

**PARENTS** *from A1*

the year or will keep it open for at least the next five years. The fate of the school will be discussed at the Dec. 3 school board meeting with a decision expected to come at the Jan. 7 meeting.

"The goal is to make sure that everybody is heard," said Sullivan after the meeting. "This is a very hard de-

cision from the district to either close the school or maintain the school because it's an investment. So we're just making sure the staff and the community, in this case the Latham community, have a voice."

On Nov. 30, the school board will receive a packet that includes information about what it would look like if the school remained open, taking into account

what the parents said in addition to maintenance costs, technology upgrades and class sizes; or if the school were to close, looking at where students would go next year, what would be done with the Latham property and what would happen to the current Latham staff.

Bridgens noted that the document that has the report will be made public.

The parents were instructed to go around the room offering up their hopes and fears with the future of the school. The idea that continued to come up was the small size of the school and how they see it is advantageous for their students.

"I hope we can still keep a small school option in town. Class size is a big factor but

another factor, I think, is overall school size," said Latham parent and school board member Taylor Wilhour. "Difference if you've got three classes of each grade level you get into a situation where the kids are less likely to know the kids walking down the hall. If there's one of each, even if we get to the district average of class size or close to it, there's an advantage to being a small school."

Currently, Bohemia Elementary School has 486 students while Harrison Elementary has 447. Dorena (pre-school through 8th grade) has 95 students while London (kindergarten through 8th grade) has 90 students; both schools are over 10 miles outside of

Cottage Grove.

Parents also brought up that if the school was to stay open that they have hopes for upgrades all around the school that ran the gamut: bathroom sinks, additional staff support, exterior paint, interior paint, security measures, cooling devices and technology upgrades. The district has \$2 million in deferred maintenance projects for the entire district.

For parent Danielle Napier, who has a student in kindergarten and in second grade, this is her first year as a Latham parent. Since moving out of the Springfield school district, Napier has seen her son go from feigning illness in an attempt to not have to attend school to now wanting to go to school despite being sick.

"It's been a dramatic difference for my kids, myself and the way I feel about their education," she said,

adding: "Being able to be a part of their life and school is amazing as a parent. I don't feel disconnected; I know what's going on. Or I can message the teacher if something is going on with my kid."

Napier is in regular communication with the school throughout the week

Whether getting an update on an incident in school, sending the teacher a message or learning that her son got stung by a bee, she feels connected to what is happening as her and her husband both work full-time. Napier feels that these immediate one-to-one connections would be lost in the shuffle of a bigger school.

"It's not even about the class size," she said. "It's just the bigger school requires way too much for something that big to function. You lose that personal, individualized attention."

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