

TEST:

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two language arts and two mathematics — and each test will take about 4 hours to complete. Eighth-graders will also complete a science assessment.

At Sandstone, the testing is being presented less as a chore and more as an opportunity, said Principal Larry Usher.

“We want to change the perception of testing to make it something to inspire students to do their best. We’ve told our kids this is their opportunity to show the state

how good they are and how much they know — just like in athletics,” Usher said.

Like a sports season, the school hosted its kickoff party and spirit line and has motivated students through its own “fight song” — written and performed by Sandstone choir students. A video of “Sandstone Middle School Testing Theme Song,” written to the tune of Rachel Platten’s “Fight Song” is available at the school’s website: sms.hermiston.k12.or.us.

Usher said the school is focusing on the theme “Be greater than yesterday” and highlighting growth rather than

straight achievement. As the second year of Smarter Balanced assessment, this is the first year students and schools will be able to measure growth on the test.

Every Sandstone student also received a handwritten note of encouragement, either from a parent or school staff.

“We want to make sure our students who walk in knowing they aren’t going to hit the benchmark know we’re supporting them just as much as any other student,” Usher said. “If we focus on growth, then achievement will come. We want to keep every student motivated to do their best.”



STAFF PHOTO BY JENNIFER COLTON

Eighth-grader Cheyenne Ruloph moves through a “spirit line” Monday morning at Sandstone Middle School. The line was one part of the school’s kick off for Smarter Balanced standardized testing.

FATE:

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back and take a longer view,” assistant city manager Mark Morgan told the city council Monday night.

The conference center’s fate came into question in early 2015, when city staff voiced the opinion that it didn’t seem prudent to use the city’s resources to subsidize both the Hermiston Conference Center and the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, which plans to open its event center to the public May 13, with full completion of the surrounding fair and rodeo grounds in August 2017.

The committee’s recommendation on Monday was that the city’s top livability priority should be ensuring the completion and success of EOTEC. Once the event center part of the project has

been operating for over a year, a consultant should be brought in to study the relationship between the event center and conference center in depth.

“Basically, is one cannibalizing the other, or is there actually a complementary relationship?” Morgan said.

At that point the city could look at its options with the conference center.

In the meantime, the Livable Hermiston Committee laid the groundwork for the city to look at what its next big project should be. In 2015 it put out an open-ended community survey asking what the top priority should be if the city suddenly had a multi-million dollar windfall for a new project.

Morgan said the most popular responses fell into five categories: A year-round indoor aquatics center, a youth/family activity center such as a YMCA,

Number of survey respondents who said they “loved” an idea:

Indoor aquatic center: 89 percent

Downtown revitalization: 86 percent

More parks: 83 percent

Family/youth activity center: 83 percent

Arts and culture center: 64 percent

an arts and cultural center, downtown revitalization projects and more parks and trails.

More than 1,000 community members were given a second survey about those five options, and more than 80 people participated in focus groups.

In both the survey and the focus groups, an indoor aquatic center had the most support, with 89 percent support in the survey and 93

percent support in the focus groups. Morgan said people made it clear, however, that it was only worth building if it could become a multi-use regional attraction and not simply an indoor lap swimming pool.

The focus groups’ second priority was a community activity center, while survey respondents’ second choice was downtown revitalization. An arts and culture center came in last with both

groups.

The Livable Hermiston Committee recommended that the city begin a feasibility study for an aquatic center, a family activity center or a combination of both housed in the same facility.

The city council accepted the recommendations to hold off on more studies until 2017. Mayor David Drotzmann commented that it was nice to have community buy-in on the next steps, and councilor John Kirwan said the committee’s work was helpful in seeing where the city should focus its resources after EOTEC is up and running.

The plan leaves the conference center in limbo for now. A contract with the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, which is housed in and manages the center, currently runs through the end of 2017.

According to information

supplied by Morgan in 2015, the city uses money from the transient room tax fund to pay the chamber about \$64,000 to run the conference center, plus shells out another \$30,000 for insurance, utilities and maintenance.

The center costs about \$179,000 a year total to operate but only brings in \$130,000 in revenue from events. The city will be on the hook for at least \$50,000 a year toward EOTEC’s operating costs once the full project is built.

A recent insurance appraisal valued the conference center building and property at \$3.2 million.

The conference center came about in 1994, when the community raised \$600,000 and added it to \$250,000 from the city and a \$300,000 loan from the city’s general fund to renovate a former Safeway.

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