

Hermiston hires graduation coach

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Omar Medina has been hired as Hermiston High School's first ever graduation coordinator.

and dropout-prevention strategies. State funds are allotted to school districts based on the school's average daily membership (weighted), or enrollment. For the 2017-2018 school year, school districts were required to submit written requests to the Oregon Department of Education detailing how they would allocate their funds. In the years after, districts will have to submit a biennial plan, identifying ways they will address the three main tenets of Measure 98.

Spoo said he hoped Medina's role will help pick up some of the students who might otherwise get missed in a big school. Currently, Hermiston High School has 1,677 students enrolled.

"I don't want kids to get lost," he said. "Omar will

probably have time to work with some juniors and seniors, too. We absolutely believe this is a sustainable position."

The 2015-2016 graduation rate for the Hermiston School District, which included Hermiston High School and the now-defunct Innovative Learning Center, was 65.68 percent, below the state average of 74.8 percent. Hermiston High School's graduation rate by itself was 87.6 percent.

The Innovative Learning Center has been dissolved and absorbed back into the high school, but the online courses will still be available to students. That facility had a graduation rate of 4.08 percent, but school officials noted that graduation was not the goal for all students in that program, with many working toward a GED or modified diploma. The completion rate for that program was 37.8 percent.

Medina said he expects his work will vary from student to student, and will rely somewhat on data that shows which students need the most help.

"I think the focus will be on freshmen and sophomores," Medina said. "We're really trying to not let

them get to the point where they're juniors and seniors, and realize they need to do credit retrieval. We're helping them get engaged in the first two years of school."

Medina said he will be helping students with goal-setting activities, assessing what they want to do after they graduate, and helping them understand what they need to do while they're still in high school to get to that point. He acknowledged that while college may not be the goal for all students, a high school diploma or GED is now required for many fields.

Spoo noted that while the results of Medina's work may not be seen right away, he expects the long-term effects of having a graduation coordinator to be obvious.

"We're trying to see the number of disengaged students drop," Medina said. "And the number of students dropping out of school go down."

Spoo agreed.

"If we see a reduction of kids getting pulled into credit recovery, or kids getting their parents called — if we see that, we're absolutely being successful. But it will probably take a couple of years."

Echo, Stanfield schools receive Community Resource Officer

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
STAFF WRITER

Some parents may be alarmed to see a police officer regularly wandering the halls of their child's school. But the goal of the new Community Resource Officer at Echo and Stanfield schools is to elicit just the opposite reaction.

"I'm not here because there are any problems," said Officer Joyce Wright, a Stanfield police officer. Starting this year, she will split some of her time between Echo and Stanfield school districts, spending time in the classrooms and hallways and getting to know students.

"The Stanfield Police Department wanted to get more involved with the community. The goal is to get someone in the school so they see a familiar face (from the police)," she said.

Wright spends about 20 hours per week going between Echo and Stanfield schools. She spends the rest of her time working as a code enforcement officer and on general patrol.

"I bounce back and forth between both schools during the day," she said. "I try to make contact with each high school at least once a day."

Wright said the school resource officer job is a jack-of-all-trades position, with some administrative responsibilities like school safety plans and emergency drills. The main goal of her position is to get involved in classrooms and interact with students and teachers on subjects related to law enforcement or drug and alcohol abuse.

"We hope it will be a good bridge between law enforcement and students," said Echo School District superintendent Raymon Smith.

While Wright hasn't taught any specific lessons yet, she said her first weeks getting to know students and staff at both schools have been positive.

"The other day, I talked to a student about forensics and careers in law enforcement," she said.

Wright previously worked for Hermiston Police for 15 years, where she spent time as a school resource officer at the middle schools and two elementary schools.

Superintendent Shelley Liscom said the schools wanted to use Wright's position to increase safety in the school environment for both students and staff.

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