

Sisters Elementary preschool has openings

By Charlie Kanzig
Correspondent

The preschool conducted by Sisters Elementary School and funded through Oregon's Preschool Promise Grant is still accepting applications from qualified families.

The preschool has hired teachers and is ready for students, but the opening has been delayed for a few weeks due to a backlog in the Early Learning Hub's ability to process applications for Sisters and other schools in the region, according to Mylee Card, lead teacher of the preschool.

Card has been working with principal Joan Warburg to reach out to families known to qualify for the program, which targets 4-year-olds. At the October 7 school board meeting, Warburg said that she is aware of at least 18 families that could take part in the program.

The preschool is free to qualified families.

According to Card, Sisters has one student fully enrolled and five others that have applications under review.

"We are ready to go with these first six," she said. "Our goal is to ultimately have 18 students and we hope to open October 19 once the five applications being processed are approved."

According to Card, the preschool will run from 8:45-2:30 Monday through Friday

and the staff and facilities are prepared to meet all COVID-19 guidelines. Card noted that this age group is not required to wear masks, but they are optional.

The Preschool Promise program is overseen by the Oregon Early Learning Division (OELD), which is a branch of the Oregon Department of Education.

Warburg also acknowledged at the board meeting that qualified families may have enrolled in other programs in Sisters which opened in September, while others may be not fully aware that they qualify for this free program.

Interested families can contact Sisters Elementary at 541-549-8981, visit the front page of the elementary school website (linked from www.ssd6.org), or go directly to the links listed below.

The basic standard for qualifying economically is children in families who are living at 200 percent of the poverty level.

According to the OELD website (<https://oregonearlylearning.com/preschool-promise>), the Preschool Promise "is a model for a publicly funded, high-quality preschool system."

Links to enroll in the Sisters Elementary Preschool are: <https://forms.gle/Q3QmTdfibF3iy8mA9>; or Spanish: <https://forms.gle/fTeamNPDbK9J2Co1A>.

Sisters School Board snapshot

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• Martha Hindman, special programs administrator, gave an update at last week's school board meeting on mental-health support still available through the Child Center with some changes. Students referred will now have access to therapists assigned to them based on student needs rather than having just one therapist for all types of cases. Two paraprofessionals have been hired as support staff. Hindman remarked how good it was to see the K-3 students back in school when she spent time at the elementary doing some observations.

• Sisters High School Principal Joe Hosang reported that distance learning is underway, but added that some small groups have been meeting in person per health guidelines, including biology and woods students.

Counselor Lindy Weddel and assistant Lynne Fendall made some house calls over the past weeks to check in with students who were struggling as the school year got underway. Grade-level team members also checked in with students via phone.

Hosang also alluded to the impact, response, and outreach of the deaths of two high school seniors and one

2020 graduate in the past two weeks and reported that support will continue.

• Tim Roth, Sisters Middle School vice principal spoke about supporting students and staff following the recent tragedies. Counselor Brook Jackson and Community Liaison Gabe Cobos made 17 home visits in recent weeks to help engage some students who had fallen out of touch during distance learning.

Like the high school students, some have been served in in-person small groups, including tutoring and ECOS class. Roth proudly announced that the middle school had 95 percent attendance for the first month and handed out "Strive for 95" hats to each of the board members. Strive for 95 is the program implemented last year to improve and sustain good attendance. Roth reported that 27 middle school students are using Sisters Educational Options this school year rather than being enrolled in comprehensive distance learning and that things appear to be going well.

• Elementary School Principal Joan Warburg spoke about how happy K-3 students are to be back in school during the past two weeks. In fact, even the fourth-graders who came in to do diagnostic testing in

small groups had smiles on their faces to be back in the building.

"When have we ever seen kids happy about being tested?" she asked.

Warburg also gave an update on the Preschool Promise (see related story on this page) with hopes to open the preschool for 4-year-olds by October 19, following a backlog of applications being processed at the county level.

• Superintendent Curt Scholl reported the district has seen a small bump in student enrollment while also losing about 50 kids to other educational options due to the pandemic and will continue to reach out to those families as the school year progresses. The new transportation facility located behind SPRD is fully functional and buses are being moved over to the site in the days ahead.

"It's night and day compared to the facility that has been used for so many years," he said.

ADA-compliant sidewalks are being completed at the elementary school after being delayed due to the heavy smoke in recent weeks that stopped construction.

The next school board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 4 at 6 p.m. at Sisters Middle School.

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