

ATTENDANCE:

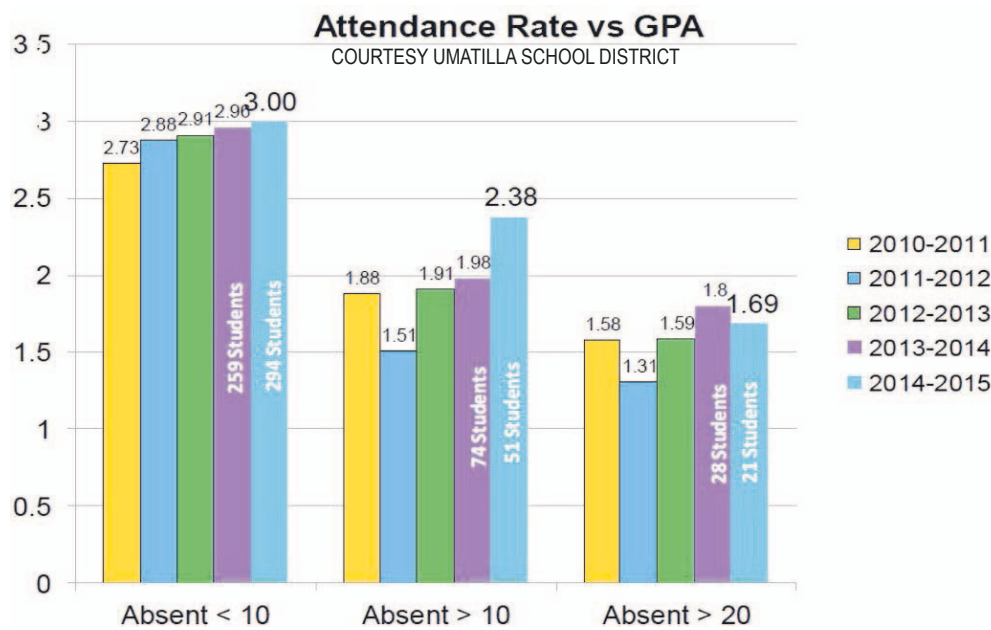
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pared with 28 students last year during the same period.

Depew also said more students — 294 — were absent fewer than 10 days this year as of January, compared with the 259 students who missed less than 10 days during the same period last year, meaning more students are absent for fewer days than before.

Depew said the students who missed fewer than 10 days averaged a GPA of 3.0. Those who missed between 10 and 20 percent of school averaged a 2.38 GPA. Students who were absent more than 20 percent averaged a 1.69 GPA.

Since instituting the new policy, Depew said 197 students made the Dean's List and Honor Roll, which is al-



most double from last year. To make the Dean's List, students must achieve a GPA of at least 3.5, and for the honor roll, a student's GPA has to be between 3.0 and 3.499.

Vice Principal Ryan Ferguson said he thinks the atten-

dance policy has contributed to students' success this year.

"Because kids are here more, we know that they are learning," he said. "I do think it has definitely been a major piece."

Ferguson said the school

monitors student absences for 20-day increments throughout the year. For students who have eight half-day or four full-day absences on their record in that time, Ferguson and UHS counselor Rachel Carter personally deliver let-

ters to their home stating that their attendance must change immediately. On their home visits, they also speak with the child's parent or guardian.

"Honestly, most of the conversations have been positive," Ferguson said. "We can put a name to the face, they can put a face to the name and I think that personal touch has been big."

If attendance still does not improve, school officials meet with the parents or guardians and the student at the school. Ferguson said, if student attendance has not improved before then, it usually does after that meeting. If attendance still doesn't improve, he said they put a folder together and submit it to the Umatilla Police Department, and parents may receive a \$500 fine.

Ferguson said through January, the district submitted folders of about 11 students to the Umatilla Police Department. He said those numbers

are probably now closer to 16 or 17 students. The harsh repercussions, however, he said, have positively impacted student attendance.

"The majority of those kids are now here and coming to school," he said.

Ferguson said the high school's attendance rate is now about 95 percent.

