



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Hermiston Senior Center comes down

Contractors use heavy machinery to remove the rubble of the former Hermiston Senior Center Thursday morning. The building was demolished this week as part of the Hermiston School District's larger efforts to prepare the old fairgrounds for new projects as money becomes available. A portion of the property behind Hermiston High School is currently being converted to additional parking for the school.

HERMISTON

School district narrows graduation venue choices to high school, Kennewick

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The Hermiston School District has narrowed its options for a high school graduation venue down to two, and will decide between leaving the 2018 ceremony in its current location, the high school gymnasium, or moving it to the Toyota Center in Kennewick.

It has removed the two outdoor options, Kennison Field and the rodeo arena at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. The district has made a survey available to the public, asking for their input on the two venues. The survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YDGVRC8>.

The district sent out a press release Thursday afternoon, detailing the two options. The high school gym has a capacity for 1,800 guests, will allow students to give four tickets to their families, and the district claims it will cost about \$11,000. If the ceremony remains at Hermiston High School, it will take place Saturday, June 9 at 10 a.m.

The Toyota Center can hold 5,000 guests, will eliminate the need for tickets, and will cost about \$6,500, including transportation of students and staff to Kennewick. The ceremony would take place Thursday, June 7 around 7 p.m.

In addition to the basics of each venue, the press release also detailed some of the issues with leaving the ceremony in Hermiston. They noted the limited handicap accessibility and the safety concerns with the overcrowded gym. The press release stated that if the ceremony were held at the Toyota Center, transportation would be available to families going to graduation.

The board has been discussing this issue since August, when Hermiston High School Principal Tom Spoo and Athletic Director Larry Usher first brought a presentation to the board, detailing the benefits of holding the event at the Toyota Center. They were scheduled to make a decision at Monday's board meeting, and Interim Superintendent Tricia Mooney had recommended that the board move graduation to the Toyota Center for one year, and then revisit local options.

The board decided instead to wait and gather further input from the community. Mooney said EOTEC and Kennison Field were eliminated from the choices because of financial and personnel restrictions.

"Due to the restrictions of the facilities at EOTEC (not currently equipped for an event like graduation) and Kennison (limited additional seating as is), these two were the most cost-prohibitive (financially and with personnel) options based on the estimates we had," Mooney said in an email Monday.

In previous presentations, district staff had said Kennison Field would add about 200 available seats. EOTEC would have been able to seat about 5,000. But the board said that after meeting with the facility's interim director, Nate Rivera, they determined the arena didn't currently have the infrastructure or staff to host the event.

The survey expires Sept. 22. The board is scheduled to make a final decision on the venue at their October meeting.

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BRIEFLY

Free household waste collection coming to Milton-Freewater

MILTON-FREEWATER — Oregon residents have an upcoming opportunity to dispose of a wide variety of household hazardous waste items for free.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, the city of Milton-Freewater and Humbert Refuse & Recycling are sponsoring the waste collection Saturday, Sept. 23, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Humbert's site, 54841 Highway 332, Milton-Freewater.

The DEQ announced the event for locals to dispose of materials and items ranging from aerosol cans to batteries to devices containing mercury, such as thermostats or thermometers. The state regulation agency stated items, whenever possible, should stay in their original containers.

The event will not take explosives, ammunition, sharps or products contain radioactive elements, such as smoke detectors.

Small businesses and farms in the Milton-Freewater area also can dispose of hazardous items for a fee, although getting rid of mercury is free. That collection takes place Friday, Sept. 22, but requires registration by Friday. To register and for more information, call 971-401-0367.

Class of '57 celebrates 60 years

HERMISTON — The Hermiston High School class of 1957 is gathering in celebration of 60 years since turning the tassel.

The reunion activities include an informal get-together Friday, Sept. 22 at 5:30 p.m. and a no-host dinner Saturday, Sept. 23 at 5:30 p.m., with a class photo taken at 5:45 p.m. Both events will be held at The Gathering Place at Bellinger's, 1823 S. Highway 395, Hermiston.

For more information, call Rick Rebman at 541-567-8560.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press releases to news@eastoregonian.com

Mixed results in state testing data, with overall downward trend

By JADE MCDOWELL
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STATE TEST SCORE DATA

Percentage of students passing test in each school district

ENGLISH	5th grade	8th grade	11th grade
Statewide	53	55	69
Hermiston	56	52	73
Pendleton	50	43	61
Morrow	32	36	68
Milton-Freewater	51	36	68
Umatilla	26	33	52
Stanfield	36	41	71
Pilot Rock	32	43	78
Athena-Weston	39	63	73
Echo	54	56	50
Helix	41	57	94
Ione	56	50	83
Ukiah	64% all grades combined		
MATH	5th grade	8th grade	11th grade
Statewide	39	41	34
Hermiston	52	32	28
Pendleton	42	39	28
Morrow	19	15	20
Milton-Freewater	33	11	14
Umatilla	24	11	22
Stanfield	22	38	28
Pilot Rock	13	15	52
Athena-Weston	41	35	41
Echo	31	56	13
Helix	24	43	56
Ione	33	29	42
Ukiah	37% all grades combined		
SCIENCE	5th grade	8th grade	11th grade
Statewide	65	62	56
Hermiston	63	79	60
Pendleton	60	65	51
Morrow	34	29	47
Milton-Freewater	74	51	52
Umatilla	29	43	43
Stanfield	52	59	72
Pilot Rock	36	52	65
Athena-Weston	71	56	68
Echo	54	75	31
Helix	77	71	>95
Ione	78	39	50
Ukiah	No data available		

Test score data released by the Oregon Department of Education is painting a picture for school districts about where their students are struggling and succeeding.

