

NEWS

SCHOOL BOARD TO SEEK MORE INPUT AFTER SPRING BREAK

The 4J School Board heard more public testimony March 20 both in support of and in opposition to the district's move to a common high school schedule, and against cuts to health and library programs. And the board's chair proposed holding more feedback sessions with teachers and community members.

At the start of the meeting, Board Chair Jennifer Geller acknowledged that "in retrospect, we understand and believe that more could have been done to work with additional stakeholders and our teachers to understand the perceived and real issues" regarding the schedule change. After spring break, she said, the board would like the district to convene discussions with parents and teachers. The board also wants the Eugene Education Association (EEA) to set a weekly time for teachers to talk to board members about any issue.

Expecting a large turnout, the board reduced the time members of the public could speak from three minutes each to two.

Public comment about the schedule change ranged from continued requests to delay implementation to concern about teachers not supporting moving ahead. Some 91 percent of teachers at North Eugene High School, 81 percent of teachers at Sheldon High School and 74 percent of teachers at South Eugene High School have signed a petition expressing their concerns about the change and requesting a delay in implementation.

"This is a year when we are facing a very large budget shortfall," said parent T.J. Forrester. "It's not the time to be implementing a new program when you do not have a handle on potential problems." Forrester mentioned a 2011 study of Superintendent Sheldon Berman's former district, which moved a number of schools to a 3x5 schedule. The study, "The Structure of Time: How Trimester Schedules Impact Teaching and learning in the Jefferson County Public Schools of Louisville, Kentucky," showed what Forrester terms "mixed results."

"We need to study, we need to quantify and learn from the academic and financial effects of the schedule change at Churchill High School after the completion of the school year, instead of relying on anecdotal evidence," he said.

Alex Thies, a recent North graduate, cited several reasons he opposes the 3x5 schedule, but his comments about teacher-student relationships struck a chord amid proposals to cut programs. "Teachers will have less time to learn about their students, and thus be ill equipped to look for the warning signs of problems arising in each of their student's lives," he said. "This reduced observation time taking place while we simultaneously cut our mental health professionals will surely lead to students falling through the cracks and being left behind."

EEA President Tad Shannon said he was disappointed that the board's work session on the common schedule failed to include a single teacher.

Several people spoke in favor of the schedule change.

South Principal Randy Bernstein said a common schedule won't end site-based decision-making. "Teachers in every school will continue to be the creative and innovative professionals that they've always been," he said.

Others spoke against cutting mental health services, closing high school clinics and curtailing library services. These have been suggested as ways 4J can trim its anticipated \$10 million budget shortfall next year. But even with such cuts, increases in class size and more furlough days are expected. — Anne Bridgman

OLIVE STREET CLOSING BETWEEN 12TH & 13TH

Attention, fans of downtown Olive Street's businesses and organizations: It's time to re-route your paths for the next six months. The city is closing Olive Street between 12th and 13th avenues for the construction of Capstone's student housing project from approximately April 1 until phase one is completed in September.

City Traffic Engineer Tom Larsen says that while a year-long, one-block closure isn't a small one, the scale of the project and its use of overhead cranes means the closure is a safety necessity. "There really is not a way that we could allow traffic and pedestrians that would protect a pedestrian from falling sheetrock that weighs 3 or 4 tons," he says. "The safest thing is to close the street."

When phase one of the Capstone project opens in September, Larsen says that the city will close one lane of 13th Avenue for construction staging during phase two of the project.

Larsen says that most traffic takes two to three days to adjust to a closure, but he says that most businesses and their customers will adapt.

The most recent example of something similar in scale is the downtown LCC building, and its construction blocked one lane of 10th Avenue for six months. — Shannon Finnell

DISC GOLF COURSE TO OPEN AT CITY PARK

The grand public opening of the new Disc Golf Course at Alton Baker Park has been set for Monday, April 1, following the finale of the Willamette Valley Winter Series of disc golf tournaments to be held on the course Saturday, March 30.

"When Eugene's only disc golf course was installed in Westmoreland Park in 1988, there were less than 250 disc golf courses in the world," says organizer Andrew Rich, who will be the concessionaire for the course. "Today, there are over 4,000 disc golf courses in the U.S., but still just one in Eugene. That will change on April 1 when the new disc golf course in Alton Baker Park is officially opened to the public."

Rich says he's been working on the Alton Baker Park course for four years, along with Tournament Director Matt Benotsch and many others involved in the Eugene Disc Golf Club. The group has held numerous events, such as the Ice Bowl and the Food Toss, which raise money and also support FOOD for Lane County. Benotsch says the Ice Bowl is held by disc golf organizations around the country to raise money for food banks around the time of the Super Bowl.

"During the public planning process for the disc golf course, the city of Eugene required that the course not come at any expense to the budget for Parks and Open Space," says Rich. "The decision was made to contract a concessionaire for the course who would be responsible for construction and maintenance of the facility." Rich was the successful bidder for the disc golf course operations, under the business name Pure Disc Golf, LLC. Players at Alton Baker Park will pay a daily fee of \$3 to use the course and yearly passes are available. The course will have an onsite pro shop with equipment and refreshments.

Rich says that unlike the operation of Laurelwood Golf Course, which receives a subsidy from the city, the Alton Baker disc golf course will be required to make payments to the city of Eugene of \$400 per month and an annual 1 percent of gross revenue. The revenue percentage will go to 2 percent in the second year and 3 percent for the

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PEGGY SOOMIL

"My life has been a journey across the U.S.," says choreographer Peggy Soomil, who grew up in a five-story tenement a mile from the Empire State Building. She took her first ballet class at age 5, studied modern dance in her teens and auditioned for Julliard at the suggestion of her gym teacher. "It was a tough place to be," she says. "Out of 100 who started, only five of us graduated." She spent four years as a member and soloist in the Anna Sokolow Company, and six years with her own Peggy Cicierska Dance Company. She left New York in 1975 for a year in Cleveland with members of her company, then joined forces with dancer Kim Arrow for performance and teaching gigs in numerous Western cities, from Boulder to Bellingham, until 1983. She taught choreography at UCLA and earned an MA. She married Steve Soomil, a musician and composer, in 1984 and they adopted Dan, a Peruvian child. They departed L.A. in 1991 and found a house on a wooded South Eugene hillside. "Six months later, we started this studio," says Soomil, who currently teaches dance and conditioning classes for adults three evenings a week in the pentagonal room among the tall firs. Check YouTube for some recent videos of her choreography. Soomil's husband, Steve, who shared the studio space, died of cancer in 1998. Her son Dan is a student at LCC.