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POLL

State school boards have low public support

By COURTNEY VAUGHN
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregonians broadly support funding educational programs, yet recent state-wide survey respondents generally lacked support for their local school boards.

Only 36% of those polled said they feel their school board represents their values and beliefs. Another 38% said they don't feel represented by their local school board and 26% said they were unsure.

Oregon Values & Beliefs Center's latest survey, which polled 1,563 Oregon residents ages 18 and older, found that Democrats are more likely than Republicans to voice support for the school board in their area. Respondents who are higher income — earning \$100,000 or more annually — and those who are higher educated are more likely to feel represented by their school boards than those with less income and education.

The 26% of respondents who said they were "unsure" about their local school board indicated a lack of familiarity with the work and decisions of elected education officials, but that isn't the case everywhere.

Last year saw a public rift between school leadership and residents in Newberg, where a school board voted to ban staff from displaying political or controversial flags, apparel and images, such as Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ pride flags, on school district property. A few months after that vote, the school board fired its superintendent without cause.

Fallout from the controversial board decisions led to an unsuccessful but close recall effort against Newberg School Board members Dave Brown and Brian Shannon in January. The election revealed sharp public divide on whether the school board was representing its community, with 52% of voters opposed to the recall and 48% voting in favor.

A large number of respondents cite political influences in their disapproval of their local school board.

"School boards have become too political," one Yamhill County Republican noted. "They should focus on education, not social justice and political indoctrination."

A Deschutes County Republican respondent said: "The school board is focused on social issues, culture and indoctrination. They do

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Greater Oregon STEM Hub staff and volunteers from the Eastern Oregon University football team pack supplies into STEM kits at the university's shipping and receiving building on March 5, 2022. David Melville/Contributed Photo

Science, Technology Engineering and Math opportunities come to Eastern Oregon students

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The Observer

LA GRANDE — An organization in Union County is spreading education opportunities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics across Eastern Oregon.

The Greater Oregon STEM Hub, a state-funded education center housed at Zabel Hall at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, recently dispersed more than 2,000 STEM kits to fourth graders in the region. The initiative is one of the wide variety of ways the organization is providing learning opportunities for students and teachers in rural areas.

"We want our program to be equitable for all students in our region," GO STEM Hub Executive Director David Melville said. "We were trying to think of what we could do in the middle of a pandemic to support



Melville

UPCOMING GO STEM PLANS

The Greater Oregon STEM Hub, based at EOU, will be participating in the Earth Day event at Max Square from 4-5:30 p.m. on Friday, April 22. The organization is also gearing up for Oregon STEM Week, which begins on May 14.

STEM education. We needed something that was versatile."

The staff of three at the GO STEM Hub, with help from the EOU football team and coaching staff, on Saturday, March 5, packaged and prepared 2,300 kits to be delivered across GO STEM Hub's seven-county service range — many of the kits have already been delivered to schools, with the remaining kits set to arrive in time for Oregon STEM Week in May.

The kits contain STEM projects, materials, instructions in both English and Spanish, snacks and giveaways. Students received catapults kits, engineering kits and gravity racer kits. The organization partnered with Sodexo food services to include two snack items per box.

The STEM kit event came about last year

during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when at-home learning was at the forefront for students. The GO STEM Hub upped the total number of kits from 2,000 to 2,300, making adjustments to this year's kit based on teacher feedback.

"We learned a lot from last year," Melville said. "We really liked the idea of it and just wanted to keep doing it."

'Pivotal point'

The GO STEM Hub works with students as well as providing resources for teachers, taking their input and needs into high consideration.

"Working in this position, we see that it means a lot to teachers when their voices

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Thorn Hollow Bridge replacement moves forward

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Umatilla County is waiting on bids to come in for the project to replace Thorn Hollow Bridge.

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock in his weekly update on April 5 reported, "Each step toward replacement is good news. Bridges are difficult issues to deal with. They are critical to transportation routes ... very expensive to replace, and the regulations surrounding their replacement provide a mountain of red tape."

The bridge spans the Umatilla River about 10 miles southeast of Adams. The flooding of February 2020 rendered the bridge impassable.

The Athena-Weston school bus route crosses the bridge, which is the main access point to Highway 11 for people living up and down the river from Thorn Hollow. The closest alternate crossing is about 5 miles west near Cayuse.

County Commissioner Dan Dorran said when the bids are in,



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

The Thorn Hollow Bridge on the Umatilla Indian Reservation sags on Feb. 3, 2021, after sustaining significant damage during flooding in February 2020. Umatilla County is waiting on bids to come in during spring of 2022 for the project to replace the bridge, which could begin in 2023.

demolition can proceed.

"We're on a tight schedule, because of the water window," he added. "But if everything goes well, work could be completed by July to August."

The six-week "in-stream work window," is intended to minimize the potential impacts of demolition and rebuilding on fish, wildlife and habitat. Last year, officials said the work window made it impossible to

complete the project in less than two construction seasons.

"If all the permits are completed," Dorran concluded, "then construction could start next year."

Original schedules suggested the bridge would take up to seven years to fix. Costs were estimated at around \$5 million. But in a press conference on March 10, 2021, county and state officials said that if all went well, what was left of the road could be demolished as early as that year. They hoped construction could start in 2023, four years earlier than previously thought.

However, the plan to demolish the flood-damaged bridge in 2021 did not pan out. But, as Dorran noted, replacement still could commence in 2023.

Last year, county officials worked with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Oregon Department of Transportation to make the new plans with funding from the state. Dorran then said the county also

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