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New LG teacher contract ratified by school board

By Dick Mason
The Observer

La Grande School District's teachers are set to receive salary increases each of the next three years.



Justice

The La Grande School Board voted to ratify a three-year contract for the school district's teachers Wednesday. Terms of the pact call for La Grande's teachers to receive base salary increases of 3 percent in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The contract was ratified by the school board after the school district's teachers union, the La Grande Education Association, voted in favor of it in late March. Dalton Sheets, vice president of the teachers' bargaining team, said he is pleased with the new contract.

"It will benefit the school district and its teachers and, in turn, be good for kids," said Sheets, a sixth-grade teacher at La Grande Middle School.

He said that negotiations went well. "They went more smoothly than they have in the past," Sheets said. "The teachers and the administrators have a good relationship."

Joe Justice, chair of the school board, noted that the district's teachers, who also received boosts in pay the past two years, went many years with no salary increases in the recent past when the district was having financial difficulties caused by the Great Recession. He said he is excited that the school district can now offer salary increases.

"We hope this can help us keep the best and the brightest in the district," he said.

The board chair said La Grande lost ground to many school districts of similar size in this region during the years it did not

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Gun debate continues

■ Oregon Senate bill would place emphasis on keeping firearms secure

By Dick Mason
The Observer

The question is becoming a focal point of the gun control debate in Oregon: Should gun owners be held liable if someone steals one of their firearms and then it is used to injure someone within two years of the theft?

Discussions of this question are heating up in the Legislature and across the state as lawmakers evaluate the pros and cons of Senate Bill 978, described by the Statesman Journal of Salem as the most prominent gun control bill in the current session of the Legislature.

The measure's proposals include requiring gun owners to secure their guns with a cable or trigger lock or in a securely locked container. They would also be required to notify the police within 72 hours of losing a firearm or having it stolen. Should a sto-



Dick Mason/The Observer

Phil Gillette, left, sporting goods manager at Ace Hardware, shows a rifle to Zachary Lawrence, of La Grande, Thursday afternoon.

len firearm be used to injure someone, the owner could be charged with a crime, according to a story in the Blue Mountain Eagle of John Day earlier this month.

Oregon Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athens) opposes SB 978 in part because of the storage requirement. Hansell said his big reason to not support the bill is because it would not be

fair to hold a gun owner responsible if someone steals a firearm and then uses it to injure someone.

"The gun owner is not the one who committed the crimes," the senator said. "It is a terrible part of the bill."

Hansell said he believes many portions of SB 978 violate the Second Amendment, which provides all

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EOU board discusses The Learning House, PERS

By Francisca Benitez
The Observer

At the regular Eastern Oregon University Board of Trustees meeting Thursday, the main topics of discussion were the contract between EOU and The Learning House and problems with Oregon's Public Employees Retirement System.

EOU has been working on a contract with TLH, an online education solutions partner, for months. The board voted unanimously to finalize the contract by the end of the month, giving the power to EOU President Tom Insko to finalize it with advice from committee chairs.

TLH would advertise EOU's online programs, taking a cut from the profits on

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Raigen's Recovery

■ On March 20, The Observer ran an article about three-year-old Spokane resident Raigen Lily Jesseph and her medical plights. This is the story of how she endured two major surgeries in a single month.

By Amanda Weisbrod
The Observer

The night before her first surgery, the little ballerina wept.

Raigen Lily Jesseph, only 3 years old, sat up in bed and sobbed. Through her tears, she cried, "I don't want to have surgery," over and over again. Makenzie and Jaymes Jesseph, Raigen's parents, overheard from the other room and rushed to her side.

Makenzie held her close, and Jaymes rubbed her legs, but Raigen just wanted to be alone.

"No thank you, don't touch me," she said to her parents. So the couple moved to the doorway and watched their daughter cry until she fell back asleep.

"It's very difficult to see your child go through all that emotion and anxiety, and there's truly nothing you can do or say that can make it better, because she had to have the surgery. We couldn't take that away," said Makenzie, who grew up in Summerville. "We prayed for her, but we had to leave her and let her get it out and have those emotions."

Since birth, Raigen has suffered from intense abdominal pain and severe headaches. Her parents tried everything — they changed her diet, took her to numerous appointments, scheduled every test the doctors suggested and met with a gastroenterologist — but nothing helped. In December 2018, they decided they needed answers, so they took Raigen to the emergency room

at Sacred Heart Children's Hospital near their home in Spokane, Washington, where she stayed for four nights and five days.

Two days into this hospital stay — her first of three — Raigen was diagnosed with gastroparesis, which is a rare digestive disorder that impedes the stomach from emptying itself properly into the small intestine.

To remedy this malady, the 3-year-old would have to endure a pyloroplasty procedure, or "a surgery to widen the opening in the lower part of the stomach so that stomach contents can empty into the small intestine" as defined by MedlinePlus, a National Institutes of Health website produced by the National Library of Medicine.

Good-bye stomachaches

At 3:30 a.m. March 1, the Jesseph family gathered their things and drove to Sacred Heart Children's Hospital for Raigen's second hospital stay. Doctors told Makenzie and Jaymes the procedure may not adequately treat Raigen's gastroparesis, but it was a good first step to take. During the surgery, doctors also placed a gastrostomy tube in Raigen's stomach in case the procedure wasn't successful and they would have to feed nutrients directly to her.

Fortunately, Makenzie said, Raigen handled the pyloroplasty well, and the doctors were impressed with her progress, especially compared to other children who had to go through the same procedure.



"Given the other kids who heal, she was doing really well. We haven't had to use the G tube, and the surgery has worked so far," Makenzie said. "She's had zero stomach pain since (the procedure) besides normal surgery pain."

Before the surgery, Raigen had been on a restrictive diet, so she could rarely eat what she wanted. But two weeks after she arrived home from her five-day hospital stay, Raigen finally had the meal she's been dreaming of for so long: macaroni and cheese, pizza and ice cream.

"She got to eat her pizza and mac and cheese and ice cream, and she can eat anything she wants now," Makenzie said. "The sad thing is we had to train her on what it feels like to be full. She's never known what it feels like to be full without stomach pain."

Makenzie said her little girl had the "biggest grin on her face" when she first tasted her celebration meal. For the first time, the Jessephs' family meals are more about enjoying

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Photos courtesy of Makenzie Jesseph

TOP: Raigen poses with a shirt given to her by a family friend. BOTTOM: Raigen, in the hospital gown sewn by her grandma, plays with the toy cash register in the play room of the children's hospital. Her mom said it was the only thing to get Raigen out of her room and moving.

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Sunday 47/30 A shower, cooler

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