

COMMUNITY

Several families choose online education over regular schooling

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
HERMISTON HERALD

For sophomore Brienne Bishop, every day is pajama day at her school.

Bishop wakes up every school day at about 6 a.m., eats breakfast and prepares her school materials, all while wearing her PJs. Unlike most students in the region, however, she doesn't catch a bus or a ride to a school building. The farthest Bishop goes is the computer in her home, no more than a few steps from her bed.

Bishop is one of several students in the area completing her school career online through Oregon Connections Academy, which is the largest state-wide virtual public charter school in Oregon. The school enrolls about 3,700 students across the state.

For Bishop and her brother, Jonathan, taking classes online, as opposed to sitting in a regular classroom, just works better for their learning styles and schedules. Bishop's mother, Sherry, said the two have attended public schools off and on in the past before eventually de-

cidng online education works best for them.

Sherry Bishop said Brienne is very advanced and couldn't get the instruction she needed while at the regular high school in Boardman.

"They always teach to the lower-level students," she said.

But with the online program, Brienne Bishop can quickly work her way through subjects in which she excels and take her time at those where she requires additional help.

"I like it better because the classes are better, and I can work at my own pace," she said. "Some of the stuff goes so much faster than it would in a regular school, and for others I need more time. It works out."

The Connections program makes sure its students have ample opportunity to socialize with one another. Hermiston resident Jennifer Malcom is a community coordinator for the school, and it is her job to schedule field trips at least once a month for the area students in the program.

Malcom organized a bowling day at Desert Lanes Family Fun Center Thursday where the Bishop family and a couple others bowled a few games together.



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

Hermiston online student Kelsie Malcom prepares to bowl this week at Desert Lane Family Fun Center. Malcom does school all online through Oregon Connections Academy. Students have the opportunity to participate in monthly 'field trips' with others in the online program.

Malcom said she has four children enrolled through the online program. Her children have also attended public school but found online schooling better suits their schedules and interests.

"We moved here about three years ago from Colorado," she said. "My son was pretty bored in school here, and he also had some health issues. We tried Connections."

After seeing their brother's success, Malcom's other children wanted to go to online school, as well. Malcom said it gives them more time for extra-curricular activities. Her oldest daughter, Kelsie, also is taking all honors classes, which freshmen cannot do at Hermiston High School.

Kelsie Malcom said she also likes the course selection offered

through Connections.

"I've taken French, a digital art class," she said.

For her French class, she video chatted with her teacher and often found herself as the only person in that particular class.

"It was like having a private teacher," Jennifer Malcom said.

Malcom said her younger children still enjoy the social interaction they would get at public school. Her daughter Nyllee, who is in first grade, has the opportunity to do show and tell and interact with her peers with a program similar to a Skype chat room through Connections.

The online option, however, may not be for everyone.

"We are supposed to check daily to make sure they are staying up with everything," said Hermiston resident Carrie Spalione, whose son Ronnie is completing his senior year through the program. "With anything online, it is easy to procrastinate ... The success with the program depends on parent involvement. If (the students) are left to their own agenda, they are probably not going to keep up unless they are very motivated."

Umatilla Planning Commission makes progress on the proposed commercial zone overhaul

Strip clubs would be prevented from opening in neighborhood and downtown zones

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

After a several month process, the Umatilla Planning Commission has determined where new strip clubs will be allowed to open in the city.

At the commission meeting Tuesday, members continued to work on commercial zoning changes and agreed that any additional adult entertainment businesses will only be allowed in the current general commercial zone and a proposed new zone, highway commercial, and only after obtaining a conditional use permit from the Planning Commission.

Chairman Boyd Sharp said several more steps must be completed, includ-

ing a public hearing, before the commission will forward its recommendations to the Umatilla City Council, which will decide whether or not to adopt the changes. He said, although the process was inspired to further regulate strip clubs, the way the proposed regulations have been achieved by overhauling all of the commercial zoning ordinances is far more important.

"Instead of just addressing adult entertainment, which would be a very narrow, narrow focus, we're addressing how we want our city to look," he said. "What we've done is actually move completely out of worrying about adult entertainment. We're worrying more about how our city should look, and adult entertainment is only a part, a very small part, of what we want our city to look like. I think it was what started us, but it really has become a secondary piece of what we're doing."

After the City Council imposed a four-month moratorium on new adult entertainment businesses

in September to create further regulations, Umatilla City Planner Bill Searles recommended the Planning Commission determine each type of use that would be allowed in each of the city's commercial zones, rather than only addressing adult businesses.

By specifying exactly what uses, or categories of uses, that will be allowed in each of Umatilla's four current commercial zones and the proposed fifth zone, Searles and the Planning Commission hope to create a framework that will differentiate the zones — and prohibit certain uses from incompatible locations.

Sharp said the commission still has several steps to complete before holding a public hearing and eventually submitting the proposal to the City Council.

On Tuesday, the commission finished determining what zones will allow various types of businesses from a list of more than 200 uses, such as veterinary services and barber shops, and categories, such as miscellaneous nondurable goods

merchant wholesalers. Sharp said the commission will review the list at the next meeting and address any issues, but he is pleased with the progress so far.

"I'm just excited about what we've done and the discussion we've had and all the things we've looked at," he said. "I had no idea that there were over 400 classifications of business, and you begin to look at that and think, 'Where do I want those? How do I want my city to look?' I mean, that's inspiring. It will improve our city, and I think that's part of what people want is an improved city to live in."

Sharp said the commission will also need to look at the parcels of land that are currently designated as one of the four commercial zones and determine if the particular designation is still valid or if it should be changed to one of the other commercial zones.

He said the final step before the public hearing will be to review the ordinance language for each of the zones.

Searles said, currently, the ordinance language for all of the zones is similar: off-street parking, for example, could be addressed differently in each of the zones.

"Right now, we have sort of one-size-fits-all standards for all the zones, and I think if we truly want to try to shape the community, we need to look at each zone individually and say, 'Does the one-size-fits-all work with the process we've been going through, or do we need to develop, as much as possible, standards to fit each zone to help shape it,'" Searles said. "Partly, so that when somebody comes in to make an application for a certain use, assuming it's allowed in the zone, that they're not having to needlessly address a bunch of standards that really don't apply. That just makes more work for everybody."

Commissioner Ramona Anderson said she believed the entire commer-

cial zone overhaul will be "very helpful" and provide consistency for the city.

"I know that we missed some things 15 years ago, or whenever that was, but we have a city planner now, which we did not have then, and that makes a huge difference when you have somebody in City Hall who actually is a real city planner," she said. "We've never had any consistency downtown, as far as things come in, go out, come in, go out, and there weren't any standards to even go by."

Sharp agreed. "The city was so concerned about having businesses open in the city instead of having vacant lots and vacant buildings that whatever wanted to be in there was in there," he said. "Now, we're saying, 'No. Here's what we really want in here. We want to fill these buildings with these, not just any old business that decides they want to come in.' I think that in itself is going to improve our city."



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