

# Schools prepare as shelters

## State pushes school resiliency

By Brenna Visser  
Cannon Beach Gazette

With construction underway in Seaside to build schools outside the tsunami inundation zone and a bond on the ballot in Warrenton in November to do the same, preparing schools for a disaster is in the limelight.

But as schools look for opportunities to relocate to higher ground to be safer in an earthquake and tsunami, administrators will face a new task: how to prepare to be a community's default shelter when disaster strikes.

Schools are at the center of the state's emergency planning strategy. The state has emphasized making aging school buildings more earthquake resilient, with programs like the seismic retrofit grant, which has awarded more than \$225 million to bring schools up to building code standards.

While schools are traditionally expected to serve as shelters, an analysis by the Oregon Seismic Safety Policy Advisory Commission found there has been little to no planning by school districts for how schools would be used following a Cascadia Subduction Zone quake.

"People have a lot of assumptions that schools would be good shelters," said Tiffany Brown, the Clatsop County emergency manager, who helped author the report. "They are buildings that accommodate large numbers of people, but that's where it stops. That's where our planning has kind of stopped."

For schools to be ready, more needs to be done to educate staff on what it takes to run a shelter, as well as the importance of planning for necessities like food, water, communication and medical supplies. Preparing a school to serve the mass care needs of a community takes planning well outside the scope of the typical responsibilities of educators, the report states, but because



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Construction crews work on the new school campus in Seaside.

there is no state mandate requiring it, little to no coordination between schools and other agencies has occurred.

That's why the advisory commission recommended to the Legislature to have clearer guidelines for what should be expected of schools, including requiring preparedness messaging and encouraging supply storage near school grounds.

"I think there are two different stages: Preparing your own constituency and preparing as a community shelter," Brown said. "Clatsop County is at the first."

### A community effort

The majority of schools in the county have some coordination with the American Red Cross to be used as shelters, said Jenny Carver, the local Red Cross disaster program manager.

For some, like Warrenton Grade School and Seaside High School, gearing up to be a community shelter didn't seem practical given the likelihood the campuses would be inundated by a tsunami, but this fact isn't disqualifying, Carver said.

"We look at inundation zones, but that's not the only disaster we prepare for," she said.

But this strategy can also be complicated. As was seen in the Great Coastal Gale of 2007, re-

gions like the Oregon Coast can become so isolated, agencies like the Red Cross can't get access to run shelters.

"Having new schools be seismically sound and out of the inundation zone will change the conversation," Brown said. "But we have to build them, plan for them, with shelters in mind. Then we can use them that way after."

Thinking about the school district's community role in an emergency has been on the mind of Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley ever since the \$99.7 million bond was passed by voters in 2016.

"We will have the physical site, but we can't on our own provide the extended resources the community could possibly need," Roley said.

In some avenues, the school district has started to plan ahead. Every administrator has been trained to use ham radios to help communicate if phone lines go down. The district is coordinating with the city to install a water reservoir at the new campus that will be seismically safe and 400 feet above sea level. Plans have been discussed to establish cache sites filled with food.

But school districts don't necessarily have large budget line items or staff for emergen-

cy preparedness training or supplies. "This really is an ongoing conversation," Roley said. "It's not within the district's realm to provide for a major community response. This is going to have to be a community effort."

### A gathering spot

At Warrenton Grade School, Vice Principal Robbie Porter, who leads the charge on emergency preparedness for the school's 800 students, said if the \$38.5 million bond passes in November she would hope to see the new campus as a safe gathering spot.

But with only three grades initially moving out of the inundation zone, as an administrator, her concern and priority still lies in addressing the needs of the existing campus. Porter has worked on doing regular drills and developed procedures on the best way to evacuate students.

To be successful, other gaps, such as proper communication tools, food, water and shelter supplies and training, still need to be addressed.

"I want to network early ... get those connections so in case of the worst-case scenario we can be ready," Porter said. "How can we work together to make that happen?"

## Seaside School District Roundup

# With permit, construction picks up steam

## Long-awaited permit drives 'catch-up' plans

By Katherine Lacaze  
For Cannon Beach Gazette

The Seaside School District's campus construction project is moving along, with administrators and the project management team "keeping busy on a lot of fronts," Superintendent Sheila Roley told school board members during their regular meeting Oct. 16.

In September, the district received its permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a process that limited some building activities. The project management team, however, has "an articulated plan for catch-up," Roley told board members.

With construction documents completed, the team submitted its final building permit application to the city.

In response to the Army Corps, they completed a survey for the environmental easement to take place on property behind the district bus barn on U.S. Highway 101, part of an environmental mitigation package.

Finally, they are putting out bids for a number of projects, including the building's roof, metal siding, and interior.

In the few weeks following the meeting, the construction team plans to bring and lay concrete on site, board president Steve Phillips said.

Roley said they continue to keep an eye on the budget and schedule, especially as

the regional labor shortage is one of the biggest barriers they face. It is the most challenging, as well, she added, "because that also affects price."

### 'More kids'

Roley shared the enrollment numbers reported for the 2018-19 school year and how they compare to last year. Enrollment at The Heights Elementary School dropped from 456 students to 449. Gearhart Elementary School increased from 295 to 298. Enrollment at the Cannon Beach Academy jumped from 22 to 33 this school year.

The largest increase was experienced by Broadway Middle School, which jumped from 356 students in 2017-18 to 403 this school year. Seaside High School's enrollment also increased by 15 kids, from 454 to 469. Overall, the district's enrollment has grown by about 70 students.

"I'm not quite sure why, frankly, because Astoria and Warrenton went up, too," Roley said. "There are more kids countywide, which is kind of interesting."

Also at the meeting, fifth-grade teacher John Meyer, president of the district's union, shared about the Seaside School District Wellness Team, a group of administrators, classified employees, teachers and other staff members who have joined forces to develop a program that will support the district's community of educators. They will be applying for grant funds available through the Oregon Education Association.

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