

Building character with social emotional learning

By JESSICA POLLARD
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — At Armand Larive Middle School, the eighth-graders in science teacher Katie Corral's class are sure to know each other's names. After all, they spent 30 minutes discussing them on Wednesday morning.

"How many of you have been in a class and felt that a teacher didn't know your name?" Corral asked the group.

Several students raised their hands.

"It made me feel like a ghost," one student said.

"It made me feel like I wasn't actually there," chimed another.

Their conversation was sparked by the CharacterStrong curriculum, which was introduced to Armand Larive this year.

The CharacterStrong website describes the program as providing curricula and training that teach character development and social emotional learning.

Different versions of the program can be purchased by schools online. They range in price anywhere from \$249 to \$3,999.

Wednesday's lesson was all about the importance of knowing one another's names. Corral went around the class, naming her students one by one. Kids designed dance moves to go with their names in order to help each other remember who's who.

"If you know someone's name, you can work with them. The point is to make people feel welcome," Corral told her class.

The in-class lessons like Wednesday's are supplemented with videos, activities, and "Character Dares," which encourage students to break out of their comfort zones by complimenting their peers or holding doors open for people. Staff are encouraged to participate as well.

Principal Stacie Roberts said that Armand Larive introduced some of the CharacterStrong con-



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Armand Larive Middle School teacher Katie Corral, left, leads a CharacterStrong workshop involving the importance of remembering names Wednesday morning in Hermiston.

cepts toward the end of last school year.

"It wasn't immature. There's all kinds of things you can find for elementary, and it was great that (CharacterStrong) adhered to our secondary students," she said.

Parts of CharacterStrong are being taught in Hermiston High School's leadership classes as well. Roberts said Sandstone is using a similar program called Second Step.

Second Step and CharacterStrong are two of

many social emotional learning — or SEL — development programs available for schools to purchase online.

According to The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, SEL is "the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."

And it's something that's been on the forefront of many administrators' minds over the past few years.

In 2018, growing emotional problems among students was the top concern for a sample of K-8 principals in the United States, according to a 10-year study released by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

It's something that didn't even make the top three back in 2008, when

principals expressed more worry over student assessment and institutional practices.

Also in 2018, the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development released a research report that found that nine in 10 parents thought schools had a role in helping children develop "life skills." The same study revealed four in five teachers who were surveyed wanted more support to address social and emotional development in classrooms.

For Roberts, the social emotional learning taking place at Armand Larive this year is part of a much bigger picture.

"In middle school, it's a hormone explosion," she said. "If we can help acclimate and adjust a student to everything going on in their life, that's the ultimate goal. We found something that has fun activities, and hopefully we're creating better people."

Fire ruins bathroom after resident moved in two months ago

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Fire ruined a bathroom in a Pendleton home, but pets and the lone occupant were unharmed.

Pendleton Fire & Ambulance Services responded to 911 calls Wednesday around 9:30 a.m. about smoke billowing from the attic of the home at 15 S.E. Isaac Ave. Firefighters forced open the front door and found no one inside except pets. One firefighter emerged with a Yorkshire terrier in his arms, while a slim, medium-sized white dog bolted from the home. Reports indicated a kitten also escaped.

The emergency responders also used a chain saw to cut through another portion of the attic and get a better idea of what was going on inside.

Diana Taylor said she was

not home when flames broke out. She said she only moved in two months ago.

She and her grandson were nearby at May Park trying to catch the white dog. Taylor said the fire made the pet skittish.

Taylor's daughter, Mandy Bosworth, hustled over and nabbed the dog's collar.

"They came and got me at work," Bosworth told her mom. "My heart is pounding."

Bosworth said her in-laws rent the place to her mother. Taylor said the neighbors complimented her for making the yard look good.

Pendleton Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Penninger said the fire was in a bathroom and electrical in nature, either a light fixture or a ceiling fan. The fire did not spread much beyond the bathroom, he said, so most of the home did not sustain damage.

Commission mulls \$300,000 home loan program

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Pendleton Development Commission continues to cycle through blighted housing plans, the latest proposal coming at a workshop Tuesday.

Meeting as the development commission, the members of the Pendleton City Council heard from Associate Director Charles Denight, who shared the latest forgivable loan concept from the commission's advisory committee.

Under the newest proposal, the urban renewal district would create a housing blight reduction program that provides loans to residents who want to fix up homes that have fallen into disrepair.

Over the course of the five-year loan, up to 60% can be forgiven by the city contingent on passing inspections. The other 40% wouldn't need to be

paid until the house sells or changes hands.

The draft plan would initially allocate \$300,000 for the program, with Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corp. and Community Action Program of East Central Oregon providing the bulk of the administrative work.

For its first year, the blight reduction program would apply only to owner-occupied homes, which excludes landlords and their tenants from accessing the loan.

Although the loan program would be available across the urban renewal district, Denight said the advisory committee wants to start its focus on the downtown area from Southeast Sixth Street to Southwest Sixth Street.

According to a survey of homes in the downtown area, 10 owner-occupied blighted homes are in that six-by-six block area.

Denight said the hous-

ing blight reduction program idea is based off of a similar program offered by the North Clackamas Revitalization Area in Clackamas County, which issues four to 10 loans per year with minimal advertising.

Based on her own experiences with housing improvement grant and loan programs, GEODC Community and Economic Development Officer Judy Moore said the commission shouldn't be overwhelmed with loan requests.

While commissioners have discussed multiple options to fix up rundown housing, the forgivable loan concept is starting to win over at least one former skeptic.

"I've kind of changed my thinking about this over the last couple of months that we've discussed it," Mayor John Turner said. "I wasn't real hot on it when we first started, but I'm starting to warm up to it quite a bit."

Despite a detailed draft plan, there are still some details the committee needs to hammer out. For instance, Moore said the GEODC and the commission haven't yet discussed how the nonprofit would be compensated under the loan program for providing administrative services.

Denight said he would like the commission to approve the plan soon. The commission's next meeting is set for Sept. 17.

BRIEFLY

East Oregonian experienced phone outage

PENDLETON — The East Oregonian offices in Pendleton experienced an outage in its phone system Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning, but the phones were back up and running before noon.

Callers who were unable to get through or leave a message during that time frame can now call the paper again toll free at 800-522-0255.

The East Oregonian receives its service through CenturyLink, but Kerry Zimmer, lead communications manager for CenturyLink, said in an email Wednesday afternoon that technicians in Hermiston and Pendleton reported there was not a CenturyLink outage in the area that day.

— East Oregonian staff

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