

Low English Learner grad rates inspire change

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

Scott Depew had to deliver some bad news last year when he was vice principal at Hermiston High School.

"I had two English Learner students who had plenty of credits, but they were both lacking two full credits of communications," Depew said. "Getting them to understand that they'd have to stay a fifth year at school was a challenge. When you're 19, you want to leave school and get a job."

This year, as Depew settles into his new position as director of secondary education at the Hermiston School District, he knows it's not an unfamiliar story.

According to a report released this summer by the Oregon Department of Education, by the end

of 2017 to 2018 school year, just 33.3% of the English Learners (EL) who entered the Hermiston High School in 2013 graduated, compared to the near-65% state average.

"We understand there's no quick fix with this," Depew said. "We started asking, 'What is the hold up? What is the reason these kids aren't graduating?'"

The answer was, overwhelmingly, a lack of language arts and communications credits. This year, the high school will utilize sheltered communications classes in an effort to get EL students out the door with a diploma.

The classes will be taught by EL-certified teachers, and offered to high schoolers as a way to earn communications credits while also improving their language skills. The classes incorporate a reading

intervention program recently instituted by the district at the middle and high school levels, called Read 180.

Kathryn Davis, an English language development teacher at the high school, said it's a little too soon to tell for sure how the program will impact EL students. But she's hopeful.

"So far, it's been wonderful. Behavioral issues have gone down," she said.

She said the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) test is one of the only data points where students learning English can see their progress. Read 180, according to Davis, has plenty of data points good for celebrating small successes. Davis said that the addition of more EL teachers has been a help, and has been important to accommodate the growth

that the district sees in students who don't speak English as their first language.

Loretta Fitterer, the EL Newcomer teacher at Armand Larive Middle School, has seen that growth firsthand.

Last spring, there were 13 middle schoolers in the Newcomer Center program, which is a program for kids who arrive to America and need a language boost before moving onto traditional core classes. This year, there are 26.

This is the first year that middle schoolers and elementary schoolers attending the Newcomer Center will have separate classes.

"The needs developmentally for a middle schooler are much different. It's easier we separate them and focus," she said. "I think the need is there, and districts are stepping up."

Both Fitterer and Davis know first-hand the challenges that students learning English face when it comes to maintaining success at school.

She said that by the time many students reach freshman year, they hate school. They feel stuck in EL, and they are repeatedly failing.

"In my experience," Davis said, "students who are having a lot of trouble may have been born here in America, but their parents don't speak English at home. When they show up at kindergarten, they are already at a huge deficit."

Fitterer said that for many kids, English isn't just a second language. It might be a third or fourth.

She said that many of her students speak Aztec dialects at home, attend school in their home countries in Spanish, and arrive at the U.S. to eventually learn English.

Artist opens gallery at Hat Rock home

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Art aficionados are invited to view the works of artist Jean Christofori Howton at a pop-up art gallery at her Hat Rock home next month.

The show will be Oct. 12 from 3-8 p.m. at 34009 Beach Shore Drive, with art spread covering walls throughout the large, split-level home. Sno Road Winery will serve wine and chocolate.

"I have a lot of new work," Howton said.

Howton has shown her paintings and drawings at galleries around the West Coast and Europe, and was the 2005 guest of honor for the Spring Fair in Les Andelys, France.

Her works range from oil paintings of pastoral scenes to abstract pieces in mixed media. Many of her works are inspired by the French countryside. She moved to Normandy, France for 10 years after her husband died, before eventually returning to their home in Hat Rock.

Last year she decided to



HH file photo

Artist Jean Christofori Howton has shown her work at galleries in the Pacific Northwest and in Europe.

host her first home gallery show and it was such a success that she is bringing it back for a second year.

"I've got paintings everywhere," she said.

She said the first time

around she was nervous about how the show would go and had several friends on hand to help customers. This year she plans to take time to speak with each customer personally about her art.

For more information, visit her website at jeancreates.com or call Howton at 541-289-4709.

Man accidentally shoots himself in the leg

HERMISTON HERALD

A 19-year-old shot himself in the leg on Saturday afternoon outside of Pendleton.

Umatilla County Sheriff's Office undersheriff Jim Littlefield said the incident was still under investigation but appeared to be an accidental shooting.

The firearm involved was a shotgun.

Littlefield said he didn't have any more information to release until after the investigation was complete, but KVEW television station reported the man was from Hermiston and was transported to St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton for treatment.

Girls in Science explore zombies

Female students in sixth-eighth grade who love all things STEM — Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics — are invited to apply for Girls in Science.

Presented by the Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center, the event is Saturday, Oct. 26 at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande. With a theme of "Zombie Apocalypse: Is It Actually Possible?" students will put their knowledge and skills to work to

solve an engaging biomedical mystery.

There is a \$10 application fee, which provides participants with lunch, a T-shirt and supplies needed for the day. The fee will be refunded if a student is not selected to attend. There are only 100 spaces available.

Applications are due by Friday, Oct. 4. For more information or to apply, contact 541-962-3422, bhargrove@neoahcec.org or visit www.neoahcec.org.

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