

Enrollment down for Hermiston School District

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Enrollment for Hermiston School District is lower than usual, Superintendent Tricia Mooney told the school board on Monday, Aug. 24.

Mooney said that the district had about 4,500 students enrolled so far, although there are always students that don't end up enrolled until classes actually begin.

The district's records show there were 5,708 students enrolled in February of this year.

While kindergarten enrollment is down overall for the district, Mooney said more kindergartners than expected have enrolled in Desert View Elementary School, and so the district will be working this week to shift some kindergartners within the Desert View boundaries over to other elementary schools and notify parents of their child's new school assignment.

Even though school is online for now, she said, there isn't an open classroom available at Desert



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

While enrollment in Hermiston School District is down overall for 2020-21, a large number of kindergartners enrolling in Desert View Elementary School will necessitate some of the students being moved to a different school so that there is room for them when students return to the physical classroom.

View to add an additional kindergarten class once children are back in the physical classrooms.

"We don't have the capacity at Desert View in regular times to be able to move a teacher," she told the board.

While students won't begin school until Tues-

day, Sept. 8, teachers returned to the building on Monday, Aug. 24 for two weeks of training and preparing for the unique school year.

"I know the teachers are working hard, and they're probably a little overwhelmed after day one, but I'm confident

they'll be ready to go with kids in two weeks," she said.

Board member Josh Goller said he was excited to see the district welcome back its teachers.

"We look forward to a different — but still good — year with our staff

and our students coming back," he said.

Mooney said the district will be sending out schedules soon for students to pick up Chromebooks, other school supplies and their bar codes for the school lunch program from their building the week of Aug. 31-Sept. 4. Last year's high school seniors will also be able to pick up their yearbooks.

After Friday, Sept. 4, the USDA's free summer meal program will end, and the district will be back to serving breakfast and lunch only to students enrolled in the district.

Katie Saul, finance director, said breakfast will be free for all students, while lunch will be \$2.45 for elementary and middle school students, and \$2.95 for high school students. Students will be able to pick up meals from their assigned school, or there will be a limited number of bus stops around town.

During the Aug. 24 meeting, Mooney also announced that the district will be subsidiz-

ing day care for families using the Champions day care that is being set up at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

Champions, a national child care provider that has provided some after-school care for the district in the past, is charging \$190 per week per child this year to reflect its higher costs in meeting all of the pandemic-related state requirements for keeping children in small "stable cohorts" that do not mix with each other. Mooney said the district will be subsidizing \$50 a week of that cost, leaving families to pay \$140 per week, per child.

She said Champions also offers some scholarships for low-income families and discounts for military families, children of educators and families with more than one child in care. More than 50 families have requested additional information about Champions so far, Mooney said.

"I'm excited about being able to help families with \$50 per week, per child," she said.

Health director says most schools unlikely to reopen in 2020

By ALEX CASTLE
EAST OREGONIAN

Oregon schools won't be able to reopen for in-person instruction for roughly 200 days, and more restrictions may be coming for Oregonians statewide if the current rate of daily COVID-19 cases doesn't sharply decline, Gov. Kate Brown said during a media briefing Friday, Aug. 21.

"We all want in-person education to reopen. To do that we must meet our goals. Right now, on the course we're on, it's going to take too long," Brown said. "We're doing well, but we have to do better. We have to work together, and we have to do it now."

A majority of Umatilla County schools won't be permitted to reopen for in-person instruction until

both the state and the county record a test positivity rate of less than 5% for three consecutive weeks, and until the county has reported less than 10 new cases per 100,000 people for three consecutive weeks.

After peaking at a positive test rate of 24.2% before being sent back to baseline on July 31, Umatilla County recorded a positive test rate of 16% the week of Aug. 9-15, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

The state's latest data also listed the county's cases per 100,000 at 207 for the week of Aug. 3-9.

While local case numbers improved enough in recent weeks for Umatilla County to move back into Phase 1 of reopening on Aug. 20, earlier this week Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe

Fiumara shared a similar bleak outlook on local schools' prospects of reopening.

"I don't have a crystal ball and things could happen, but anybody who is expecting the schools to operate in person in Umatilla County this year, I wouldn't put much money on that," Fiumara said Aug. 19. "I hope we get there, I really do. But the numbers we've got to get to right now are really, really low."

Based on the state's current metrics, Umatilla County would have to report eight cases or less per week for three straight weeks in order for all schools to be eligible to reopen for in-person instruction. If the county can reach the metric of less than 5% test positivity rate for three weeks and reports 24 cases or

less per week over that span, then schools would be permitted to offer in-person options for kindergarten through third-grade students and school districts of less than 100 students could reopen.

But local schools reopening is also reliant on improvement in the statewide numbers, which Brown said Aug. 21 have dropped to about 300 new cases per day but need to fall to 60 new cases per day in order for in-person instruction to be viable.

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