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EAST OREGONIAN

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WINNER OF THE 2016 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

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GRADUATION DAY 2017

TALE OF TWO CLASSES



The Pendleton High School class of 2017 has 210 graduates, down 3.7 percent from the year before. Hermiston High School on the other hand is up 37.5 percent from last year and has a graduating class of 332. *Contributed photo*

Pendleton grapples with falling enrollment

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Budget cuts hit the Pendleton School District hard.

The \$1.4 million cut to the 2017-2018 budget's general fund required the district to reduce its workforce by 19.5 positions through layoffs and unfilled vacancies. When Pendleton High School cut its only business teacher, that meant that the business program went with it.

School officials have pointed to the Legislature's proposed education budget as being insufficient to support the district's operations, but they also started discussing a local trend that could have wide-ranging funding implications — Pendleton's declining enrollment.

At a recent budget hearing, Michelle Jones shared a line graph that showed Pendleton's enrollment from 2006 to 2016.

After a period of stability between 2006 and 2008, enrollment peaking at 3,355 students in 2007, the graph began to resemble a roller coaster that had reached a free fall in recent years. The 3,155 students enrolled in the district in 2016 represented a definitive low for Pendleton across the 10-year sample.

Since starting with 3,173 students at the start of the 2016-2017 school year, Pendleton's enrollment has fallen every month through May, ending with 3,075 students.

Like other states, Oregon bases its funding allocations on enrollment, meaning lost pupils are lost money.

If Pendleton continues to hemorrhage students, the district would have little choice but to continue slashing staff and services.

"If you're getting less students, we have to live within our means," interim superintendent Matt Yoshioka said.

Schools on the open market
Under a rapidly changing educational landscape, parents are no longer bound by geography in deciding where they send their kids to school.

With increasing competition for Pendleton's students, Yoshioka said the district

"If you're getting less students, we have to live within our means."

— **Matt Yoshioka**, interim superintendent

Hermiston will graduate record class next week

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Hermiston's population has spiked over the last decade, and with it, so have Hermiston School District's graduating classes.

This year's graduating class is 332, the largest in Hermiston's history, and an increase of 91 students from last year. They will walk at 10 a.m. on June 10.

Tricia Mooney, Hermiston School District assistant superintendent of human resources, said there were a few reasons for the sudden increase.

"First, our senior class this year is about 40 students larger than last year," Mooney said via email. "Second, and more exciting, is that our staff have been working really hard with our students this year and we are anticipating an increase in our graduation rate."

While an increase of that magnitude over just one year is

unusual, the overall growth of the district's student population has been consistent. According to data on the district website, the district has added an average of about 100 students each year since 2005, with 5,609 currently enrolled. The trend is expected to continue through the decade. Hermiston was the second-fastest growing district in the state as of 2015-2016, according to the Oregon Department of Education.

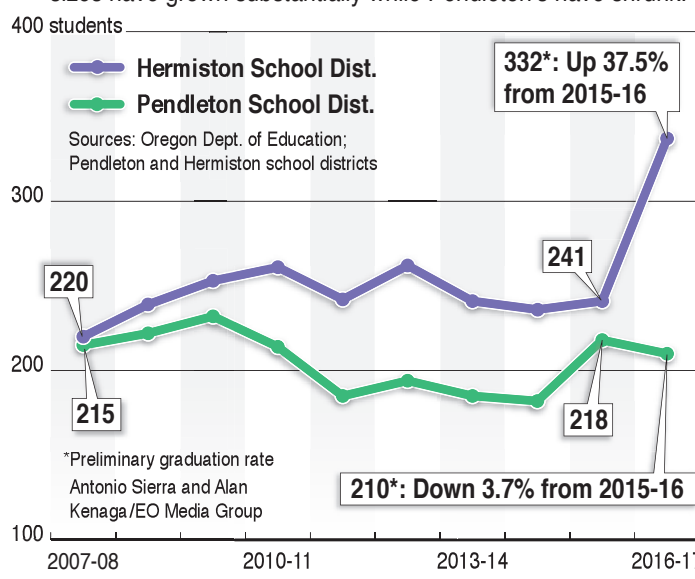
"We're going to have to continue to look at how to accommodate that," Mooney said. "Right now the three smallest classes in the district are at the high school. Our 12th grade class was 377 students at the last enrollment report. Next year's freshman class is 410. If you project down the road, the junior class will be at 382. And the current seventh grade class is at 447."

The 2010 census data showed that between 2000 and 2010, Herm-

See **HERMISTON/10A**

Pendleton and Hermiston's graduation class size

After the 2007-08 school year, Hermiston's graduation class sizes have grown substantially while Pendleton's have shrunk.



Caps & gowns

Pendleton's graduation is Saturday, 10 a.m. at the Round-Up Stadium and Hermiston's is June 10. For a profile on Pendleton grad Jennifer Kannier see PAGE 9A.

See **PENDELTON/9A**

First man pleads guilty to Nelson homicide

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Edward Duarte Ayala pleaded guilty Friday to the January 2016 killing of Thadd Nelson of Meacham.

Ayala, 47, will serve 16 years for the crime.

Back in April, he cut a deal in April with federal prosecutors and pleaded guilty to gun crimes in Nelson's shooting death, which took place on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Ayala made a separate deal with the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office, and Friday in circuit court in Hermiston admitted to his role in Nelson's death.

Ayala pleaded guilty to

conspiracy to commit burglary and to manslaughter in exchange for a sentence of 16 years and two months. That time will run concurrent with his federal time of 20 years, according to court documents.

Circuit Judge Eva Temple presided and said she found the agreement "an appropriate resolution to the case."

She asked Ayala if he committed manslaughter.

"Yes, I did," he answered, standing in yellow jail clothes, shackles and cuffs.

District Attorney Dan Primus spoke on behalf of Nelson's family. He said Nelson's parents, Susan

See **AYALA/10A**



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Edward Duarte Ayala enters the courtroom Friday to receive his sentence for manslaughter and conspiracy to commit burglary in connection with the homicide of Thadd Nelson, of Meacham. Ayala received a 16 year sentence for the crimes.

