

GRAD RATES

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One factor in the low rates, Spoo said, was the 2016 dissolution of the Innovative Learning Center, Hermiston's alternative school. Those students were absorbed back into the high school.

"We're still seeing the ramifications of the ILC dissolving," Spoo said.

The graduation rate for Hermiston High School this year, including alternative school students, was 72.5 percent. Last year, with those students in a separate category, the high school graduation rate was 87.6 percent.

However, the district-wide graduation rates between the two years were roughly the same — with a 65.82 percent rate for 2016-2017, and 65.68 percent for the previous year. Those rates include students who take classes online.

Interim superintendent Tricia Mooney said many students from surrounding areas come to Hermiston to earn a GED, which counts as a completion but not a graduation.

"We know that counts against our graduation rate, but we feel it's the right thing to do," she said.

Mooney and Spoo both said they are trying to focus on improving the graduation rate over the long term.

"It takes several years to see the results of what we are doing," Spoo said. He pointed to the newly-hired graduation coach, Omar Medina, who works with students, mostly freshmen and sophomores, to help them get back on track.

Spoo said he and assistant principal Scott Depew also meet one-on-one with struggling juniors and seniors, checking in with them regularly to help them get back on track.

"Research shows that once you bring an administrator in, there's a little more



Sophomore Alejandro Gutierrez, right, gets counseling for his class schedule from graduation coordinator Omar Medina on Wednesday at Hermiston High School.

STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS



Family members and friends take photos of the 2017 Hermiston High School graduating class during Saturday's graduation ceremony in the gym.

STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

of an impact, a sense of urgency," he said.

Hermiston's dropout rate is also nearly two points higher than the state average — 5.6 percent to the state's 3.8 percent. Spoo said the district hopes to study those numbers further, but said there were some challenges with dropouts.

"The district will make phone calls and try to get

those kids to come back in," he said. "We don't have a lot of control over that. Those habits have already been created — and that's a frustration for us."

Echo School District

Other schools in the area attributed their rates to continued efforts at all levels of schooling.

Echo School District had

a four-year graduation rate of 80.95, down from last year's rate of 84.62. Their dropout rate was 3.45 percent, slightly below the state average.

Echo Superintendent Raymon Smith said with a school district as small as theirs, percentages are easily skewed.

"The difference between 84 and 100 percent may be two kids," he said.

But Smith said they would continue to work on things that affect grad rates. One thing that has helped, he said, is revising their attendance policy.

"If a student misses more than nine days, for any reason, they have to make it up hour for hour," Smith said. "That's helping us keep better track of students."

Stanfield School District

Stanfield School District made a small gain this year, with a rate of 86.67. Last year they had a graduation rate of 85.29 percent.

Stanfield's dropout rate was above the state average, at 4.52 percent.

In an email, Stanfield Secondary School Counselor Kirsten Wright said the district has a strong college-going culture, and tries to show students how their schooling relates to life after high school.

She added that the district continues to work with students with disabilities — the area that needed the most improvement with graduation rates — and keep an eye on students in lower grades for signs they may be struggling, like absenteeism or

failing core classes.

"Staff at SSS are meeting every six weeks to review our list of kids that we have identified for intervention as part of our 'on-track progress monitoring' for graduation," Wright said.

Umatilla School District saw a jump of nearly 10 points in the rate of its four-year cohort, with a graduation rate of 81.7 percent. Last year's rate was 72.2 percent. But the district's dropout rate was 6.53 percent.

Superintendent Heidi Sipe credited staff members' commitment to following through with students.

"I think that's one of the things [Principal] Bob Lorence provides really well at the high school," Sipe said. "He follows through, and makes sure students are meeting those expectations. When he first started, the kids weren't very thrilled about the level of expectation and accountability. But kids need boundaries."

She said Umatilla High School staff have been diligent about checking in with struggling students. They also have benefited from resources from the Inter-Mountain Educational Service District.

"There are a host of services through the ESD at the K-12 level, which are essential to our collective success as a region," she said.

She cited monthly meetings between all the superintendents in the ESD, where they share ideas and discuss things that are successful for their respective schools. Hermiston is not a member of the ESD.

BY THE WAY

BTW

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A mixed bag of **Dr. Seuss** fun is featured in an upcoming production at **Hermiston High School**.

Drama and music students will present "**Seussical: The Musical**" Feb. 9-10 and Feb. 16-17 at 7 p.m. and a matinee show Sunday, Feb. 18 at 2 p.m. All performances are in the school's auditorium. Tickets, which are \$10 for adults, \$8 for senior citizens and \$5 for students, can be purchased in advance at the high school bookkeeping office.

For a full story and photos about the production, see next week's *Hermiston Herald*.

Several area farmers

were recently recognized as being outstanding in their field during the **2017 National Corn Growers Association's Corn Yield Contest**.

Kristen Corpus of Hermiston achieved a winning yield of 310.7090 bushels per acre in the irrigated category with DEKALB DKC62-05.

Also, a trio of Boardman farmers swept the No-Till/Strip Till Irrigated division with **Vern Frederickson** taking top honors for his DEKALB DKC62-05, which yielded 315.7699 bushels per acre. **Nolan Mills** placed second with Pioneer(r) P0805AM(tm), with a yield of 308.7628 bushels; and **Emily Rea's** 258.6239-bushel yield, which came in third, was with Pioneer(r) hybrid P0157.

The NCGA Corn Yield Contest is an annual com-

petition among corn producers with the goal of producing the highest yields. Growers compete in six corn production classes.

For more about the association, including a link to a list of all contest winners, visit www.ncga.com.

Echo has joined the list of local schools to offer a robotics program to its students. Superintendent **Raymon Smith** said the program was introduced this year, and is run by science teacher **Don Walker**. Smith said the school is sending four teams to an upcoming competition.

You can submit items for our weekly *By The Way* column by emailing your tips to editor@hermistonherald.com or share them on social media using the hashtag #HHBTW.

STREET

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"We're to the point of construction and we're very excited about that," city planner Clint Spencer told a group of downtown business owners at an informational meeting Monday.

The project will put the sidewalk and lanes of travel on the same level, separating pedestrians from vehicles using trees and short posts called bollards instead of a curb. During events such as farmer's markets or arts festivals, the street — which will feature decorative brickwork, landscaping, lighting and other elements — can be blocked to vehicle traffic.

Representatives from Moreno & Nelson answered questions about access to building entrances, cleanup and other concerns Mon-

day, and said they hoped to make construction as painless as possible for nearby businesses and First United Methodist Church. While the sidewalks in front of businesses like Scrubs Life and Brickhouse Coffee & Bistro will be missing for part of the construction phase, contractors plan to lay down gravel and take other steps to make it easier for the public to access the buildings.

They said the best thing people can do is spread the word that though there will be work going on during the day Monday through Friday businesses are still open. The same portion of Second Street has been closed to vehicles the last three Decembers for the city's Christmas tree and light display.

Future phases will extend the festival street farther down Second Street in both directions and add a water feature to the munic-

ipal parking lot across from city hall, but Spencer said the timeline for those would depend on future funding opportunities.

As parking spaces are removed from one side of the street but changed to diagonal spots on the other, Spencer said the first phase should end up with the same number of total parking spaces as before. He said the city was looking for a place to move the cardboard collection station in the parking lot to free up a couple of extra spaces there during construction.

"Substantial" completion of the project is planned for Memorial Day, with any final punchlist items finished by June 15.

The city hopes to use the completed festival street for annual events like Fun-fest in addition to adding some new, small events such as live music during First Thursdays to help draw people downtown.

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