

Schools:

Continued from Page A1

While building closures during the first part of the pandemic makes the data fuzziest to suss out, having dedicated family and student outreach specialists yielded notable results for high school kids in that time, Duff said.

“Nationwide you see a loss of engagement from elementary to middle school and middle to high school.”

That comes from both students and their parents, particularly when there are language hurdles and more, he said.

The district decided to direct resources toward the challenge and hire staff to build and be bridges between home and school life for middle and high schoolers.

“It’s a big change, going from one or two teachers in elementary grades to seven or eight,” Duff said. “We want someone checking on them. Not just someone students can check in with, but someone who will actively check out for them, to be out on the playground with students.”

Historically that role was usually fulfilled by a teacher, he said. Now, however, “we have maxed out teachers,” and what time they do have for extra communication must be reserved for the students most in need of



Contributed Photo

Sixth graders starting in the fall of 2022 at Central Middle School in Milton-Freewater had a special transition camp in the summer to acclimate to their new building, lockers and each other.

such specialized help.

That leaves Noirot’s team and new hires Angel Palacios and Rico Graham to be liaisons between family and faculty.

Noirot said the district’s understanding that more effort

was needed to bring families to the table began over the past few years through surveys taken at school and community events.

Parents, many of whom are learning English, shared that they didn’t feel very welcome

inside the facilities and were sometimes scared of the education system.

The political tenor of the nation has been a contributing factor as immigration and the rights of immigrants rises up again and again in national conversations, Noirot explained.

“School doesn’t necessarily feel like a safe space. What does it mean, for example, when you have to share certain information with school officials?”

In her 15 years working in the district and as a parent, Noirot has seen the changes Duff speaks of, she said.

“Like, kids love school at the elementary level. But something happens in secondary school. I really want to see them still loving school. ... If we don’t have a solid team with families, we’re going to lose kids.”

She developed the family outreach program for the district by borrowing from InterMountain Educational Service District’s model of sending staff door-to-door to Latino families to ask what help is needed, “in a very warm and loving manner,” Noirot said.

“I thought, ‘This is what I need for Milton-Freewater specifically, for all our families.’ Is the kid not getting out of bed in the morning after the parents go to work? Can they not catch the bus for some reason, and do they need a ride to school? We needed

someone comfortable around parents, someone willing to stick their neck out and with thick enough skin to take it.”

It became clear this needed to be a dual role, funded by state education dollars.

Thus Graham, who grew up in Walla Walla and attended college there and in Spokane, will support Central Middle School kids as a student success coach inside the building, attending to issues such as grade drops, hygiene concerns and falling asleep in class. His office will offer a setting for students to catch up on work, Noirot said.

Palacios will be calling and visiting parents of Central and Mac-Hi students, adding in the piece teachers were once tasked with but that can add hours onto the daily workday.

He’s ready, Palacios said last week.

He grew up in Milton-Freewater and is equally comfortable in English and Spanish. A 2010 graduate of Mac-Hi, he’s working on degrees in applied science and business management at Walla Walla Community College.

But it’s wrestling coaching he’s done in the community that gives him the biggest advantage, Palacios believes.

“I have dealt with a lot of the kids and their families. Like making sure their grades are good before they can compete. I’ve reached out to the parents and talked to them.”

He’s been in that uncomfortable spot of correcting

information presented to a mom or dad by a child or facing an attitude of “my child can do no wrong,” Palacios said with a laugh.

It helps that he is naturally easy-going and has full support from school administrators, he said.

If, by the end of the year, a child has attended 95% of all school days, he will have reached his goal, Palacios said.

“That is huge. I’ve heard if kids are there that much of the time, they will earn a C average.”

These new positions will help the district return to a small-school mentality, Duff said. “Where every staff knows every kid.”

The Milton-Freewater schools will also be looking harder at ways to foster an environment of care, such as doing visual checks of who could use a new backpack or might need some extra services.

As well, the district instituted ways to introduce students to new school buildings as they move up — dedicated days to figure out lockers and layouts without the pressure of older students watching.

It’s more adult support all the way around, Duff said — going to the kid instead of waiting for the kid to come to you.

“This year will be really great,” he predicted. “And we will have all the kids at once.”

Museums:

Continued from Page A1

“I feel like we’re coming out of it, getting more tourists through and more people wanting to come out,” she said. “We’re still not back to normal.”

While some are quick to point to the pandemic as the driving force behind reduced attendance, others suggest the intense summer heat Pendleton has experienced this year is more to blame.

“Bus and boat counts are down, we think that might be heat related,” Brooke Armstrong, executive director of Pendleton Underground Tours said.

Pendleton Underground Tours experienced a drop-off in total visits at the beginning of the year, she said, but it appears the busy season started in earnest during the summer.

“There aren’t as many tours as in the past, but we’re not slow,” Armstrong said. “Our adult-only tours sell out weekly.”

Pendleton’s annual Rock & Roll camp also saw a dip in attendance this year, but Pendleton Center for the Arts Executive Director Roberta Lavadour said she feels the loss in attendance is a “singular occurrence.”

The camp, which begins admitting attendees at the age of 13, saw a normal amount of new attendees and returning attendees before the pandemic, according to Lavadour, but “joining Rock & Roll camp at 15-16 (years old) is a bit tougher.”

Contributing to the slump felt by many, the effect of reduced overall tourism in Pendleton has made a large impact. Joanna Engle, executive director of the Children’s Museum of Eastern Oregon, said the museum was closed 444 days and reopened June 1, 2021.

