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However, Harklerode was thrilled with a solution the district is coming up with.

“We’ve been talking about putting in a new outdoor covered play area,” said Grzeskowiak, explaining that the district had planned to create a self-standing steel structure on the south side of the elementary gym so kids could be outside during rainy days. That project was due to begin next summer, but with the gym floor issue, the district is looking to move up the timetable to the next couple of months.

“Once that’s done, we can get kids out of the gym and they can use the outside space while we get the gym repaired, which again is a two-month shutdown,” Grzeskowiak said. Both construction projects are not yet set in stone as the district looks into financials — insurance would pay for the gym floor repairs, while

money saved in the district’s building construction fund would pay for the covered play area.

“It’s not going to dip into operations to get this done. When we get some hard numbers, we’re going to let the board know,” Grzeskowiak said.

In other news from the meeting, the numbers for the Sept. 3 “Siuslaw Elementary Back to School Barbeque” were released, and it was a rousing success with almost 600 meals served during the event.

“We had people parked in every ‘no parking zone’ from 18th Street to 35th Street,” Grzeskowiak said.

Harklerode added, “It was a huge increase over last year. Dave (Bitner, food services

director) was running back to the kitchen. He was prepared for it, he had food on hand.

“As teachers and administrators, we will not use instructional time to help students plan and organize an event like this to occur during school hours. As district employees, we are not allowed to use our class time to take a political position on any civic matter. Such discussion and or persuasion will not be carried on during the performance of our district duties with the exception of open discussion during classroom lessons that consider various sides of a political or civic issue.”

— Andy Marohl, Siuslaw Middle School Principal

But he had initial servings out for 250 people and he just looked back at the line. Went back to the kitchen and threw more into the oven. More hamburgers. And not everybody who attended had a meal.”

Later in the meeting, district employee Sarah Girard thanked the board for the passage of the recent student cell phone use policy.

“It has made such a drastic difference. Kids are talking to each other at lunch time, ver-

and look at it in a reasonable way. To me, the whole point is getting young people aware, educated and involved.”

Tousley-Ritt was at the meeting to promote, and get students to attend, a presentation by climate group 350 Eugene on Saturday, Sept. 2.

“But I would like to propose not just this one-shot event,”

she said. “I’m willing, and my group is willing, to bring in speakers to the middle school and high school, to even start an ecology club, an earth club or an after-school event. ... If we get to the point where we start a club, I’m willing to spearhead it along with any teachers that want to do it.”

Tousley-Ritt also stated that she would be willing to bring speakers from climate groups such as Our Children’s Trust to speak to the school because, “it’s much more invigorating, I believe, to have a young person who is really involved with this to come out and speak to other young people.”

Tousley-Ritt’s comments, and her organizations presentation next Saturday, coincide with a global Climate Strike that will be occurring on Friday, Sept. 20.

“You’ll see students on the news, I’m sure, walking out of schools,” she said, adding that she was not encouraging students to strike in protest. She instead encouraged students to come to a rally at 3 p.m. on that day.

If students do decide to strike on Friday, it would not be the first time students at Siuslaw have made political protests through walking out. In March 2018, a group of students walked out in support of a national walkout regarding school gun violence. That incident caused a host of complaints from some parents who viewed the event as chaotic.

“No staff prep for the walk-out. Kids walking out without supervision when, on a normal day, they weren’t allowed to walk out the front door,” one parent, Jennifer Waggoner, wrote the school district after the event. “Middle school kids left our closed campus freely and ended up at Dutch Bros. and the high school. No principal in the building. And on top of it all, a planned surprise fire drill with no admin to manage it and fairly suspicious timing that coincided with the walkout. Was that fire drill planned for that time to get kids and teachers out of the building to show more support for the walkout? It is not a stretch to reach that conclusion. (sic)”

The walkout itself only lasted 17 minutes, and, for the most part, students were respectful.

“Unfortunately, other students used this event as an excuse to skip class and thumb their nose at authority,” Siuslaw Middle School Principal Andy Marohl had replied. “The students who did not attend the event and left campus altogether will receive appropriate discipline and their parents have been contacted.”

Regarding Marohl leaving the middle school during the event, he stated that he escorted the students for safety concerns, while the vice principal stayed back to manage a planned fire drill that occurred at the same time.

“The fire drill was planned to coincide with the event because, with that level of disruption to the school environment there was no instruction that could happen, so we evacuated the remaining students. Reflecting back, I agree that this may not have been ideal,” Marohl wrote.

However, he stressed that the fire drill and the personal escort were not intended to support the walkout itself.

“As teachers and administrators, we will not use instructional time to help students plan and organize an event like this to occur during school hours,” wrote Marohl. “As district employees, we are not allowed to use our class time to take a political position on any civic matter. Such discussion and or persuasion will not be carried on during the performance of our district duties with the exception of open discussion during classroom lessons that consider various sides of a political or civic issue.”

And this is the mindset the district is taking for Friday’s potential walkout.

“I was planning to send out the general notice, ‘If you walk out, you’re absent. We appreciate that you have the right to do this, but you’re absent,’” Grzeskowiak said during Wednesday’s meeting, stressing that the district is not advocating for students to leave class during the global strike.

For more information about the Siuslaw School District, visit siuslaw.k12.or.us.

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541-997-5673
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