

STUDENTS: Students leave for a range of reasons

Continued from page 1

departing families. (Note: the numbers they were operating with represent a slightly earlier snapshot, and totals vary somewhat from the most current enrollment report. Enrollment continues to fluctuate slightly day to day and week to week. In addition, some students may be taken out and re-enrolled in short order, or leave for extended vacations and are "dropped" in accordance with state law. They later re-enroll.)

SES Principal Becky Stoughton noted that SES received 27 new kids in August and 23 during the school year so far. That was good news for a district that had seen recession-related decline in incoming enrollment. However, others are departing. Thirteen families moved before the start of the school year.

"During the fall 2015, 31 students moved from SES," Stoughton noted.

Twenty-one went to other districts in Oregon.

"In talking with these families, most moved for reason of new jobs for family members," Stoughton said.

Eight are enrolled in another state, having moved there for jobs and affordable

housing, according to Stoughton. One withdrew for "personal reasons"; one's status is unknown.

Stoughton noted that "we had seven new kids that were waiting for us when we got back from break..."

SMS enrolled 49 additional students this year, but because of departures and a big eighth-grade class moving on to the high school, total enrollment at SMS as of January 8 is down 6.5 students.

Principal Marshall Jackson reported that five SMS students left Sisters for another local district and another five moved to another district within Oregon.

"Reasons range from custody issues to housing and employment," Jackson said.

Three students moved out of state for family reasons that "were housing/job-type things."

Eight students went to either Redmond Preparatory Academy (RPA) or Baker Web Academy (BWA). Three students went to Sisters Christian Academy (SCA).

Jackson noted that the school also received incoming enrollment who had tried BWA or RPA or had enrolled at SCA and were coming back.

The board asked several questions about online education, which is increasingly viewed as a viable alternative to traditional classroom education.

Mark Stewart, who administers Sisters' own online education program, reported that about 175 students are involved in it. Some students work primarily online; others just take a single class online.

"It's a very good fit for some kids," said Superintendent Curt Scholl.

He said that Sisters has to continually work to refine its offerings to serve the needs of all students.

"A little competition is not a bad thing in this circumstance," he said.

SHS Principal Joe Hosang reported 10 students migrating to another local school district.

"The reasons range from sports (to) affordable housing as well as ease of transportation because the parents work in either Redmond or Bend, to a few personal reasons due to social needs," Hosang reported.

Five moved out of state. Seven students went to BWA or RPA.

"The reasons ranged from special needs to wanting to graduate early to social issues," Hosang said.

Other students departed because they "needed an alternative setting that fit their educational needs that were outside of what Sisters has to offer."

Enrollment is a quandary for Sisters and other small districts. It takes increasing enrollment to maintain and enhance programs that attract

and serve students. So, in a sense, it takes enrollment to attract and retain enrollment. And outside factors, like the affordability of housing and the availability of local jobs have an impact that the district cannot control.

“The reasons range from sports (to) affordable housing as well as ease of transportation because the parents work in either Redmond or Bend, to a few personal reasons due to social needs.”
— Principal Joe Hosang

So, as the district holds its own after years of seeing enrollment drop, they continue to seek ways to attract students to Sisters — and keep them here.

Snowpack at 138 percent of normal

SALEM (AP) — December snow and cold has brought Oregon's snowpack up to 138 percent of normal.

The Statesman Journal reports that at this time last year, the snowpack was 53 percent of normal. This winter's snowpack is higher than at any time last year.

A hydrologist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service says fall and early winter precipitation has started to fill reservoirs across Oregon that were depleted from last year's drought conditions.

But it's too early to declare an end to the drought in eastern Oregon.

Most reservoirs in Oregon are still below normal, except for the Willamette basin.

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