



**CBC SENDS  
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Pouring his  
heart into  
painting

LIFESTYLES 1C



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# EAST OREGONIAN

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First-year teacher Mariana Medina helps fourth-grader Sergio Avila with a math question on Thursday at Rocky Heights Elementary School in Hermiston. Staff photo by E.J. Harris

## Brown will fund water project

By HILLARY BORRUD  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Newly minted Gov. Kate Brown said Friday she will pursue the \$51.6 million water development fund in former governor John Kitzhaber's budget targeted to help irrigators and conservationists reach a deal in the Umatilla Basin.

"I anticipate we will maintain that in the budget," Brown said during her first press conference since being sworn in as governor. "I know how critical it is to the economy in that area, so I look forward to working with folks to make sure we get some more resources into that project."

Under the Kitzhaber's proposal, communities around the state could compete for government loans and grants to assist with planning and development of water supply, watershed restoration and other projects.

Oregonians outside the Portland metropolitan area are watching to see how Brown handles issues of importance in their com-



Brown

See BROWN/10A

## A teacher like me

Umatilla County school districts try to close minority student-teacher gap

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

Being a teacher of color in Eastern Oregon makes you a minority within a minority.

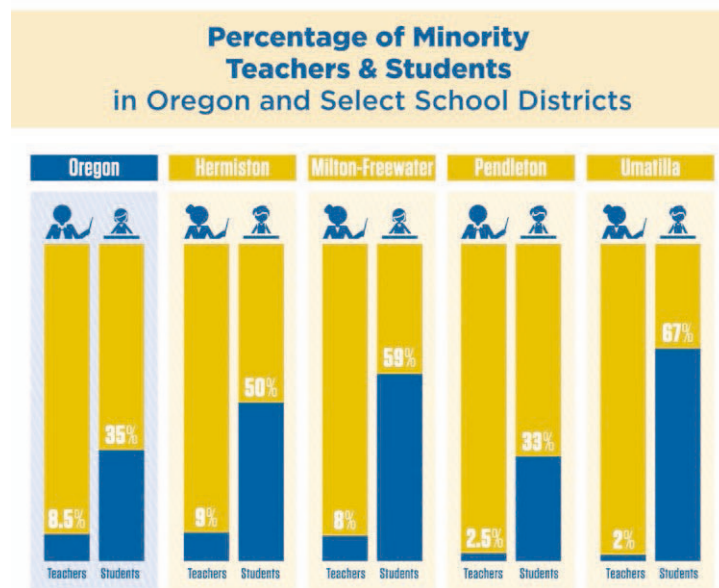
Because even as the minority population in Umatilla County continues to grow, the number of minority teachers has remained stagnant.

After years of trying to find such teachers with little success, plus continual underperformance in tests and graduation rates for minority students compared to their white peers, local school districts are starting to look at their increasingly diverse student body for solutions.

Mariana Medina is exactly the type of first-year teacher many Eastern Oregon school districts are looking for.

The Rocky Heights Elementary School fourth grade teacher is young, Latina and a product of a Hermiston School District.

According to the Oregon Department of Education, 49 percent of Rocky Heights students



are Hispanic, roughly in line with the district's Latino population as a whole.

Although the district boasts the highest minority teacher population in the county, it still employs only 9 percent teachers of color.

While a Hispanic student from Hermiston has a modest chance of being taught by someone of his or her own ethnic background today, Medina wasn't one of those students.

Over her thirteen years as a student in Hermiston, Medina

said she had no Hispanic teachers.

Medina said she admired many of her teachers, but added that the presence of a Hispanic teacher could have helped, especially in her early years.

From kindergarten through second grade, Medina's family migrated between Hermiston and Mexico.

Medina would spend three to four months of the year in a Mexican school, and while her social skills allowed her to pick up English quickly, the constant

moving made reading and writing a more difficult prospect.

**Not a unique problem**

While some areas of the country do better than others, the problem is persistent nationwide. About 40 percent of the country's students belong to a minority, but only 17 percent of the people who teach them are people of color.

In Oregon, minorities comprise 8.5 percent of teachers compared to 35 percent of students.

Despite the clear disparity, the issue hasn't garnered nearly as much attention as other educational topics like the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced assessment.

But the issue hasn't escaped the notice of Donald Easton-Brooks, the dean of business and education at Eastern Oregon University.

According to research Easton-Brooks conducted himself, minority students with at least one minority teacher before fifth grade score higher in math and in reading. Other studies have shown that minority teachers generally have higher expectations of minority students.

Easton-Brooks said the bias

See SCHOOL/12A

## PENDLETON Local birders await Vaux's swifts' return

By KATHY ANEY  
East Oregonian

The tiny birds flitting around Pendleton City Hall were oblivious to the stir they caused.

Aaron Skirvin and Diana La-Sarge spotted the black cloud as they walked back to their car after enjoying the carnival during the Pendleton Round-Up week last September. To the untrained eye, the creatures might have looked like dozens of bats on the wing, but the two experienced birders recognized them as Vaux's swifts. The tiny birds weigh less than an ounce and depend on hollowed-out trees

and chimneys for shelter from the cold.

Unlike most other birds, they are unable to fluff their feathers for warmth and they can't wrap their toes around branches and wires to perch. Instead they cling to the mortar in brick chimneys and bunch together. Bird club members had never seen the birds amass in Pendleton.

Excited, Skirvin called fellow Pendleton Bird Club member Jack Simons and told him the happy news.

The next night just before sun-

See BIRDS/12A



About 500 Vaux's swifts swirl around the chimney at Pendleton City Hall in September 2014. Photo by Jack Simons

