

# LEADER GUIDES NONPROFIT

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BEND ENDURANCE ACADEMY TAKES ON PANDEMIC CHALLENGES • **SPORTS, B1**

# The Bulletin

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## COVID-19 | Distance learning in Central Oregon

# Enrollment plummets at public schools

BY JACKSON HOGAN  
The Bulletin

Enrollment in Central Oregon's public school districts plummeted this school year. Bend-La Pine Schools and Redmond School District lost more than 1,500 students combined.

Meanwhile, enrollment in private and online charter schools skyrocketed, the number of local students being homeschooled has spiked, and many parents of younger children have opted to postpone starting school all together.

The overarching theme of this massive shift in enrollment is that many parents had no interest in traditional schooling during COVID-19, with distance learning, constantly

### *Families left for homeschooling, charter or private schools — or pulled students out*

changing re-opening plans and post-reopening safety concerns.

"We just wanted a school year where we didn't have to be yanked around," said Kristina Johnson, a Bend parent who moved her third grader from Lava Ridge Elementary to Bridge Charter Academy this fall. "We were (also) reasonably concerned about the risk of COVID transmission to us, and to our grandparents who moved next to us to be near kids."

Between October 2019 and October 2020, all six Central Oregon K-12 school districts

saw a drop in enrollment, according to state data released Thursday. The biggest drops, by percentage, happened at Bend-La Pine Schools, at 6.3%, and Redmond and Culver school districts, each with 5.4%.

Crook County School District had easily the smallest dip, only losing 0.4% of its student population, or 11 students. And since October, the Prineville-based school district has added 53 more students, according to Superintendent Sara Johnson.

Statewide, public school enrollment, including charter

schools, fell by 3.73%.

### Where did the students go?

Statewide and local education officials have various theories as to where public school students wound up.

One big culprit is homeschooling.

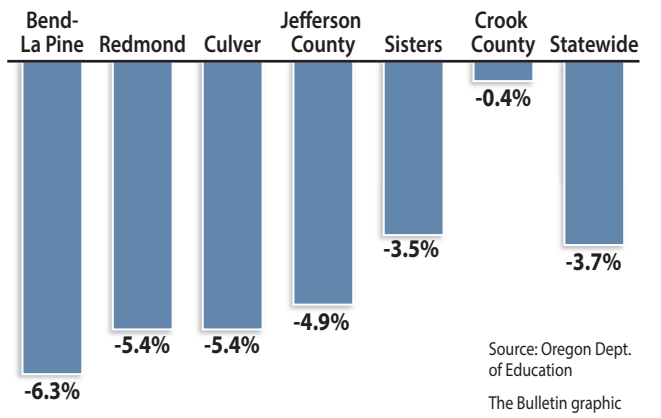
This school year, the High Desert Education Service District — a Redmond-based agency that, among many other educational duties, registers local families for homeschooling — saw a sharp increase of homeschoolers.

Since September, 803 local students signed up for homeschooling, compared to 131 last school year, service district spokesperson Linda Quon said.

See **Schools** / A5

### Student enrollment decreases in local school districts

Between October 2019 and October 2020, all six public K-12 school districts in Central Oregon lost student enrollment due to various factors. Public school student enrollment fell statewide, too.



## Warm Springs during the pandemic

# Leader navigates challenges, loss



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Danny Martinez, emergency manager for the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, helps to ensure that there is enough water to support the community.

BY MICHAEL KOHN  
The Bulletin

Danny Martinez, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, has been through war in east Asia. At home, he has fought wildfires and served his community as emergency manager. At 67, he thought he had experienced all the challenges that life could throw at him.

Then came 2020.

Martinez had his hands full throughout the past year, dealing with a COVID-19 outbreak on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, a destructive wildfire season, and infrastructure failures that shut off water to thousands of residents.

See **Warm Springs** / A6

# Lawmakers seek to ax timber tax cuts that cost communities billions

BY ROB DAVIS  
The Oregonian

Oregon lawmakers have filed a spate of bills aiming to reverse decades-old timber tax cuts that deprived counties of billions of dollars and to eliminate a quasi-governmental state agency that has acted as a lobbying arm for the industry.

The measures follow an investigation published last year by Oregon Public Broadcasting, The Oregonian and ProPublica. The newsrooms found that timber companies, increasingly dominated by Wall

Street real estate trusts and investment funds, have benefited from tax cuts that cost counties at least \$3 billion over the past three decades. Half of the 18 counties in Oregon's timber-dominant region lost more money from tax cuts on private forests than from the oft-blamed reduction of logging on federal lands stemming from environmental protections for the northern spotted owl.

The investigation also documented how the state-funded Oregon Forest Resources Institute, which has an annual bud-

get of \$4 million, worked to discredit climate research deemed harmful to the timber industry and appeared to skirt legal constraints against lobbying. By law, the organization is prohibited from attempting to influence policy. Its role is to educate residents about forestry.

In response, Gov. Kate Brown requested an audit of the institute, and a group of citizens proposed a ballot initiative to restore timber taxes. Now, lawmakers are weighing additional actions.

"We as a state must be able

to assure, to the greatest extent possible, that we maintain an unbiased, balanced and fair taxation system," said Brad Witt, a state representative who leads Oregon's House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The committee will be the first stop for many of the bills proposed during the legislative session that ends in June.

A former mill worker and officer for labor unions in Oregon, Witt has been a supporter of the timber industry.

See **Timber** / A5



Leah Nash/The New York Times, file

Clear-cut forests are visible along U.S. Highway 30 near Portland.

