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EAST OREGONIAN

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Experiencing English



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Students eagerly raise their hands to be picked to participate in an math exercise by instructor Loretta Fitterer on Monday in the Hermiston School District's Newcomers program at Highland Hills Elementary School.

Hermiston class helps speakers of indigenous languages acclimate

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

The students in Highland Hills Elementary School's Newcomers class know the difference between the numbers 15 and 50.

Regardless, they take a few minutes during a math lesson to repeat them over and over again — “fif-TEEN, fif-TY, fif-TEEN, fif-TY” — emphasizing the last syllables that distinguish the two.

As they learn English, repetition is an important part of understanding the vocabulary for all subjects, from the pronunciation of numbers to learning the words for different parts of the body.

“The Newcomers program is all about helping our kids express what they know,” said teacher Loretta Fitterer.

The program is open to third- through eighth-graders, who attend a class at Highland Hills Elementary School, and ninth- through 12th-graders, who meet at Hermiston High School. To qual-

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Instructor Colleen Muldowney works on comprehension with students, clockwise from center, Pamela Ambriz Ponce, Senisse Diaz Loza, Edgar Diaz Loza and Cristopher Monales Trejo on Monday in the Hermiston School District's Newcomers program at Highland Hills Elementary School.

“The Newcomers program is all about helping our kids express what they know.”

Loretta Fitterer | teacher



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Rep. Greg Walden answers questions from a group of Eastern Oregon county commissioners during an unpublicized meeting at the Umatilla County Courthouse in March.

Where's Walden?

Representative visits Hermiston Rotary Club, addresses lack of in-person town halls

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Rep. Greg Walden was in Hermiston on Thursday, but most residents were likely unaware.

Oregon's lone Republican Congressman gave an update to the local Rotary Club on legislation he was working on and took questions from club members before heading to another event in The Dalles. Such semi-private, under-the-radar appearances have become a popular line of attack for his critics.

“Where's Walden?” they ask.

The activist group Indivisible even held a “Where's Walden?” caravan in late August, holding rallies across the district. A news release claimed the campaign marked 500 days since Walden had last held a town hall meeting in his district.

Walden acknowledges it's been a while since he has held a more traditional town hall, but points to four “telephone town halls” open to the public that he has held so far this year. He said during his most recent one earlier this month, 16,458 people called in, including Umatilla County residents.

He also said his office has responded to 128,500 constituent phone calls, emails and other communications this year and he has covered 8,791 miles in the district while holding smaller forums and focus groups, which Walden said encourage

See WALDEN/11A

PENDLETON

Shared data cuts down on emergency room overuse



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Steve Hardin, manager of the emergency department at St. Anthony Hospital, started a program focused on the ER's superusers. The program has helped reduce the number of repeat visits and saved the department money.

St. Anthony finds way to reduce ‘superusers’ clogging system

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

About half the people who visited the St. Anthony Hospital emergency room in 2016 didn't need to be there.

They arrived with symptoms of the common cold, minor injuries or other low-severity issues. Some hoped to score painkillers and many used the ER as their primary source of care.

Some, dubbed superusers, visited the hospital 10 or more times a year. Such frequent fliers clogged the system.

The doctors and nurses use the triage method to size up patients as they arrive. The sickest or most injured people get

treated first. Those arriving by ambulance are also triaged by severity. The least acute patients had to wait, sometimes for several hours. On average, the emergency room saw 37 patients per day, straining the department.

“Forty-three percent of people who come to our ER were what we call low acuity patients,” said St. Anthony Emergency Department Manager Steve Hardin. “They could be seen by a primary care provider or a walk-in clinic.”

Two factors contributed heavily to the glut, said Hardin, a registered nurse.

“Nationwide we have an opioid problem,” he said. “On top of the opioid problem, we have poor access to primary care.”

Hardin said he and his colleagues felt frustrated.

“Statistically, the average person should

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