

Board to decide if Latham Elementary closes its doors

By Caitlyn May
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Decision may be as soon as January

The South Lane School board held its monthly meeting on Monday and night and invited the elephant into the room: Would it close Latham Elementary School?

The board agreed that more information was needed before it made its decision but leaned heavily on discussion of the building's failing infrastructure, smaller class sizes and the coming of the new Harrison Elementary School next fall as well as a possible savings of over \$200,000 a year if the school closed its doors.

"I believe at some point, Latham won't continue to operate," board member Jerry Settelmeier said. "In some respects, you might say it's a mercy to say it's over," he said, noting the mounting maintenance issues and his belief that the conversation on what to do with the school should have come a year ago.

Latham currently has 94 students enrolled in classes. That number is down from 111 from the same time last year. Whether that trend will continue is unknown but Superintendent Krista Parent said elementary numbers across the board are down and there was discussion that the neighborhood that feeds Latham's student body numbers is aging out.

If Latham were to be closed, the district would save \$187,397 in staffing costs. That includes the entire \$84,463 principal salary and pieces of other costs that include officer manager time (an approximate \$18,373 savings), a handful of the nine food service hours (\$14,085 in savings) and \$70,000 of the \$401,234 spent yearly on teachers.

"Some of those six teachers at Latham would follow the kids. Wherever the kids went, the teachers would follow," Parent said in explaining the \$70,000 savings rather than the entire \$401,234.

A total of \$46,429.87 could be saved in electricity, utilities, permits and upkeep if Latham closed and saved the district \$2,900 in garbage removal, \$7,662 in electricity and a little over \$2,000 in custodial supplies.

Financial savings aside, the board discussed the other benefits Latham provided students, including a small school option. Board member Taylor Wilhour, who has children in the school, said it was a viable concern for parents and fellow member Tammy Hodgkins noted that if the district closed Latham, it may not be able to provide an alternative for parents seeking out a smaller school.

"Social media, word around town is, 'Oh, Harrison's opening,

Latham's closed.'" Andrea Griffith sat through the two and a half hour board meeting with an infant to get more information about her second-grader's school. "I want him to stay there, it's a great school. We are a community. It's small, we feel like a little family over there. It's hard not to get emotional, I don't want him getting lost in the shuffle," she said. "I feel like this will be a conversation year after year now until it's closed."

Bullying and behavior has been an issue at the school, which sits on 10.42 acres and was considered for closure once before against Delight Valley. Academic performance, however, remains on the higher end of the district with 25 to 30 percent of third to fifth graders meeting standards on level three in math and English.

The construction of the new Harrison Elementary School has raised concerns over the closure of Latham. According to the school district, many Latham students opt into the school and do not live in the attendance area. Harrison, however, is also an option for students and is expected to open in the fall of 2018.

The board instructed Parent to attempt to assess how many Latham parents intend to send their children to Harrison. The board will combine the information with a guesstimate of the incoming kindergarten class, a scaled down budget for Latham and public comment.

"It should be made clear," Settelmeier said. "That it doesn't mean if every parent says they're keeping their student at Latham, the school will stay open." He went on to say that the decision to close the school would be left to the school board.

Vision 2037 Vision Keepers Committee Members Needed

The Vision Keeper Committee welcomes applications from interested persons who would like to serve a two year term as an "at-large" member of the committee (2 positions available). Applicants will be interviewed and then confirmed by the Cottage Grove City Council.

The role of the Vision Keepers is to monitor progress of the Cottage Grove 2037 Vision Action Plan, encourage implementation of actions, provide technical assistance or support where appropriate, produce annual progress reports, and recommend minor modifications to the plan as necessary. The Vision Keepers will hold quarterly team progress meetings, and will develop annual awards to recognize individuals or organizations for exceptional service toward promoting achievement of the Cottage Grove 2037 Action Plan.

Applications are available at City Hall and at the Cottage Grove Public Library, and should be returned by Friday December 22, 2017, at 5:00 PM to: Teresa Cowan, City of Cottage Grove Community Coordinator, 400 Main Street, Cottage Grove, Oregon 97424, Email: volunteers@cottagegrove.org, Phone: 541-942-1185.



School board wrap-up

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North to Alaska

The Cottage Grove boys basketball team is heading to Kodiak, Alaska to play in the 51st annual Joe Floyd tournament. The team will be leaving on December 26th and will return on the 31st.

First year head coach Nick Finley, who coached in Alaska for the last three years, was contacted about a spot in the tournament opening up at the last minute for Cottage Grove.

At the school board meeting on Monday night, Finley reported that the Kodiak School District will be paying for the majority of the flights in addition to providing lunch and dinner the students that would be going. Additional money will be coming through a shoot-a-thon that the team is doing, donations and a sports fund at Cottage Grove High School. The details about lodging are still being ironed out but Kodiak High School has offered to let the team stay at the school.

According to the presentation

that four team members gave to the school board, about half of the 13 players on the basketball team, consisting of 10 seniors and three juniors, have never flown on a plane before.

Donations at CGHS

Chelsea Armstrong, a member of CGHS student council, reported to the board that the school has been taking donations and will be opening up a winter clothes closet for students in need. The school is looking for more donations of all kinds and are especially looking for shoes and general

hygiene items.

A Special Performance

Cottage Grove's charter schools, Academy for Charter Education (ACE) and Child's Way Charter School, had short performances for the board on Monday night to update them about their school.

Two ACE students sang about the first law of thermodynamics while another student from the school recited Chaucer for the school board on Monday night. Following them, a host of staff members from Child's Way entered the meeting playing a saxophone and guitars. The staff talked about the activities the school is doing including their music programs, quilting, building and outdoor education.

Custodian Honored

Cottage Grove High School's custodian Brian Anderson has been honored by the Oregon safe Schools and Communities Coalition for his work to make the high school a safe place for students to be.

ALICE Training

In January district teachers and staff members throughout the district will continue taking part in the Alert Lockdown Inform Counter Evacuate (ALICE) training program that focuses on active shooter response training.

School District Meeting with PeaceHealth

On Jan. 8 members of the school board will be meeting with Meghan McCarthy, PeaceHealth's Director of Community Health, to discuss a possible financial contribution from the company for the new pool renovation. The district plans to give a tour of the current pool space and discuss how the renovation will benefit Cottage Grove and keep people healthy.

Honor roll

Continued A1

William Hickox
Morgan MacDonald
Rhianna Nash
Caleb Parks

3.49 - 3.0
Samantha Baker
Jimmy Barrone
Payton Black
Riley Black
Caleb Clark
Devin Davidge
Nicki Derrick
Vivianna Du Faux
Jake Gerrard
Trace Gordon
Lauren Kalkowski
Jonnathan McGuire
Dominic Mills
Daniel Olp
Justin Smith
Madilyn Sprinkle
Natalie Thompson

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