Ferguson said school officials were certain the new attendance policy would show positive gains, but it is nice to have the data to support that.

He said the effort does require some extra time on his and Carter's part, but it has been worth it.

"Hopefully we just continue to see steady progress and the numbers that we want," he said. "It is still kind of new, but so far, it has been really good. Any time we can pick up 40 kids, that is always a good thing, and the police department continues to be awesome."

REAL ESTATE:

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an area, look for a rental and then choose their own home to purchase after a while."

Parsons said, whether a person wants to purchase a home for investment or personal use, the cost per square foot is less locally than other areas.

"I believe Hermiston and Umatilla moderate-priced homes, the \$150,000 range, you can get a lot of home for your money, as compared to some of the areas in the state where a \$150,000 home would just be very minimum," she said. "In this area, there's a good value for your home and a good value when you purchase it."

According to the study, Umatilla homes cost an average of \$90.17 per square foot, and Hermiston homes cost \$97.70, which were among the lowest in the study with the lowest cost of \$61.39 in Nyssa.

In the study, Umatilla earned an 8.97 out of 10 market health index score, which is based on how soon homes generally sell when placed on the market, compared to 8.89 in Hermiston.

"If they are in good condition and priced fairly with where the current market is, they usually go fairly quickly," Parsons said.

She said, whether buying or selling a home, people should consult with a real estate broker, who can provide a variety of services to ensure all steps in the process are done correctly.

The full study is available at nerdwallet.com/cities.

FROST:

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moved to Hermiston in the middle of January.

Frost said he was told it was always sunny here, and he was beginning to wonder if everyone had been lying to him until the sun began to shine recently. He said, overall, the weather has been "quite a bit nicer" here — and he hopes the summer's dry heat is less "miserable and suffocating" than Wisconsin's humidity — but, otherwise, he has noticed similarities between the two locations.

"There's fewer trees than what I'm used to, but, as far as driving around and looking at the land, it looks pretty similar," he said. "Where I'm from, they have the same sort of central-pivot irrigation going on (and) a lot of the same crops. I grew up in potato country."

Frost said the culture and people are similar, as well, and he is currently meeting with local agricultural stakeholders to determine how he should focus his research.

"I'm trying to sit down and talk to as many people here that are associated with agriculture and trying to see what they think the need is here," he said. "Basically, what I want to try to do is integrate some of the basic studies on plant pathogens and deliver that information to growers and other stakeholders in the industry to help them manage their crops better."

Frost said he is assuming the responsibility for several projects started by retiring plant pathologist Phil Hamm, who will still maintain his role as station director. Frost said he is still determining what projects he will begin himself.

He said part of his job consists



SEAN HART PHOTO

Hermiston Agricultural Research & Extension Center Plant Pathologist Ken Frost stands in a field at the facility where an experiment was testing how different wheat varieties fared during the winter.

of obtaining funding for research projects by writing grants and building relationships with people who may fund projects. Frost said he will also manage research trials at HAREC and possibly on local farms once he establishes relationships with growers.

As a plant pathologist, Frost will also manage the diagnostics clinic at HAREC, which is used for research and outreach.

"The clinic is essentially a laboratory where growers or any member of the community can send in a sample for disease diagnosis," he said. "If they have a problem with a plant growing in the yard, or a grower has a problem with a plant growing in the field or they need soil diagnostics done, then we pro-

vide fee-for-service diagnostics trying to figure out what's going on with the plant or the soil."

The extension position is a part of the OSU Department of Botany, and Frost recently traveled to the main campus in Corvallis for an orientation.

"Officially, my appointment is 75 percent extension and 25 percent research at the university," he said. "What I sort of see that meaning is I put experiments in the ground to try to study pathogen biology and ecology, and my goal is to take what I learn from those experiments and then extend that to the grower community with the hope that it will help them grow a better crop or be more profitable in what they're doing."



SEAN HART PHOTO

Ken Frost, who recently replaced Phil Hamm as the plant pathologist at the Hermiston Agricultural Research & Extension Center, examines a tobacco plant, which can be used to remove harmful substances from soil.

