

Lack of teacher time, student apathy dim hope for writing improvement

By April Sykes

A frustrated and over-worked high school English teacher told the Morrow County School Board Monday night that she didn't hold out much hope for improving students' English skills because of lack of time, increases in class size, and students' apathy and addiction to computers and text messaging.

Heppner High School language arts teacher Jeanne Collins told the board that she has 32 students, and because of time constraints resulting from declining enrollment at HHS and budget issues, and subsequent increases in class sizes, she is unable to spend as much time with the students as she would like. She said that if she spent as much time as would be necessary to grade students' papers and make comments in their papers to improve their writing skills, she would be up until 2 a.m. every night. She added that students are not getting the prerequisite writing instruction necessary because freshman writing has been removed from the school's curriculum because of reduced enrollment.

She cited a downturn, not only in skills, but in the perceived importance of spelling and writing.

"I think we're in a downward trend," she added. "There is a lot of apathy. Kids don't care and they believe computers are going to fix it."

She also said that she feels that she has a "big target" on her because of increasing demands on teachers because of state testing of students' writing skills

and state mandates that a certain percentage of students must pass the tests.

"I know that some teachers feel it's all on their shoulders," she said.

MCSO Superintendent Dirk Dirksen told the board that financial help will not be forthcoming because of state budget constraints. He and district Chief Financial Officer Andrew Fletcher said that any increases in state school funding will most likely be eaten up by increases in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) costs to school districts. He said that a projected increase to \$6.3 million in the state budget for education for the next budget year, from \$5.7 this year, will likely only result in "flat funding" for the schools, because the difference will be paid out in PERS costs.

"It's going to be a difficult pill to swallow," he said.

(In a related story on page one of this issue of the Gazette-Times, the PERS Board recently voted to increase PERS employee contributions by \$900 million for the 2013-2015 biennium.)

Also at the meeting, the board approved a resolution in which they accepted and appropriated several grants, previously unanticipated: \$5,000 from the Oregon Department of Education to Irrigon Elementary School to "support the participation in workshops and completion of the school self-evaluation tool"; \$11,263 from the State of Oregon to support teacher development; and \$42,407 to

help rural and low-income school programs.

"We are going to spend it wisely," said Dirksen, who added that the majority of the money is connected to staff development in working with low-income students.

The board approved revised policy regarding reimbursable school meals and milk programs, taking the words "milk" and "free milk" from the verbiage, substituting the phrase "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP)" for Adult and Family Services and included the following:

- "The district will offer SMP (Special Milk Program) without the free option to students who are not able to participate in the district's lunch or breakfast programs";

- substituted "Meet all minimum and maximum calorie requirements by grade level" for the phrase "Meet at least the minimum nutrient standards set for calories, protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A and vitamin C";

- substituted "Meet the maximum standards set for sodium by grade level" for the previous wording "Offer less sodium and cholesterol and increase the level of dietary fiber over time. The district will use a USDA approved menu planning approach to plan meals and snacks claimed for reimbursement";

- eliminated the words "total fat" in the sentence "Meet the maximum standards set for total fat and saturated fat."

The new policy was

revised as follows:

- "High school students must take at least three of five different food items, "including one half cup of fruit or vegetables" offered in program lunches;

- "The district will use the offer versus serve option when serving program breakfasts to senior high school students. High school students must take at least three or four food items including one-half cup of fruit or vegetables offered in program breakfasts."

- "The district will use the offer versus serve option when serving program lunches to students below senior high school grades. Students below high school grades will be required to take three of five food items including one-half cup of fruit or vegetables offered in program lunches."

- "The district will use the offer versus serve option when serving program breakfasts to students below senior high school grades. Students below high school grades will be required to

take three of four food items including one-half cup of fruit offered in program breakfasts."

In other business, the board:

- discussed a possible trend toward students enrolling in charter schools and how they might reverse the trend.

- received the following enrollment report as of October 2012: A.C. Houghton Elementary School, Irrigon (kindergarten through grade three)-273; Sam Boardman Elementary School, Boardman (k-three)-348; Heppner Elementary School (k-six)-172; Irrigon Elementary School (four-six)-203; Windy River Elementary School, Boardman (four-six)-210; Heppner Junior/Senior High School (seven-12)-176; Irrigon Junior/Senior High School (seven-12)-362; Riverside High School, Boardman (seven-12)-398; other-42; total-2,184.

