

## Schools

### Continued from A1

Dave VanLoo, Bend-La Pine's director of school improvement, said this year's dramatically scaled-back standardized tests mean less class time is lost.

Standardized testing was largely canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and with students barely back in the classroom this spring, it's been scaled back throughout Oregon.

Earlier this spring, the Oregon Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education agreed that instead of Oregon students taking the traditional suite of tests in various subjects, each student would only take one test in one subject this spring. Which subject a student is tested on depends on the grade level.

"We don't really anticipate a detrimental impact on student learning, having kids take one test that takes an hour," VanLoo said.

Some other Oregon school districts — like Ashland and Eagle Point in Southern Oregon — are taking the opposite approach to standardized testing: opt in. That means students won't take any standard-

ized tests, unless their family emails the school district and asks if their child can participate.

Other school districts have decided to not offer standardized tests at all this year, including Oregon Trail School District and Salem-Keizer. Salem-Keizer School District spokesperson Sylvia McDaniel said the school board canceled the tests because students have had limited opportunities for in-person learning during the pandemic.

VanLoo said Bend-La Pine Schools' ability to bring back students earlier than many other large districts means missing a bit of regular instruction for tests isn't as tough for local students. While Bend-La Pine high schoolers returned to hybrid learning in February and full time in-person Monday, Portland high schoolers won't return to buildings until next week, and it will be part time.

"For kids who haven't had as much in-person instruction, I could see that possibly being a higher concern," VanLoo said.

Both VanLoo and Morton said they'll respect the wishes of any family that chooses to pull their kid out of standardized testing.

Bend-La Pine and Redmond teachers' union leaders had mixed responses to their schools moving forward with the opt-out method for standardized tests this year.

Sarah Barclay, president of the Bend Education Association, is pushing for her school district to move to an opt-in style. She believes standardized tests are a waste of time when students had to spend more than half the school year learning online.

"We have really precious time with students in-person this spring," Barclay said. "So even one week (of testing) is just not a good use of time."

Barry Branaugh, board member of the Redmond Education Association, doesn't believe there should be standardized testing this year. But if the district is going to still give the tests, it's still easy for students and families to opt out if they choose, he said.

"I don't think we really should be having it, but given that's what the state wants, it's fine," Branaugh said. "The opt out is not a difficult thing. It's just a matter of filling out a piece of paper or going to a website."

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Photos by Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Near Space Corp. uses a Mobil Operations Center at the Madras Municipal Airport on Thursday to track a large helium-filled balloon carrying a 100-pound payload 110,000 feet into air for a high altitude drop test.

## Balloon

### Continued from A1

"That went well," said Kevin Tucker, president at Near Space Corp., who oversaw the test flight. "It's always interesting. The wind was actually changing, and that's a big deal. We were very careful about that."

Tucker's company, which produces balloons for scientific tests, partnered with researchers from the University of Kentucky to launch the balloon and test a delivery system that could be used to return individual items from the International Space Station back to Earth. The team tracked the balloon's flight Thursday and recovered the dropped device.

"The Kentucky team will be gathering a lot of data as this travels from 110,000 feet back to the Earth's surface," Tucker said before the flight.

The university engineering students call the delivery system the Kentucky Re-Entry Universal Payload System and their research was sponsored by NASA's Flight Opportunities program, said NASA spokesperson Megan Person.

"The flight aims to enable testing of the technology's electronics and communica-



Near Space Corp. personnel carefully handle the protective sheath containing the 150-foot-long balloon Wednesday, before weather conditions canceled the flight.

tions systems in preparation for further research as part of a commercial resupply mission to the International Space Station later this year," Person said.

NASA regularly identifies projects, such as the balloon launch, and connects research teams with companies and locations to help generate a test. In this case, NASA connected the Kentucky students with Tucker's company and coordinated with the Madras airport.

"Today's successful flight is one example of how the Flight Opportunities program helps advance promising space technologies before they move on to riskier orbital missions," said Paul De Leon, NASA Flight Opportunities campaign manager.

