

Prepping food



Volunteers help prepare meals during the Polk Community Connect on Jan. 25. The event provided assistance to residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

FCSD's Thompson resigns post

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — Jack Thompson, the superintendent of Falls City schools, has resigned effective at the end of June.

Thompson submitted his resignation during the Jan. 24 Falls City School Board meeting as part of his superintendent's report.

"Lastly on my report, I handed to all of you folks my resignation as of June 30 of this year," he said.

The board accepted his resignation later in the meeting and scheduled an executive session to discuss the position moving forward. Another executive session is slated for Feb. 21 before the board's regular meeting.

Thompson said he turned in his resignation months before his departure because he wanted to give the board plenty of time to plan its next steps before the next school year.

"Hiring a superintendent is much different than a teacher," he said.

Thompson declined to elaborate on whether he's leaving for another position.

He said he gave credit to the board's leadership since he took the position at the beginning of the 2013-14

school year.

"I appreciate the staff and students in our schools," Thompson said. "I've appreciated that the board has been working really hard to make the district better."

In other business, the board:

- Approved make-up days for the days the district had to cancel school because of snow and ice.

"After we got all done with our snow days, at this moment, we have five days that we need to make up for lost days to maintain our hours," Thompson said.

Two days will be conference days — those are considered "student contact days" by the state — on Jan. 27 and Feb. 3.

Added school days are March 3, April 7 and April 21.

"Those are all Fridays, so we are not extending our school year at all and we aren't taking any holidays," Thompson said.

Elementary Principal Art Houghtaling said district staff kept after-school program FACES Friday field trips in mind when suggesting days, and the district has more day available for make-ups if necessary.

"We have some more Fridays," Houghtaling said.

Falls City plans gym without bond support

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — The Falls City School Board decided to stop asking district voters to pass a bond to build a gym at Falls City Elementary School.

Instead, it's asking for donations and volunteer support to build a scaled-back version, providing space for required physical education class time and an additional practice gym for sports.

Board member Bob Young proposed a barebones building with heat, a concrete base floor with a gym floor placed on top, and two basketball hoops, and capability to set up a volleyball net.

The building would be placed in the field across the street from the elementary school instead of the lot next to the school, which will cut down on the excavation needed to construct the gym, Young said.

He said with more PE minutes required next year and more classroom space needed, the building is a must-have.

Currently, elementary stu-

dents take a bus down to the high school gym for PE classes.

"I don't think I would be talking this way if we were just talking about sports. The PE issue brings the whole thing together as a crisis," Young said. "Something needs to be done."

Young believes, if planned correctly, the building would cost less than \$500,000. He said the district would have seek a loan, grant funding, and donations from businesses and individuals to get it done.

"It's going to be a big project, but I know we can do it because I know that I can get enough people to help do it," he said. "It comes down to the board having faith that we can do something like this and pull it off."

Board member Kristy Major asked if the plan meant that the district would no longer seek a voter-approved bond to build the gym. Voters have rejected that proposal twice by slim margins.

Board Chairwoman Jami Kidd said she didn't believe a third time would bring a dif-

ferent result.

"I think we've done it twice in a row. I think that people are a little concerned, not knowing what their health care costs are going to be, what life is going to hold. They don't want increased taxes," she said.

Elementary Principal Art Houghtaling said the proposal worried him because if the budget is tight, the cost would mean cutting staff.

Board member Larry Sickles estimated if the district had to borrow the full cost of the building, it would cost about \$25,000 per year to pay for it.

He said that's a figure he's comfortable with. He pointed to the latest financial report that the district — with all its regular bills covered, including payroll, insurance costs and utilities — would have more than \$350,000 left at the end of the year.

That didn't include unexpected repair costs, teaching supplies not requested yet, and FACES expenses. Sickles estimated that still left the district with \$200,000 or more in the bank at the end

of the year.

A new gym isn't the only improvement the district's looking at completing with an out-of-the-box plan.

The original, bond-funded gym project would have included a new kitchen and cafeteria.

Now that is no longer in the plan, but John Gilbert, the district's facilities manager, has an idea to address the issue.

It would begin this summer with demolishing the stage in the elementary school cafeteria, creating more room for tables and for the kitchen.

The additional room would provide enough space to add coolers, prep tables and a long-awaited dishwasher.

He said the remodel would be expensive, but could be completed and saved for in stages. Amy Houghtaling, FACES coordinator, said grants are available for school kitchen expansions, too.

"We would almost double our kitchen," Gilbert said. "We have a kitchen that you actually cook in."

Chemeketa offers learning in Mexico

Itemizer-Observer staff report

SALEM — Chemeketa Community College will sponsor a trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, in June. Participants will attend six classes during spring term to study and prepare for the trip. The class sessions give an overview of international development work practices. The program includes four college credits in humanities.

Participants will engage in meaningful community service with the community residing in Oaxaca's garbage dump. There will also be four levels of Spanish classes available, from beginner to advanced.

The trip is affiliated with the local agency Friends of Pimpollo and is open to the community as well as students. Cost of the trip is \$2,000 all inclusive (tuition, air, lodging, activities).

A free information session will be held on Feb. 15 at 6 p.m. at Chemeketa Salem Building 9, Room 104.

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