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## Hermiston breaks ground on new schools

Elementary schools part of \$87.2M bond passed in 2019

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Hermiston School District had a lot to celebrate on Tuesday, April 13.

The district welcomed all students back to the classroom full time for the first time in over a year, and celebrated the groundbreaking for two new schools.

"This day could not get any better," Rocky Heights Elementary Principal Stefani Wyant said.

She said she was thrilled to see all of her school full again, and to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for a new, larger Rocky Heights that will be constructed in the current athletic fields next to the school.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney, second from right, speaks before a groundbreaking for the new Rocky Heights Elementary School in Hermiston on Tuesday, April 13, 2021.

The softball fields there are in the process of being moved to a new softball complex next to Hermis-

ton High School, on the former fairgrounds. Students will continue to attend at the current building for the

2021-22 school year while construction is underway, before transferring to the new school in the fall of 2022.

For some, knowing the next school year will be the last for the original Rocky Heights building is bittersweet. Wyant said the school has served multiple generations of families, and some current staff were Rocky Heights students themselves.

"A lot of families have gone through here," she said, calling it "home" for her after she began her teaching career there and eventually became principal.

The building was built in 1962, however, and has maintenance and security issues. The new \$23 million building, built to serve 600 students, will have a one-story, 73,500-square-foot layout with 24 classrooms plus a library, gym and other common areas.

At the April 13 break-

ing, Superintendent Tricia Mooney called it a "huge step forward" in a project that has already taken years of planning and effort.

"Great communities have great schools, and this is one step to getting there," she said.

After the Rocky Heights groundbreaking, school board members and other dignitaries traveled to the large, sagebrush-covered lot at the corner of East Theater Lane and Northeast 10th Street to break ground on the new school, which will be known as Loma Vista Elementary School.

Loma Vista will also serve 600 students, using the same general layout as the new Rocky Heights, and open for the 2022-23 school year.

At the second groundbreaking, Mooney recognized the work of a long list of people, including

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### BMCC-DOC

## Funding to complete prison education deal OK'd

House Bill 5042 will act as stopgap funding for BMCC between contracts

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

SALEM — By passing a bill, the state is poised to end a eight-month ordeal that nearly ended Blue Mountain Community College's corrections education program.

On April 8, the Oregon Senate followed the House in passing House Bill 5042, a spending bill that includes \$542,033 for BMCC to help tie up some loose ends as it starts its new contract with the Oregon Department of Corrections.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, who voted for the bill, said the allocation will act as a stopgap funding to cover the few months between the end of the BMCC's old contract with the state prison system and the beginning of its new contract.

The future of BMCC's adult education programs at Eastern

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Hansell



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Boxes of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine sit in a refrigerator at the Umatilla County Public Health Department in Pendleton on Wednesday, April 14, 2021. The department has roughly 880 doses of the vaccine in storage,

## Johnson & Johnson on pause

Local officials concerned with vaccine hesitancy amid nationwide pause for Johnson & Johnson

By BRYCE DOLE  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Eastern Oregon officials are raising concerns over vaccine hesitancy and adapting their efforts amid a national "pause" over the use of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine while federal health regulators investigate six rare reports of blood clots in women ages 18 to 48.

The six cases are among the nearly 7 million people who have received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in the United States as of Monday, April 12, with no other serious adverse reactions having been reported, according to the *New York Times*.

"I'm worried that it's going to drive anti-vaccine messaging and hesitancy further," Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said of the pause. "There's a very small number of folks. We're talking less than one-in-a-million chance. I definitely think this is a move out of an abundance of caution, but I'm worried that the messaging that will be carried with it is that the vaccine is not safe."

One of the women has died and another is hospitalized and in critical condition, and all six women developed the illness within one to three weeks of receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, according to federal officials. None of the six women were from



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A five-dose vial of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine sits on the counter at the Umatilla County Public Health Department in Pendleton on Wednesday, April 14, 2021.

Oregon, according to the state.

In a statement, Johnson & Johnson advised people who've received its vaccine to contact a health care provider if they experience symptoms of blood clots within three weeks of their vaccinations, which can include headaches, abdominal pain, leg pain or shortness of breath.

### County response

The announcement prompted Oregon health officials on Tuesday, April 13, to suspend the use of the Johnson & Johnson

vaccine statewide. At least 85,148 Oregonians have received the vaccine so far, according to state health data as of April 12.

In response, Morrow County officials on April 13, canceled the last clinic scheduled during an eight-day commitment with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Oregon Health Authority intending to vaccinate people en masse with 2,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

"It was going to be our last strong day in

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