

SMALLER IS BETTER

SDA school offers education with a Christian worldview

Enrollment is at its lowest point ever this year

By Paul Wahl
Wallowa County Chieftain

Elementary schools conjure the sound of bells ringing and students bustling through the hallways.

At one school in Wallowa County, the bells are absent and general noise level is negligible as students poke their noses into books or computers.

Ten students make their way to the Enterprise Seventh-Day Adventist Christian School on Wagner Street, greeted by instructors Dan Webster and Julie Corson.

The students begin their day with praise and worship songs and Bible instruction followed by a full course of reading, spelling, science, history, social studies and physical education.

“Because of our size, we are very strong on individualized learning,” said Webster, the school’s lead teacher. “We want the children to feel like they are part of a family here.”

Webster, who is a graduate of Walla Walla College in College Place, has been with the school 20 years. He holds a master’s degree in biology.

Science is taught with a slightly different slant. The school’s curriculum reflects the Adventist worldview, which accepts the Bible as the standard by which everything else is measured.

“We don’t emphasize evolution, for instance, but we talk about it,” Webster said.

Most of the opportunities afforded students in public schools are available at the SDA school, which are often referred to as academies.

A nest of ice skates sits in one of the two classrooms, built in 1950. Most winters, students spend a portion of



Gavin Nash receives individual help with a math lesson from Dan Webster, head teacher at Enterprise Seventh-day Adventist School.



Paul Wahl/Chieftain

Instructor Julie Corson spends a moment with Enterprise Seventh-day Adventist School student Madison Isley. Corson is in her first year with the school but has nearly 15 years of service in the Adventist education system.

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— Patrick Frey,
superintendent of education for the Idaho
Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

their physical education time on the rink in Enterprise. This year, other avenues for recreation were needed as the rink was almost never frozen solid.

Large overhead windows allow for natural light and views of the mountains surrounding the community.

Students have individual responsibilities to keep the school neat and tidy. Class field trips are common as is community service.

Students volunteer at the Enterprise Senior Center and help with the meals program. They have raised funds for Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, a humanitarian organization.

This year’s enrollment is the lowest in the history of the school, Webster said. Numbers peaked in 2008 when 27 students were attending.

Six years ago, the school lost a beloved teacher to an illness and continues to feel the impact. Another factor is the

reduced number of families in the adjacent SDA church congregation.

The local church supports the school financially, and the school’s board is made up of members from the church.

There is no tuition fee to attend.

“The church there has decided to provide education to the parents based on a donation system,” explained Patrick Frey, superintendent of education for the Idaho Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which includes Enterprise. “Each family is informed of

the average cost of educating a student and are asked to donate what they can to defray the cost of the operation of the school.”

What is not covered by parent donations, the church makes up. Over the years, Frey estimates the church has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in students.

“Quite an accomplishment for a small church,” said Frey. “The school has been on this plan longer than I have been its superintendent.

The church, which is one of 153,253 SDA congregations worldwide, views the school as

its mission to youth in Enterprise. Most of the school’s students are not Seventh-day Adventists. The school’s religious education does adhere to Seventh-day Adventist’s beliefs, but Frey said the teachers’ respect the religious beliefs of the students and their families.

“The faculty’s goal is to facilitate the student’s spiritual growth and their relationship with Jesus while providing them a quality education to prepare them for high school,” Frey said.

Frey noted that individual attention is a big plus for the school’s students.

“Because each teacher has several grades in a classroom, they can provide differentiated instruction to the students allowing each student to be working at their own level,” he said. “This helps decrease frustration in the students working too far above or below their skill level, and they can

develop a love for learning.”

Corson has six students at five grade levels, which she admits is challenging at times. But she has built-in help.

“The younger ones learn from the older children,” she said. “Being in the same classroom helps pull them along.”

Corson moved to Enterprise from Medford at the beginning of the school year. She holds a teaching degree from Walla Walla University. She has spent 12 years in the Adventist Education System, including a stint in a school in Taiwan, and she believes she is “called” to be an instructor.

There are 19.5 million Seventh-Day Adventists worldwide. The church’s name reflects that its followers believe that Saturday — the “Sabbath” — is the day set aside for worshiping God — not Sunday. “Adventist” indicates the assurance of the soon return (advent) of Jesus to earth as described in the Bible.



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