

ENROLLMENT: Funding is directly tied to student numbers

Continued from page 1

based on enrollment numbers, fewer students means less money in the coffers. The state this year provides \$7,548 per ADM (average daily membership — a number that does not correspond exactly to per-student funding, since some students are counted differently for funding purposes). Coming in 31.5 students below projections means the district will come up short in expected state funding to the tune of roughly \$235,000.

Part of the shortfall, according to Superintendent Curt Scholl, is a loss of inter-district transfers (about 15 fewer than projected). The superintendent notes that while Sisters continues to offer small class sizes and innovative programming, there are more education options available than ever across the region, including online education and the Redmond Proficiency Academy, which draw students looking for more educational flexibility and a different learning environment.

Additionally, there were approximately 39 home-schooled students in the district at the beginning of this year.

Scholl believes that students that migrate toward alternatives are “students we should be able to get back.”

He believes that the key question in attracting and retaining such students is, “How do we as a small district keep expanding our options for our kids — and what does that look like?”

A more difficult hurdle is the demographics and economics of Sisters. Though the local housing market is healthy, there is a critical dearth of rental housing and the demographics of those moving to the area means that more people does not necessarily correlate to more students.

“Growth is happening,” Scholl said. “For us, we get a higher percentage of folks who are retiring instead of families.”

The challenge of attracting family-wage jobs to Sisters and the challenge of creating workforce housing that is in the reach of younger families puts downward pressure on enrollment.

“I think those are the two equal challenges that we have,” Scholl acknowledged.

Small district size means that the comings and goings of just a few families has a big impact. Scholl noted that one family this year came to

Sisters on an extended vacation. They enrolled several children in the district — then pulled them out again when their time in Sisters was done.

That sort of thing also makes projecting enrollment hard to do.

“It’s not an exact science,” Scholl acknowledged.

And, subsequent to *The Nugget’s* interview with Scholl last week, the district received enrollment paperwork for four new students for next year.

Going into budgeting sessions, the district is pegging enrollment projections for 2017-18 at last February’s number of 1,080, which is down from last year’s projection of 1,109.

That means tightening the belt, and tightening the belt means reductions in personnel. Scholl reported that the district will “absorb one retirement” and has already notified one teacher that they won’t have a position next year.

The district is now awaiting word on where per-student funding is coming in from the State of Oregon for next year. Though the district must complete its budget in June, the actual amount of state funding is not expected from the Oregon legislature until some time in July.

TICKETS: Event is set to spur out second weekend in June

Continued from page 3

On Sunday, the Kiwanis Buckaroo Breakfast will be served from 7 to 11 a.m. and the Cowboy Church Service will be held at 9 a.m., both at the rodeo grounds.

Emylia Breckel, Sisters PRCA Rodeo Queen, will reign over the 77th annual rodeo. Each performance will feature the grand entry, wild horse race, tie-down roping, bareback riding, steer wrestling, saddle-bronc riding, team roping, bull riding, and barrel racing. The Xtreme Bulls event is bull riding only.

Cathy Williams, director of ticket sales said, “Tickets are selling fast. It is wise to order now if you have a group or want specific locations.”

The ticket office is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

For tickets and information, call the ticket hotline at 541-549-0121 or 1-800-827-7522, or stop by the ticket office at 220 W. Cascade Ave. in Sisters from 10 a.m. to noon and 2 to 4 p.m. Visit the webpage, www.sistersrodeo.com for more information.

LISTING: For ODA, state issues unrelated to each other

Continued from page 1

Sisters Rural Advisory, LLC, the entity under which the activist group Save Our Skies operates, submitted testimony asking that ODA not approve the listing and take no further action. The group cited concerns over ODA’s process, and the recent Oregon Department of Transportation demand for the return of nearly \$400,000 in grant funds that had been allocated to the airport for improvements.

They also cited the ongoing issue of a runway “run-out” that was built on property belonging to the homeowners association of Sisters Eagle Air Estates, land that may be considered wetlands.

The group argued that it, “create(s) confusion and frustration among the public when one arm of State government, Oregon Department of Aviation (ODA), provides

recognition by an upgrade in listing at the same time as ODOT and Division of State Lands (DSL) are conducting significant investigations involving the same airport.”

A representative of airport owners Benny and Julie Benson informed *The Nugget* last week regarding the ODOT demand, that “Since receiving the notification from ODOT the Bensons have reviewed the request and have requested and been granted a meeting with ODOT on May 3, 2017.”

The Department of State anticipated making a site visit regarding the wetlands question this week.

ODA has noted repeatedly that the various airport issues are separate and unrelated.

ODA Director Mitch Swecker told *The Nugget*, “The timing of the results of the investigation by ODOT are coincidental, unfortunately, and therefore could be conflated to be linked to Appendix M/Exhibit 2. Per our legal advice, our job is to follow the law and continue to be fair to all the parties.”

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