- accepted the following resignations/retirements: June Dabbling, retiring from RHS special ed assistant;

Raylena Cimiyotti, IJSH special ed assistant.

- approved early graduation from Heppner High School for Alyssa Wizner.

- approved a School Achievement Compact Committee consisting of the following: Dirk Dirksen, George Mendoza, Craig Benson, Mark Jones, Marilyn Post, Lori Frank, Rick Drake, Dave Fowler, Brenda Profit, Kyle Carpenter, Kathie Good and Rose Norwood.

- heard the following announcements: Oregon School Board Association fall regional meeting, Oct. 10, 6 p.m.; end of the first nine weeks, Oct. 12; OSBA convention, Portland, Nov. 8-11; Veterans Day holiday, Nov. 12; next board meeting, Sam Boardman Elementary, Tuesday, Nov. 13, because of the Veterans Day holiday, 7 p.m.; Thanksgiving holiday, Nov. 22-23.

- held an executive session concerning personnel issues and expulsion of a student.

Secretary of State candidate attends Heppner town hall

By David Sykes

Oregon Secretary of State candidate Knute Buehler and his wife Patti were in attendance at a Sept. 30 town hall meeting in Heppner, where he said if Oregon doesn't pull itself out of its downward economic spiral, "We could end up the Mississippi of the West."

Buehler says his opponent, incumbent Kate Brown, is not welcoming to business in Oregon.

"I would encourage more business to come here. I would work to cut the red tape and regulations. We are the third highest state in the country when it comes to government regulations," Buehler said. He also said Oregon is now 43 out of 50 in quality of education.

Buehler is a native Oregonian, a Rhodes Scholar, physician and business owner. He was born and raised in Roseburg and says he attended Oregon State University, where he played college baseball.

He told the crowd of about 40 at the town hall that the Secretary of State's office needs to be fairer and less partisan. Buehler said independent voters in Oregon are treated especially badly and he would change that.

He said the voters' pamphlet is a mess and needs to be straightened out and become more nonpartisan. "I see manipulation of the voters' pamphlet all the time."

Buehler also thinks the initiative process where citizens can put issues on the ballot has been abused by the Secretary of State so badly that only corporations now have the resources to



Secretary of State Candidate Knute Buehler and wife Patti speak with Heppner resident Melba Folkemer at recent town hall meeting. -Photo by David Sykes

use it.

"I have seen her (the current secretary of state) throw out pages and pages of signatures because of a clerical error," he says. "That is just not right."

He said the current Secretary of State has been in Salem so long she no longer understands regular citizens.

"She has been in Salem 20 years. I haven't been sitting in Salem voting the party line and taking special interests," Buehler says. And he asked for people's vote and for financial help for his campaign. He says he needs \$200,000 to fight

the special interests who are buying Salem.

One of Buehler's favorite quotes at the town hall about his opponent was "Is she slippery or sloppy?" in reference to an article in Willamette Week newspaper.

"Kate Brown is in the unenviable position of having to convince voters she is sloppy rather than slippery," said the newspaper.

The town hall meeting was sponsored by the Willow Creek Tea Party Patriots on Sunday, Sept. 30 at Heppner City Hall and was attended by about 40 people.

Tumbling, aerobic classes to begin

Tumbling classes for children ages three to 11 will start this Friday, Oct. 12, at the Morrow County Fairgrounds.

Aerobic classes for adults will begin Nov. 13 at the same location. Classes will be held at 6:15 on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

For more information, contact Cindy Sumner at 989-8514.

Greg Walden

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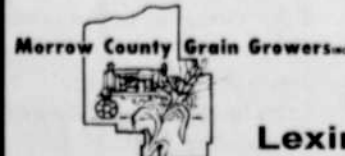
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Congratulations to Corey Sweeney, MCGG Employee of the Quarter

We are proud to have Corey as an employee at MCGG. He has been with MCGG for over 12 years where he has worked in the propane department. Corey goes out of his way to help people and does above and beyond what is expected.

Good Job Corey!!



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