

# Classroom outbursts becoming more commonplace

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
STAFF WRITER

In classrooms across Eastern Oregon, teachers have seen a swell in concerning behaviors: verbal outbursts, or students getting violent toward themselves, peers and teachers.

A report published last month by the Oregon Education Association reveals that statewide, schools are dealing with these problems more frequently.

John Scanlan, a teacher at Pendleton's Sunridge Middle School, said teachers have noticed more students coming into class ill-equipped to handle their emotions.

He said there have been instances of students flipping desks, lashing out, and teachers having to do "room clears" — removing all the other students out of a room while one child is out of control.

As board member for the National Education Association, Scanlan travels to Washington, D.C., three times a year to meet with congressional delegates and lobby for education policy.

When he went this month, he said lawmakers were blown away by the reports they heard.

"Senator Wyden's education person asked us what a 'room clear' was," he said. "He's talking about education at the policy level, but this is a real boots-on-the-ground situation."

Hermiston School District provided data for teachers injured on the job in the past five years. There has been a steady increase in the number of teacher injury reports, as well as reports in which a student caused the injury. In 2015-16, there were two student-related teacher injury reports, and in 2017-18 there were 13, out of 24 total teacher injury reports.



John Larson, OEA president and a Hermiston teacher, speaks during a school funding rally Feb. 18 in Salem. Proponents for additional funding say larger class sizes and fewer aides increase the number of outbursts from students.

District spokesperson Maria Duron said there is a difference between reported injuries and worker's comp claims. An employee is required to report an incident, but may decline to submit a claim. Additionally, she said, there has been a recent push by the Oregon School Employees Association to report student-related incidents, which has caused the incident count to climb.

Pendleton School District officials said the only data they could provide were the number of worker's comp claims. In 2018, three of 13 claims were caused by student behavior, and the previous year, two of seven were caused by students.

Throughout 2018, teachers around the state were able to share their experiences at a series of 14 forums around the state, including in Hermiston. OEA representatives asked teachers to discuss barriers they face to a safe school environment, and what changes could be made to improve that environment.

Those forums led to OEA's report, "A Crisis of Disrupted Learning." Compiling the responses of the more than 700 people who participated, the report identified a "disrupted learning environment" as a class where student behavior significantly interferes with instruction and classroom stability and safety. Educators described behaviors like verbal abuse from students, spitting or kicking, destroying property, and using scissors or pencils as weapons. The report identified contributing problems, including increased class sizes, not enough adults per student, insufficient resources to support students with special needs, a decrease in physical activity at school, and a lack of training for teachers.

A safety risk for staff and other students, the report said these behaviors also cut into instructional time for students. The behaviors also negatively impact teachers. Julie Smith, Pendleton's director of special programs, said they have to make sure they take care of their staff. "Teachers love their students," she said. "When (they) see children struggling, it takes an emotional toll on them."

Smith said more extreme behavioral problems often stem from students who are dealing with major stress-

ors outside of school, like domestic violence, financial strain on their families, or food or housing instability.

"When you live in a toxic stress environment, you're always surviving," she said. "You're not able to relate to others — you perceive everything as a threat to your safety."

That can lead to students getting violent, or running away.

Smith said those behaviors aren't new, and teachers have been dealing with them for years. But she said one reason for the spike in schools is the inclusion of those students in general education, where they may have been separated before.

Though there are many factors contributing to the problems, Scanlan said it's hard for teachers to deal with them with limited resources. He said there need to be more adults per student in schools, including counselors. Though they've added one back, a few years ago, Sunridge had one counselor for 750 students.

Though teachers feel the strain of being asked to do more with fewer resources, Smith said the district is trying to allocate funds to solve the problem.

The creation of safe spaces in the classroom, she said, has allowed children to have a place to calm down. There are also rooms where students can take structured breaks, which Smith said has drastically reduced the number of room clears.

She said they also try to identify problem behaviors early on and take preventative measures.

Scanlan said to truly address the problem, schools need more state and federal funding. More than 4,000 teachers, including Scanlan, marched in Salem on Feb. 18, calling for lawmakers to allocate more funding for public schools.

# Umatilla reviews its relationship with Chamber of Commerce

By JADE MCDOWELL  
NEWS EDITOR

The Umatilla Chamber of Commerce could take on a new look and a new relationship with the city in the near future.

The city of Umatilla's contract with the chamber isn't up for renewal until mid-2020, but City Manager David Stockdale said with all of the changes in leadership the city and chamber have both experienced in the past year he felt it might be "appropriate" to look at options for adjusting the chamber's structure and funding.

During a Feb. 19 city council meeting, the chamber board was invited to sit in on the council's closed-door executive session to "conduct deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions."

The city currently gives the chamber half of its transient room tax funds (about \$20,000-\$25,000 per year) and has also given an additional \$20,000 from the general fund this year. The city also provides in-kind services, most notably leasing the chamber's building to the organization for \$1 per year.

Stockdale told the *Hermiston Herald* that the relationship between the city and chamber has been great but the city's relatively new community development department does "a lot of similar work" and he thought it was worth having some discussions to see if changes might help both entities use their resources more effectively.

Mark Ribich, president of the chamber board and a former city councilor, said the chamber's contract runs through mid-2020 but they are always open to dis-

cussion about ways to better partner with the city. He emphasized that while the city makes decisions about how much money it gives the chamber and whether it continues to lease the chamber's building to them, the power to decide the chamber's organizational structure ultimately resides with its board.

The Greater Hermiston Area Chamber of Commerce approached the Umatilla Chamber of Commerce last year, for example, about creating a regional chamber. Ribich said the chamber board ultimately decided to decline the offer for Hermiston's chamber to essentially absorb Umatilla's.

"We were concerned that the needs of the business community here would not be served," he said.

However, he said the chamber would like to take a more regional approach in other ways.

The chamber's building, located above the Columbia River in view of the bridge from Washington, is well-situated for a visitor center. Stockdale said he recognizes this, but he also called the city-owned building a less-than-ideal place for a chamber of commerce to be located "off the beaten path from all the other businesses."

Stockdale also said as a newcomer to town he saw tremendous potential in the building and felt it was being underutilized. He suggested that the building could be used for small weddings, business meetings and other events at a low rental cost of \$150 to \$250 for a day. He said he thought that could be achieved whether or not the chamber of commerce stayed at that location.

# Hermiston's Headings earns NWC honor

By HERMISTON HERALD

Former Hermiston basketball standout Tavin Headings was named to the All-Northwest Conference second team Feb. 20. She was one of three George Fox players honored.

Emily Spencer was named to the first team, and Hai-ley Hartney was selected to the honorable mention team. Bruins coach Michael

Meek was named the NWC Coach of the Year for the third time in nine years.



Headings

Headings, a senior wing, grabbed her first honor on the All-NWC Team.

Headings led the Bruins in scoring this season with 12.4 points per game and is one of five players to average 20 or more minutes per game.

She holds the fourth-

best shooting percentage in the conference from the field (51.2) and eighth-best 3-point percentage (36.1) in conference games.

Her points per 40 minutes is the second-best among conference players at 27.5.

The Bruins (24-3) will play Greenville University (23-4) on Friday in the first round of the NCAA Division III Women's Basketball National Tournament in St. Louis.

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