



Morrow County teachers, staff honored at Crystal Apple Awards

Grant receives 2025 Legacy Award



L-R: Morrow County School District Superintendent Matt Combe with MCS D winners Stephanie Simpson, Elizabeth Graham, Addie Cole and Brook Baker. -Contributed photo



L-R: Legacy Award winner Susie Lemmon, MCS D Superintendent Matt Combe and Legacy Award winner Greg Grant. -Contributed photo



Karrie Zellars (right) with Ione School District Superintendent Tracey Johnson. -Contributed photo

Pendleton—Inter-Mountain Education Service District (IMESD) and its component school districts recently presented the 2025 Crystal Apple “Excellence in Education” Awards. Among the recipients were two Ione teachers and four Morrow County School District (MCS D) teachers.

Ione honorees were math-science teacher Dieter Waite and pre-K teacher Karrie Zellars.

MCS D award recipients were Heppner music teacher Brook Baker, Irrigon special education/ life skills teacher Addie Cole, Boardman special education/ life skills teacher Elizabeth Graham and Boardman math teacher Stephanie Simpson.

In addition to the annual

Crystal Apple awards, two MCS D staff also received 2025 Legacy Awards. Recipients were Greg Grant, head teacher and long-time football coach at Heppner high School, and Susie Lemmon, secretary at Morrow Education Center.

Dieter Waite

Dieter Waite is a math/ science teacher at Ione School District, where he has worked for one year. Thos who nominated him said he does an amazing job of leading by example using a positive attitude, setting high expectations for himself and students.

Described as kind, caring, supportive and compassionate, Waite believes in building strong connections with students in a safe environment where students can make mistakes

and learn from them for academic progress. He is adept at using multiple modes of learning for success in the classroom and eager to share knowledge.

Karrie Zellars

Karrie Zellars is a pre-K Teacher at Ione school and has worked for the district for one year. She has a lot of experience with young learners; previously, she worked for three years at Head Start, two years with Healthy Families Oregon and two years with IMESD/ Preschool Promise, in addition to 15 years of having a home preschool.

Zellars is described as patient, organized and willing to help wherever needed. She always keeps new ideas flowing into the classroom and goes above and beyond to make her stu-

dents feel seen and heard.

Brook Baker

Brook Baker is the music teacher at Heppner Elementary and Heppner Jr./ Sr. High School. She has worked for MCS D for four years. Her direction and expectations in the classroom are always clear, and her dedication to teaching and student achievement is evident.

The community is very supportive of the music program, and the concerts are standing room only. The pep band is very popular, with the football and basketball teams asking them to support them at playoff games.

“The kids just love her and can’t wait to get into fifth grade to start band classes,” says one person.

Addie Cole

Addie Cole is a special education/ life skills teacher at Irrigon Jr./Sr. High School and has worked for 10 years for the district. Her dedication and passion for student success is shown in her collaboration with students with special needs and their families. Those who know her say Cole has worked tirelessly to build meaningful relationships to promote the well-being

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Morrow County voters overhaul Health District board, school bond has the votes...for now

Morrow County’s 38.94% turnout surpasses state average in off-year election



By Chris Sykes

On May 20, 2025, Morrow County held a pivotal election with a 38.94 percent voter turnout, with 2,822 ballots cast out of 7,247 active registered voters, surpassing the statewide average of 21.83 percent.

The election reflected a community eager for change in areas like healthcare while maintaining the status quo at the Port of Morrow.

The school bond measure currently has enough “yes” votes to pass, with 50.25 percent (1,225 votes) in favor and 49.75 percent

(1,213 votes) against. However, with a deadline of May 28 for all votes to be received, the outcome could still swing to “no” votes.

Morrow County Health District: A call for new leadership

Morrow County voters signaled a strong desire for change in the Morrow County Health District (MCHD) by electing four new board members to guide healthcare priorities. MCHD, a non-profit Oregon Special District, operates Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner, clinics in Heppner, Irrigon and Ione, and provides county-wide ambulance, home health and hospice services. The past two years have been turbulent, marked by operational challenges and legal disputes.

