

# It's been a rough start to winter for schools

By Steve Kadel  
Correspondent

Heavy snowfall, icy roads, concern over the ability of roofs to hold up to a heavy snow load — Sisters schools have faced a perfect storm of conditions that have made it hard to get students to school and into the classroom.

That has a significant impact, not only to students' education and experience at school but also to the bottom line (*see related story, page 1*).

Sisters School District officials canceled classes Friday, January 13, to allow time for a structural analysis of school buildings and the heavy snow load on their roofs. Classes resumed Tuesday after the Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday on Monday — only to be delayed on Wednesday due to icy roads.

School Superintendent Curtiss Scholl was unavailable to comment on Friday's closure and what steps the district took to ensure that roofs at the elementary, middle school and high school are stable despite the deep snow.

However, Brett Hudson, who is project manager for the District's bond measure renovation, confirmed that District representatives spent part of Friday, January 13 inspecting the school buildings. He declined to elaborate.

The closure announcement came after the collapse of a Bend school's gym roof due to heavy snow last Thursday. It prompted parents in Sisters to wonder if the same thing will happen here.

Kelly Davis Martin emailed a letter of concern to *The Nugget* on the day of the Bend incident. She acknowledged a message from Sisters School District indicating that engineers assessed local schools and found them safe.

Her letter read, in part: "I do believe that city, county and disaster specialists are saying the snow should be removed from roofs for safety under these circumstances. I appreciate the engineers but I do believe, for the safety of our children, all roofs should be cleared prior to kids being in those buildings. There are three confirmed school roofs collapsed as of now in Central Oregon. I am sure the engineers said their roofs were safe, too."

Carlene Turpen, the mother of two students, drove to the Sisters School District Administration office the

same day to get answers.

"As a parent, I am concerned about the snow that's on (school roofs) and the rain that is coming," she told Mel Petterson, Superintendent Curtiss Scholl's administrative assistant.

Petterson received a flood of calls earlier in the day from other parents with the same worries. She told everyone that District administrators were meeting to weigh the risks.

"People need to be aware we are working on it," Petterson said. "We are working on our plan. This weather is so unusual. We are dealing with it hour by hour."

Earlier that day — Thursday, January 12 — the District released a message from Scholl to parents, staff and community members. It acknowledged the safety concerns about record-breaking snow loads and the effect on District facilities.

"BBT, a Bend engineering and architecture firm, are working with us on our upcoming bond projects and have recently evaluated and inspected all of our building plans," Scholl wrote.

He added that the decision to hold classes before Friday was based on BBT's evaluation and the District's inspection of buildings.

"We will continue to conduct regular physical inspections and at any time we feel it is unsafe for students and staff we will cancel school immediately," the superintendent wrote. "As always, the safety of our students and staff is our number one priority."

Sisters public school classes were canceled because of weather on six days this winter prior to last Friday's closure.

## CLOSURES: District trying to avoid spring break impact

*Continued from page 1*

The superintendent added that classes likely will be held on Presidents Day, Monday, February 20, to cut the needed makeup days to four. Scholl said it's about 95 percent certain that will happen, and he will send a notice to families well in advance so they can adjust their schedules accordingly.

The District is trying to avoid affecting spring break, which runs from March 27 until April 7. That's because many parents, and teachers alike, have made vacation plans that would be difficult to break.

"We have a student trip going abroad with two teachers, and they won't even be back if we schedule (classes) over that time," Scholl said.

He explained that while the District schedule surpasses



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Sisters Middle School staff — and the rest of the District — are hoping there are no more snow closures this year.

what the State mandates, the Sisters School District policy is what causes the need for further makeup days.

"Oregon has one of the shortest school years in the nation," Scholl said. "We need to get our kids together with teachers."

He noted that Sisters isn't alone in wrestling with the loss of class time this winter, which has brought record snowfall across the state.