Tucker and his crew originally scheduled the balloon flight Wednesday, but called it

off because of high winds. On Thursday, conditions were mild enough to allow the launch.

Tucker, who runs his company out of Tillamook, said Madras was the ideal location for the balloon flight. The open spaces around Madras offer several options to drop and retrieve the device from the balloon, Tucker said.

In addition, the Madras airport is smaller and quieter than other commercial airports in the region, which allows the team to work without interfering with other aircraft. The team still has to coordinate with the Federal Aviation Administration.

"The airport doesn't have a huge amount of traffic," Tucker said. "We are not causing mayhem if we do a launch."

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## COCC

### Continued from A1

"We are not recommending any increase in tuition or general fees for our students for the coming year," Dona told the board. "The (financial) discipline and the assistance we've received are the two major reasons for that."

COCC received more than \$10 million from the first two COVID-19 federal relief packages from 2020, more than \$3.6 million of which went towards student aid, Dona said. The college is expecting to soon receive an estimated \$11.2 million, half of which must be used for student aid, from the third federal stimulus package signed by President Joe Biden in March. Partly because of this federal

funding, Chesley said COCC administrators all felt freezing tuition would be possible.

"The whole senior leadership team was in agreement on this one, and when does that ever happen?" Chesley said Wednesday night, chuckling. "I think there was wide agreement that this was the right thing to do."

After the meeting, board Chair Erica Skatvold told The Bulletin that this was the perfect time to freeze tuition and fees. Not only can the college afford to do so thanks to federal grants, but the past year has put a lot of locals in financial hardship, she said.

"We want to make Central Oregon Community College as accessible and affordable for students as possible," Skatvold said Thursday. "In a time when

a lot of people are in financial hardship because of the pandemic or wildfires last summer, it's a little extra help."

The tuition freeze means an in-district student would pay \$4,527 in fees and tuition for a full, 36-credit load next year — the same cost as this year.

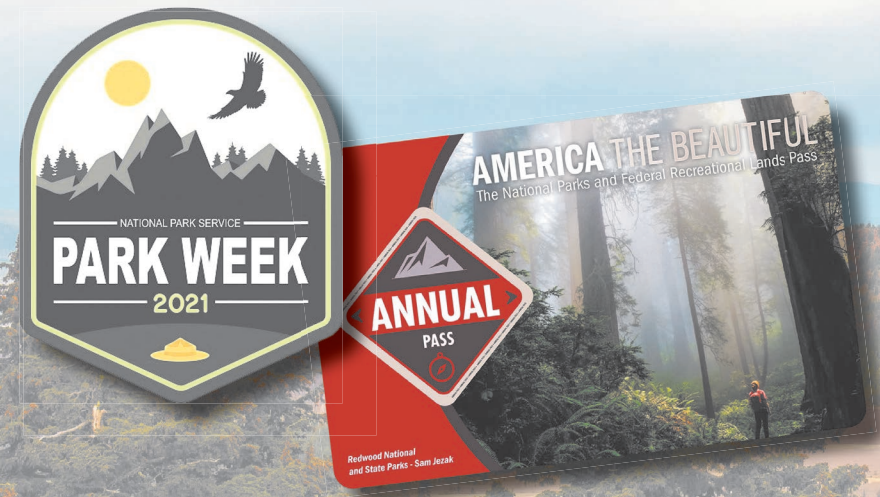
Tuition and student activity fees were raised by 3% for students between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. Since 1976, the average annual raise for in-district tuition has been 5.3%.

The last time COCC did not increase tuition for in-district students was 2014, according to college data. The last time there was no tuition increase for any students was 2008.

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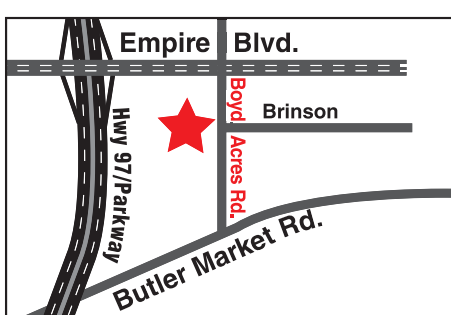
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