The state publicly released hundreds of pages of assessment data on Thursday morning, showing how many students in each school passed the Smarter Balanced assessment in the spring.

Statewide, test scores in most grade levels and subjects ticked downward a percentage point or two. The department did not offer an explanation in its news release, beyond noting that participation levels are down. But Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Salam Noor said under the banner of the "Oregon Plan," the state is implementing a number of programs to increase student performance and teacher effectiveness.

"We are confident that as we work with school and district leaders to implement the Oregon Plan, we will see more students attending school regularly, more students graduating and more scoring in the proficient category on these assessments," he wrote in a statement.

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe said while people tend to jump straight to comparing a school or district's data with the state average, it is important to look at how much growth those schools have experienced and how they are performing compared to "like schools" with similar demographics. Umatilla's elementary and high school students, for example, are performing well below the state average on assessments, but are much closer to the performance level of their peers in similar categories. Nineteen percent of Umatilla High School juniors who are considered "economically disadvantaged" passed the math test, compared to 22 percent of economically disadvantaged students statewide. The overall state average for all 11th graders was 34 percent.

"There are several areas where we are outperforming the state," Sipe said.

The numbers can be confusing for parents to sort through, but the story they tell helps inform schools' decisions about curriculum and where to offer extra assistance. Sipe said one telling piece of data this year was that there was growth among high school and elementary school students, but not at the middle school level.

"At Clara Brownell Middle School, we are not seeing the growth we expect and have

added intervention classes for students in both math and English language arts to better support students," she said.

Sipe said it's hard to get a true picture of a district's progress over the years based solely on state assessment scores, because the state is constantly changing things. It changed from the OAKS test to Smarter Balanced a few years ago, and is already discussing another change in assessment. Even during the OAKS years, the bar was raised on what was considered "passing," and the state is planning to make the Language Arts portion of Smarter Balanced shorter next year.

"We're not interested in chasing a (Smarter Balanced) score for our district, we're interested in chasing student learning," Sipe said.

Bryn Browning, assistant superintendent for Hermiston School District, agreed that it

is hard to get a real picture of progress when the measuring stick is always changing.

"We never really get to compare apples to apples," she said.

She called the Smarter Balanced data just "one piece of the puzzle" combined with students' performance on in-class quizzes, tests and assignments throughout the year.

The data does tell a story that the district listens to. Browning noted that Hermiston's math scores went up in every grade but 8th. The district has changed to a new math curriculum this year, so a test of its effectiveness will be if scores continue to rise, particularly at the seventh and eighth grade level, where test scores are still below the state average.

"This is where we're optimistic we're making a difference," Browning said.

On the Language Arts side, however, only 5th and 11th grades saw growth from last year. Browning said that signals to the district it's time to do some more professional development there.

Although the Milton-Freewater Unified School District saw its overall math scores improve by 3.1 percent to 23.6 percent proficiency, Superintendent Rob Clark saw cause for concern.

While grades 3-6 saw improvement, seventh, eighth and 11th grade all saw drops from the year before, with eighth grade passing the Smarter Balanced math assessment at only a 10.9 percent rate.

Clark said the district has already hired a math tutor that will work with both teachers and students at the secondary level.

Although Clark pointed to an improvement in English at the fifth grade level as a bright spot, the 40.9 percent overall passage rate represented a similar percentage where they were before.

"We're running in place when we need to be accelerating," he said.

According to Matt Yoshioka, the Pendleton School District's director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, local administrators aren't the only group confounded by the dip in assessment performance.

Yoshioka said the Oregon Department of Education recently called Pendleton as a part of a series of interviews with districts across the state trying to figure out the state's downward trend in test scores.

Pendleton saw slight growth in overall math (38.2 percent passing in 2015-2016 to 39.6 percent in 2016-2017) but a more significant slide in English (54.1 percent to 47.2 percent).

Yoshioka said it would take more data analysis before they could figure out what measures they want to take to improve, but pointed out that Pendleton High School graduated 91 percent of its students in 2015-2016 (the district as a whole had an 84 percent graduation rate), a statistic that measured the ultimate goal of every school district.

Spreadsheets of test score data, which will be compiled into more user-friendly "report cards" for each school later in the year, can be found online at www.oregon.gov/ode/education-resources/assessment/Pages/Assessment-Group-Reports.aspx.

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