PRIOR:

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he attended the University of Idaho to earn a degree in mechanical engineering. Afterward, he worked for two years for Sperry Corporation in El Paso, Texas, and in Denver, Colorado, before he realized that farming was a better fit for him and returned to work for the family farm. In 1975, he decided to make the move to Hermiston.

Since Prior moved to the region, he has owned and operated his farm, Eagle Ranch, in Echo, where he grew a variety of crops with sons Art and David. It was through agriculture that friend and Hermiston Agricultural Research & Extension Center Director Phil Hamm came to know him.

"Chet, of course, was a long-time supporter for the experiment station," he said. "He was highly involved with the experiment station in the past, serving on advisory committees. He is also a (Oregon State University) College of Agriculture Sciences Hall of Fame award winner."

Hamm said Prior and late agronomist Don Homeck were instrumental in getting the station's first center pivots, which they used for research at the facility.

"It was really innovative because there wasn't any research facilities that had center pivot irrigation systems," he said. "In 1989-1990, Chet

and Don were people that spearheaded that effort. They knew and understood that doing research under the same kind of growing conditions they operated under would only further the ag community."

Prior's efforts, however, benefited more than just the agriculture community, Hamm said. In addition to promoting and providing for the region's food supply, Prior was also a strong advocate for the region in general, he said.

Prior served on the board for the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center up until his death. He also served as the president of the Hermiston Development Corporation for many years, and was a board member for the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, the Northwest Livestock Production Credit Association, the Port of Umatilla, Good Shepherd Medical Center and a member of the Hermiston Airport Advisory Committee.

Prior was also active with the Echo School District. Superintendent Raymon Smith said Prior was always willing to be a judge for an FFA event or support students in the Umatilla County Fair Youth Livestock Auction.

"He basically was a role model for students and adults, alike, in how he conducted himself and served the community," Smith said.

Additionally, Prior served on the Umatilla County Budget Committee, was a

member of the Hermiston Rotarians, founded the Echo Kiwanis Club and spearheaded the Echo Food Pantry, which provides food for people in the community who may not be able to afford it.

Prior also lobbied for local, regional and state issues, in addition to being a member of a core group of people working to secure greater access to water resources in the area. Piercy said Prior was the go-to person for many government issues in the region.

Oregon State Rep. Greg Smith described Prior as someone who was an economic development leader for not only the Hermiston area, but for west Umatilla County and eastern Oregon.

"He was one of the original pioneers of trying to bring water to the region and to advocate for sustainable agriculture, but everybody knows that about Chet," he said.

Smith said what many people may not talk about as much is just how generous Prior was.

"He was always looking to give to those community projects to make sure that we live in a better community," he said. "I have had an opportunity to work with him off and on for the last 16 years during my time in the Legislature, and he always proved himself to be statesman and a strong advocate for the community."

Smith said Prior was one

to always listen and observe issues before he spoke.

"That really speaks about his wisdom," he said.

Smith also said Prior was a character.

"He was a fun guy to be around," he said. "He was always one of the first people, once the work was done, to crack a joke. He is surely going to be missed."

Friend and former Hermiston City Manager Ed Brookshier said he worked

with Prior in a variety of capacities through the years, and the region won't be the same without him.

"He did so many positive things," he said. "He has been very much, for a long time, involved in the economic development of the community ... He contributes quietly, but very generously, to local charities. It would be very difficult for me to think of anyone that I would compare him to. I considered him a

good friend."

Brookshier said Prior was always positive but could be stubborn and skeptical, which he described as a good qualities.

"But he always, always, whatever he was engaged in, it was always representative of the interest of the community of our area ... in a way that could always move the community forward," Brookshier said. "I am really going to miss him."

Submit Your Pictures!

The East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald are looking for wedding photos to showcase in our Bridal Planner that publishes March 7, 2015.

Deadline Wednesday Feb 18th.

By mail: 211 SE Byers, Pendleton, OR 97801
By email to ajacobs@eastoregonian.com
Please include the names of the Bride and Groom!
Any questions, please call Amanda 541-278-2683