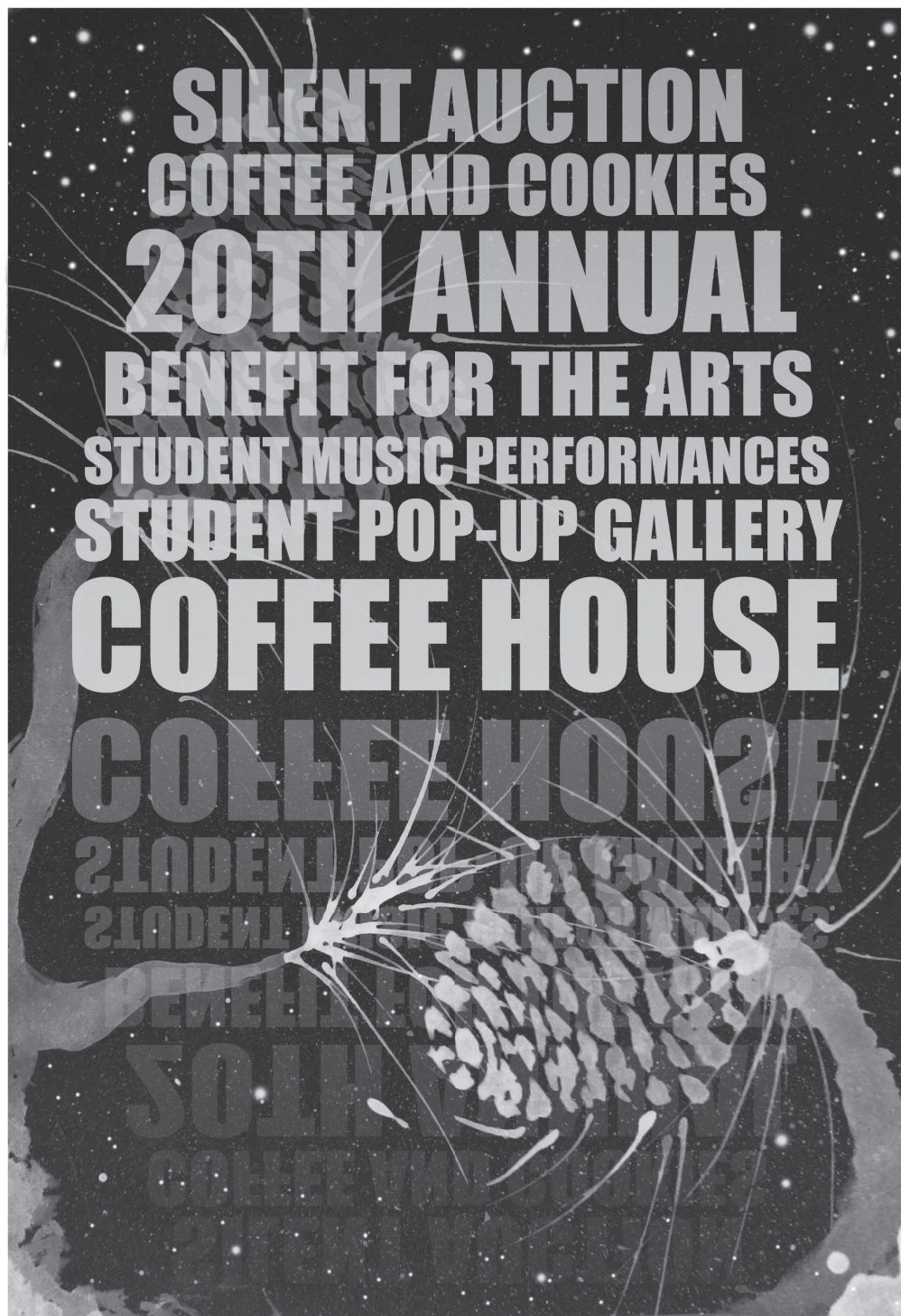
"It's not just isolated with

us," he said, pointing to the Eugene-Springfield district that is looking at six or seven makeup days.

Meanwhile, winter is far from over and additional snow closures could happen. If that occurs, Scholl said, it will only make the situation worse and possibly require lengthening the school year next spring.

"We are hoping this is it," he said of snow closures for 2016-17.

### FEBRUARY 1ST 7-9PM



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