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Families file suit over students' shortened days

Pendleton, Hermiston families talk about difficulties with districts

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Disability Rights Oregon filed a lawsuit Tuesday accusing school districts in rural Oregon of cutting school days short for children with disabilities, blaming the state for failing to provide the resources to offer a full day of education.

The four plaintiffs in the suit claim that practice violates state and federal laws, and are suing the state of Oregon, Governor Kate Brown and Oregon Department of Education Director Colt Gill.

The plaintiffs are all students in

Oregon public schools with behavior-related disabilities. The lawsuit gives detailed accounts of the experiences of four boys. It does not identify the boys or the districts by name, instead using initials.

Disability Rights Oregon attorney Joel Greenberg said the four children represented in the case were selected because they represent the breadth of the issue. The children range from ages 6 to 14, live in communities around the state, and have behavioral problems of differing severity.

"One of the points of the lawsuit is that the issue of shortening a child's school day instead of helping them

learn to be successful is happening to a lot of students," said Greenberg.

The suit describes each boy's experience with special education programs in their district, and how each district systematically responded to each child's disruptive behavior by shortening their day instead of conducting functional behavior assessments or modifying their behavior plans.

It talks about the negative impact of the shortened day on the students, both academically and socially. It describes a 7-year-old boy who was mostly non-verbal, but due to his shortened

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Aidin Schell is a third-grader from Pendleton. Though not involved in the lawsuit, his mother said he has had many problems with the district shortening his school day due to behavioral disabilities.

Contributed by Jennifer Schell

HART BEATS LONGER

Hermiston bus service adds hours to better accommodate workers

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Starting in February, Hermiston residents will have increased access to public transit. Hermiston Area Regional Transit, or HART, will increase its circulation from six routes a day to 10, beginning Feb. 4. The service will be available from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday, increasing from its current hours of 9:12 a.m. to 4:48 p.m.

The routes will stay the same, with 21 stops on each route, and the service, operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's Kayak Public Transit system, will remain free to the public.

In 2017, the system's first full year of operation, they gave 2,723 rides. In 2018, they gave 4,812 rides, according to Kayak Transit Coordinator Susan Johnson.

Hermiston Assistant City Manager Mark Morgan said the city initially introduced the program with the hope of supplementing the senior/disabled taxi program. When assessing the program, he said, 45 percent of the users needed the service between noon and 5 p.m., and two thirds of the riders were all going to the same three locations: the hospital, Life-ways, and Walmart.

Johnson said the increased hours will allow them to hire another driver, bringing them to one full-time and two part-time drivers. She said this spring they will also be getting a 22-passenger bus, which she said they hope will increase ridership.

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Staff photos by E.J. Harris

Hermiston Area Regional Transit, or HART, will increase its circulation from six routes a day to 10, beginning Feb. 4. The service will be available from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. At left, Kayak Transit driver Ron Myer, navigates through the Walmart parking lot in Hermiston Tuesday. At right, the HART bus leaves the stop on Southwest Third Street.

Pendleton library director retires

Assistant librarian will step into role

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

The Pendleton Public Library is turning the page on its leadership.

Library Director Mary Finney announced at a December library board meeting that she would be retiring on Jan. 31. The following day, assistant director Jennifer Costley will take over the library's top post.

In an interview Tuesday, Finney said it felt like the right time to retire after working for the library

for the past 28 years, the last five spent as director.

Finney said one of the highlights of her career was being involved in the move from the library's old location at 214 N. Main St. to the newly opened Pendleton City Hall in the late 1990s.

Originally hired as a library services librarian in 1990, Finney had risen to assistant director by the time former Director Kat Davis announced her retirement in 2013.

After a nationwide search for a new director failed to yield a sufficient candidate, the city promoted Finney to the director position.

Hired as a youth services



Finney

librarian in 2012, Costley was elevated to assistant director when Davis retired.

With Finney considering retirement over the past two years, City Manager Robb Corbett said the city decided to train Costley to take over for Finney in the event of her departure.

Costley said she was "over the moon excited" to take over as the next director.

She said she had just returned from maternity leave, so she hadn't been able to give much thought on how her tenure might affect library services and programming. But she plans on soaking up as much

knowledge as she can from Finney before the end of the month.

The youth services librarian position has been vacant since the last leadership changeover, with Costley continuing to manage the children's section along with her duties as assistant director.

With Costley set to be promoted again, the library will leave the assistant director position unfilled this time and restore the youth services librarian.

Finney said the thing she was most proud of during her time as director was the staff who worked under her.

She said she had no immediate plans once she was retires beyond "reconnecting with my cat."



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