“We’ve been open a full year now,” she said. “Going into the summer (of 2021), I thought, ‘Yes we’re back,’ and then there was a slump. People stopped traveling, normally summer visitors to the museum are about 30% of people from out of town. That was not the case last year, but it is coming back up.”



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Kate Brizendine, coordinator of Education & Outreach at the Pendleton Center for the Arts, discusses reaching out to the community Tuesday, Aug. 23, 2022, in Pendleton.



Mackenzie Whaley/East Oregonian

Heritage Station Museum Executive Director Kari Brooks poses for a photo Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022, at the Pendleton museum, which reports its visitor numbers have yet to rebound to pre-pandemic levels.

Engle said the Children’s Museum is not hosting events and instead focusing on the quality of the museum experience itself.

“We made the decision to focus our attention on the day to day experience. That way whoever comes in, whenever they come in, they have a great experience,” she said.

On the other end of the spectrum, Pendleton Air Museum reported a steady attendance throughout the pandemic. Museum coordinator Debbie Rasmussen credited retaining control over the environment and taking necessary precautions to prevent an overall dip in attendance.

“It would be completely inaccurate to say the pandemic hasn’t affected us,” Breena Beck, assistant director of the SAGE Center in Boardman explained, but illustrated that last year’s opening of the Amazon Web Services Think Big space (a classroom accommodating K-6 education) has caused a marked increase in

students coming through the doors, for class or otherwise.

“Since completion of (the Think Big) classroom ... there are students in the SAGE Center, learning in the Think Big space, every day of their regular school week,” she said. “It has been a wonderful addition to the SAGE Center.”

Through the Morrow County School District, which buses students to the SAGE Center daily, Beck said the addition of 10-30 students per day learning in the Think Big classroom has boosted overall attendance.

Outreach also has played a vital role at the SAGE Center. Beck said SAGE reached out to 75 area school districts last year, and eight surrounding counties.

“It was in the spring, we sent out letters and packets with our educational visit form,” she said. “We got a lot of school visits off of that also. It’s been refreshing, the additions we’ve made here have been good to us. It’s a good momentum we have going.”

Harvest:

Continued from Page A1

All wheat production in Idaho totaled 76.5 million bushels, down 32% from the previous year as well. Yield fell an estimated 29.1 bushels from 2020.

In Washington, production totaled 87.2 million bushels, down a whopping 48% from 2020. Yield plummeted a shocking 33.3 bushels from the previous year.

“We had a good crop,” Umapine rancher Tim Leber said, “thanks to the rains.”

No. 1 soft white wheat was unchanged at Portland on Aug. 19, averaging \$8.64 per bushel for current delivery, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A year before, the price was \$10.29.

National average wheat reached \$11.78 in May, up from \$4.81 in June 2020.

But costs have risen as



Yasser Marte/East Oregonian

Wheat piles up Friday, Aug. 19, 2022, at United Grain’s Duff Ground Pile 4 miles northeast of Pendleton off Highway 11.

well. Diesel fuel averaged \$5.06 per gallon in Pendleton on Aug. 19, down from \$6.29 on July 3, but still up from \$3.57 a year earlier.

U.S. white wheat production was projected at 289 million bushels, up 3 million from the July estimate and 44% higher than last year’s drought-stricken crop, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wheat Outlook reported on Aug. 16.

Production for soft white winter, soft white spring and hard white spring were all improved from a year ago based on conditions in Washington, Idaho and Oregon. The comparison would have been even more stark, but hard white winter production was lower than in 2020, with most of the loss in drought-affected regions, mainly in Kansas and Colorado.

Auction:

Continued from Page A1

Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorran who serves as the liaison between the county board of commissioners and the fair board, also celebrated the success of the auction with the rewarding of the youth exhibitors for their efforts by strong support from the business community, families and local supporters.

“We also need to celebrate the work done by FFA and 4-H clubs,” he said.

According to Linnel, this was the last year of participa-

tion of several young exhibitors who are heading off to college. The proceeds from the Umatilla County Fair Youth Livestock Auction were helping make their post high school plans a reality.

“Besides saving money for education, some of the young exhibitors also saved money for next year’s livestock to buy animals and keep up with rising feeding costs, and sheltering,” Linnel explained.

Parents have a fundamental role in their children’s preparation for the yearly livestock auction.

“I remember that a few years ago my two boys participated in the livestock auction,” Linnel said.

“They had their own checking accounts and learned the responsibilities of taking care of the animals and the budget to make a profit.”

Local youths also learn the responsibilities of animal care, she said. Feeding animals, cleaning stalls, bedding them down, keeping them cool during the high temperatures during the fair. And they have friends to share the excitement of participating in livestock auctions.

Ultimately, what the young exhibitors learn is to become leaders.

“Many of them come back to Umatilla County,” Linnel said, “after they finish college to serve the community.”

Prepare for Power Outages & Save Money

REQUEST A FREE QUOTE!

ACT NOW TO RECEIVE A \$300 SPECIAL OFFER!

(844) 989-2328

GENERAC PWRCELL SOLAR-READY STORAGE SYSTEM

Leaf Filter GUTTER PROTECTION

BACKED BY A YEAR-ROUND CLOG-FREE GUARANTEE

EXCLUSIVE LIMITED TIME OFFER!

15% OFF & 10% OFF

FINANCING THAT FITS YOUR BUDGET!

CALL US TODAY FOR A FREE ESTIMATE

1-855-536-8838

Smart security. Professionally installed.

Protection starts with prevention

Get FREE Professional Installation and Four FREE Months of Monitoring Service*

CALL NOW TO CUSTOMIZE YOUR SYSTEM

844-894-8790

vivint

Amazon Web Services Donates \$2 million to Organizations in Eastern Oregon

Scan here to learn more