

# Hermiston schools grow safety net

## Board sets fund balance, enrollment target

By JENNIFER COLTON  
Staff Writer

The Hermiston School District will grow its safety net in the 2016-17 school year. The school board met Monday for a work session to discuss financial planning parameters for the 2016-17 school year. The parameters, set by the board, provide the basis for the district budget.

The board agreed by consensus to plan for modest enrollment growth and to keep the “ending fund balance,” or the amount of money left in the district accounts at the end of the school year, at a minimum of 8 percent of the district’s total budget; however, the board also provided an objective for the district administration to grow that balance to at least 9 percent.

An 8 percent slice of the district’s budget is about \$4 million, and the balance provides both a safety net for the district and allows operating expenses during the summer months before state funding is distributed in the fall.

For the 2015-16 school year, the district is at an 8.75 percent level, according to Deputy Superintendent Wade Smith. The management objective for the 2015-16 school year was to keep the balance above 8.5 percent.

“We still haven’t fully

### In other business, the board:

- Unanimously accepted the consent items without discussion. The consent items included personnel resignations for Blaine Ganvoa, athletic director at Hermiston High School; Cynthia Moran, second-grade teacher at Rocky Heights Elementary; and Sarah O’Gorman, kindergarten teacher at Desert View Elementary.
- Heard a presentation from Rocky Heights Elementary staff about recent events, goals and development.
- Discussed a proposal to move Outdoor School to the fall for the 2016-17 school year.
- Proclaimed March 7-11 as Classified Employee Week.
- Met in an executive session to discuss the superintendent’s evaluation. No action was taken after the executive session.

recovered from the recession, so we knew growing that was going to be difficult, but we agreed to try to move toward 9 percent,” Smith said.

Smith said that 9 percent could be important while the district faces state-mandated PERS funding increases. PERS increases every two years, so the next increase will be in the 2017-18 school year.

In addition to the EFB amount, the board also set the parameter for enrollment growth at an increase of 50 weighted students. A student’s funding “weight,” referred to as ADMw, includes aspects such as poverty level, English-language proficiency and disabilities. Smith said straight increases in enrollment do not always equal straight increases in

state funding.

“This year, although we’re up 200 students, we think we’re going to get paid an increase of about 80ADMw,” Smith said. “Next year, do we think we’re going to be up 150-200 students? Absolutely. Do we think we’re going to be up 150ADMw? No.”

The 2015-16 increase will offset a loss in funding for teacher experience. Schools with long-term experienced teachers receive additional funding; the hiring increase in Hermiston last year — 62 new hires — meant the district did not receive that experience bonus.

During the March school board meeting, the board will discuss the final two funding parameters: the PERS reserve and the funding per ADMw assumptions.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER COLTON

Students competing in the Battle of the Books have to prove knowledge of 16 different books this year.

## BOOKS

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Oregon Battle of the Books is a statewide reading motivation and comprehension program. The program challenges students in third through 12th grade with trivia and critical thinking questions based on 16 pre-selected books. The Oregon Battle of the Books program is run by volunteers through the Oregon Association of School Libraries and partially funded through the Library Services and Technology Act.

The students of the YMnMs — Maria Tejada, Sally Wooster, Yaloani Alvarado, Mirely Reyes and Nazly Chavez — have been involved with Battle of the Books for years and said they participate because they like to read, it’s fun, and it’s a challenge.

“The hardest part is remembering the details. The best is getting to read good books — and a variety of books. It isn’t all the same genre,” eighth-grader Nazly Chavez said.

This year, each Armand Larive and Sandstone middle schools received a grant from the Oregon Battle of the Books organization that covered the registration fee and a book box with one copy of each of the 16 books used in the middle school divisions.

Delia Wallis, librarian for Hermiston High School, Sandstone and Armand Larive Middle school, said the program challenges students and promotes reading.

“You have to know your stuff. You have to know what color was the bicycle Bob rode down the street,” Wallis said. “It’s very difficult.”

For the first time, Herm-

iston High School will launch an Oregon Battle of the Books team next year.

For the 2015-16 school year, students are keeping their eyes in their books and on the next stage. The winners of the building competitions advance to the regional competition: March 5 at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.

While the YMnMs have already earned their place, other students are heading into their building finals this week.

At Hermiston elementary schools, finals are taking place in school gyms this week:

Rocky Heights Elementary, Thursday at 9:15 a.m.

Desert View Elementary, Friday at 8:15 a.m.

Sunset Elementary, Friday at 10:10 a.m.

Highland Hills, Friday at 1:15 p.m.

395 between Hermiston Foods and the Wal-Mart Distribution Center. Planning commission documents in the agenda packet identify that retailer as farm supply and sporting goods store Ranch & Home.

He said the retailer had begun the application process with the city to build a 100,000 square foot store and develop several “lease pads” that could end up hosting restaurants, gas stations or other small retailers. Spencer said without a traffic signal being installed at what is currently known as the “Hermiston Foods driveway” traffic would be limited to a right turn in and right turn out, discouraging visitors to the stores.

“The store itself could function without a traffic signal, but you would need

one with the lease pads,” Spencer said.

City councilors agreed that a traffic signal at the development’s entrance — as well as previously-proposed ones at places like Airport Road and the Wal-Mart Distribution Center — were likely necessary but they needed to be stop lights, not roundabouts.

“It definitely slows traffic way down,” councilor Rod Hardin said.

Councilors voted unanimously to continue the public hearing on the matter until their March 14 meeting, allowing staff to discuss with ODOT whether the state transportation commission would still sign off on the Transportation System Plan without adding the recommendation for roundabouts.

## HWY 395

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During a workshop before the council’s regular meeting, city planner Clint Spencer stressed that the Transportation System Plan is not a construction plan, but rather a “conceptualization” of what the city’s transportation needs might be over the next 20 years.

The state won’t give the city money for projects if they aren’t included in the plan, so he said it was important to include all projects that the city might be interested in pursuing.

Spencer said the amendment process began after conversations with a “large retailer” interested in developing a portion of Highway

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