Jan. 28, emergency department visits for influenza-related illness is 3.1 percent, down from 4.1 two weeks earlier. The number of outbreaks of three or more people dropped from 24 to 15 in the past two weeks.

So far this season, 8,511 people have tested positive in Oregon for influenza. The vast majority of the specimens (88.6 percent) were determined to be influenza A, though some influenza B was found as well. About 1,200 individuals were hospitalized

in the Portland metro area (Flu Bites tracks hospitalizations only in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties). In contrast, 443 people were hospitalized with flu the previous year.

Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports flu activity in every state. The flu seems to have peaked earlier in Oregon than for many other states. Hospitalizations and the percentage of clinic visits for flu-like illness continue to rise nationally. Flu has killed 15 children so far this season.

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