

SCHOOLS: Local schools got a good report card

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made news during the year: State Report Card

Sisters schools had strong test results from elementary through high school levels, according to the Oregon Department of Education. In math, 81.2 percent of Sisters third- through fifth-grade students met or exceeded state standards compared to 77.5 percent of students statewide. The same held true for sixth-through eighth-grade students with 81.4 percent meeting or exceeding standards compared to 70.3 percent statewide. The difference among high school juniors was 84.9 percent for Sisters students and 61.8 percent across Oregon.

The number of meeting or exceeding state standards in English was 77.7 percent of Sisters third- through fifth-grade students compared to 73.7 percent statewide. A total of 91.1 percent of Sisters sixth- through eighth-grade students met or exceeded state benchmarks, slightly better than the state's 90.2 percent average.

Sisters students excelled in science, too. Those numbers showed 87.2 percent of fifth-graders meeting or exceeding standards compared to 66.5 percent statewide. Sisters eighth-graders scored 94.6 percent—well above the state average of 63.8 percent. Sisters High School juniors

recorded 78 percent meeting or exceeding compared to 60 percent across the state's public schools.

Sisters School District Superintendent Curtiss Scholl wrote in an accompanying message on the Department of Education's website that, while Sisters is among Oregon's best in terms of test scores, the state tests don't measure everything.

"There are several important items that the State Report Card does not assess," he wrote. "This includes the low student-to-staff ratios, our welcoming school environment, and the fact that we have music and art in all of our schools."

“ This includes the low student-to-staff ratios, our welcoming school environment, and the fact that we have music and art in all of our schools. — Curtiss Scholl

Bond Measure

Sisters voters approved a \$10.7 million bond measure in May. The first hands-on construction projects were the high school tennis courts and renovation of the school's running track. The track needed a new running surface because frost heaves and tree-root upheavals made it unusable for competition.

Brett Hudson was chosen

as project manager to coordinate renovation work authorized by the bond. Hudson grew up in Bend and Redmond, and has lived in Sisters since 1997.

The school board also approved six local residents as members of the Sisters School District's Bond Facilities Oversight Committee. They are Mike Bush, Bill Duerden, Dave Moyer, Regan Roberts, Angela Sitz and Jay Wilkins. The panel will help improve the quality of decisions through two-way communication with the district and will make sure bond money is spent wisely, said School Board Chairman Jeff Smith.

BBT Architects Inc. was chosen by the school board to lead the design of bond construction work. The Bend company was one of five firms vying for the job, and was selected because of its high-quality work on past Central Oregon school projects, Scholl said.

Declining enrollment

School officials wrestled with enrollment levels that have dropped in recent years, and they began studying the causes. Enrollment was 1,211 as of 2011-12 but slipped to 1,074 in mid-November.

Enrollment is important because the State of Oregon allocates about \$7,000 annually to public school districts for each student they have. The District launched a study to determine what's behind the trend, with lack of affordable housing in Sisters one of the issues.

PERS Worries

Like other public school

districts in the state, Sisters braced for another increase in Public Employee Retirement System costs during the 2017-18 biennium. Most estimates indicate Oregon's public employers will pay an extra \$800 million during the next biennium starting July 2017.

"It's going to impact us, but we're still not sure how much," Scholl told *The Nugget* as school opened in the fall. He added that financial effect won't be known until the Legislature adopts its next budget.

Teachers' Contract

The school board voted unanimously in September to approve a new two-year contract for the District's teachers. The agreement included a 1.5 percent cost-of-living salary increase in 2016 and another 1.5 percent boost in 2017.

"It's a fair deal, given the (financial) circumstances," said Shawn Swisher, attorney for the High Desert Education Service District, who helped in negotiations. "Hopefully this

will see us through until the economic climate improves. It gives some labor stability the next couple of years."

Board member Stephen King expressed hope that the contract would allow the District to increase the number of school days each year, but Swisher said that would require negotiations to be reopened. Scholl said the budget doesn't support more school days at this point.

Career-tech Grant

The Roundhouse Foundation announced a \$250,000 grant to Sisters School District in October to bolster the District's technical education programs. It will provide \$50,000 annually for five years.

Smith, the school board chairman, called it "a great opportunity for our kids" and noted that discussions with The Roundhouse Foundation had been going on for some time. The grant is primarily intended to purchase equipment, although some money can go to instructor salaries.

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