# Tiny Oregon school to reopen after 10 years

#### Just a handful of students, for now

By ABBY SPEGMAN The Bend Bulletin

BROTHERS — From behind the counter at Brothers Stage Shop, Jerrie Hanna has watched crews come and go this summer preparing Brothers School to reopen in September after sitting empty for a decade. Hanna looks forward to kids coming to her store for snacks after school, to having some life across the street again in this town so tiny you can drive through it without realizing.

"Everybody is really, really, really excited about it," said Hanna, a former teacher herself. She hopes having a school in town will draw more families, knowing their children won't have to spend hours on a school bus to Prineville. "That makes the community grow."

Brothers School is set to reopen with — as of now — five students in first through fifth grades as part of the Crook County School District.

Officials expect enrollment to be steady or even to grow in the coming years based on demographics in the area. They've hired most of the staff and the building is ready for students. But a bigger issue still looms: Can the district afford to open a school so small?

#### The only school

Brothers School was the only school in the Brothers district. It had three students in the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years and no students going into the 2005-06 school year, according to The Bulletin archives. State law said a district in a county with more than 35,000 people must merge with an adjoining district if it has fewer than 18 students for two consecutive years.

Even though Brothers is located in Deschutes County, its school board opted to merge with Crook County School District.



The playground outside of Brothers School in Brothers. The tiny school will reopen to students in the fall.

But residents said they always hoped the school would reopen. Back at Brothers Stage Shop, Hanna and her sister Dixie had counted up all the schoolage kids in town and thought it was probably enough. Hannah called up her cousin, then-state representative Bruce Hanna, R-Roseburg, to help resurrect the tiny Brothers district. Meanwhile, the Crook

County district was spending \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year to maintain the property in case there was enough demand to reopen the school down the road, said business manager Anna Logan. However slight, officials decided the demand was there this year, and in April the school board voted to reopen the school. Gretchen Stack, a fourth-grade teacher from Cecil Sly Elementary School in Prineville, was hired to teach in Brothers; she plans to live on the school property in the teacher's unit. There will also be a part-time educational assistant who will double as the secretary and handle nutrition services; a part-time custodian will also drive the school bus. Mona Boyd, the district's special education director, will serve as principal.

#### Four-day week

Brothers School will have a four-day week, same as the district's K-8 school in Paulina, which had about 20 students last year. Older students go to Crook County High School.

Operating the school will cost about \$186,000 a year up to about 20 students, when the district would look to add staff. The district has requested rural school funding from the state, which gives more money per student in order to cover the cost of operating such a small school. Logan said while other Crook County schools may receive about \$7,000 per student this year, Brothers could receive \$35,000 to \$60,000 per student depending on how many enroll.

"It's a big part of the funding equation," Logan said. The district is still waiting on an answer. If the request is denied, it would be up to the school board whether to reopen the school, but Boyd said plans are continuing as though it will happen.

Then there are the smaller questions: How do you run a school fundraiser with five families? What sports can you play with five?

"Those things will evolve as we see the direction the kids and community and parents want to go," Boyd said.

#### **One-room schoolhouse** model

A model for Brothers may be the one-room schoolhouse in Ashwood, about 30 miles northeast of Madras. It had five students last year; each year officials wait to see how many students will enroll. A difference of one or two students can feel like a major change.

"It's a very different experience, but it worked really well out here," said Kim Symons, whose granddaughter went to Ashwood. One year she was one of two students, but that meant extra attention from the teacher. "It just gave her a really good foundation going into a bigger public school. She was really well-adjusted, really well-rounded. To this day, she reads way beyond where she is supposed to.'

Carol Dixon retired this year after 11 years teaching at Black Butte School in Camp Sherman, which has about two dozen students. She knew every child, his or her strengths and weaknesses and where they needed extra help. It was also easier to change lesson plans or organize field trips. Students went skiing every Friday in the winter and swimming in the spring.

"It's challenging because of the different abilities and grade level of the kids, but it's also advantageous because a kid can be placed where they need to be," said Dixon, who previously taught in Bend, Sisters and Crook County school districts. "The kids grow up together, and it's really difficult for a kid to fall through the cracks.'

Dixon said it will be a benefit to Brothers being part of the Crook County district, with access to its human resources, instruction and special education departments. Black Butte is its own school district, and teachers have to help out with reports and regulations required by the state.

In such a small school, said Dixon, "You can't just show up and teach."

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