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MCS D awaits election outcome for bond measure

Morrow County School District is awaiting the results of the May 20 election regarding Measure 25-104, the district’s General Obligation bond. As of Tuesday, May 27, the bond was narrowly passing with 50.25 percent yes votes and 49.75 percent no votes.

According to Morrow County Elections, ballots that were postmarked on Election Day were given several days to arrive and will be counted on May 28.

At 5 p.m. on May 28, Morrow County Elections will issue updated results. Official certification of the

election results will occur on June 16.

According to election law, the bond will pass with a simple majority vote, which is 50 percent of the votes counted plus one additional vote.

“While it’s very difficult to wait for election results, Morrow County School District is pleased about the number of voters who supported the bond so far. We remain committed to improving schools in our district to further student success,” School Board Chair Richard Cole said.

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Wildhorse grants help MoCo organizations

\$36,239 benefits Boardman childcare, Irrigon fire, South Morrow seniors

Three Morrow County organizations were among the 40 organizations awarded grants by the Wildhorse Foundation this quarter.

Families First Childcare of Boardman received \$11,100 for equipment and supplies, while Irrigon Rural Fire Protection District was awarded \$16,239 for protective equipment. As reported in last week’s Gazette-Times, South Morrow

County Seniors Matter also received \$9,000 to honor and assist Morrow County veterans.

The Wildhorse Foundation is a community fund managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in partnership with Wildhorse Resort & Casino. The formation of the Wildhorse

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Port to stay as CDA fiscal agent a little longer

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Port of Morrow will continue as the fiscal agent for the Columbia Development authority, at least for the time being.

According to the CDA’s current intergovernmental agreement (IGA), one of the five partners (Port of Morrow, Port of Umatilla, Umatilla County, Morrow County and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation) must serve as the fiscal agent.

The Port has been serving as the fiscal agent but intends to step away from the role following recent controversy centered around the loss of grant funding and questions about accountability.

“So I’m asking this table; does anyone else want to sign up for that?” asked POM Commission Chair Joe Taylor.

CDA Project Manager Greg Smith said he had been looking for outside resources for accounting, bookkeeping and payroll before he realized the fiscal agent has to be one of the

five members.

“We still have the ability to have that service, but at the end of the day, one of the five needs to sign off as the fiscal agent,” said Smith.

The CDA board discussed amending the IGA to allow an external contractor such as an accounting firm to serve as the fiscal agent. That would require board approval and possibly a solicitation process.

Another problem with shifting the role of fiscal agent has to do with employees. Rather than being employed directly by the CDA, the two staff, Smith and CDA Project Manager Emily Collins, are technically Port of Morrow employees in the Port’s role as fiscal agent.

Collins noted that, depending on how things shake out, the CDA might need an Employer Identification Number (EIN). That requires an individual’s Social Security Number unless the entity is a municipality or government agency, which the CDA

is not.

Smith pointed out that, depending on future conversations, the role of fiscal agent in the future could be “significantly different” from what was being discussed at the meeting. The board discussed the need for a clear scope of work for the fiscal agent, including the implications of transitioning to a contractor model.

Representatives of CTUIR indicated that serving as the fiscal agent is not a good fit for them due to state regulations and sovereign immunity concerns.

Umatilla County alternate Dan Dorran expressed hesitant interest but said he was not willing to make any promises.

“I think that eventually the CDA should have its own fiscal, responsible, point-at person,” said Dorran. “In the meantime, I think it’s worth a conversation.”

Meanwhile, the Port of Morrow agreed to continue as the fiscal agent until Aug. 1 of this year but expressed

a desire to transition away from this role.

“We can carry this ball a little bit more down the road,” said Taylor. “Maybe something will change, shake loose.”

“But that was the extent that we were willing to do for the time being,” he added.

The board voted unanimously to have the Port continue as the fiscal agent until Aug. 1.



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