



First local students return to classroom

Special education and ‘Newcomers’ are in school again

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

For the first time since March, some of the desks at Hermiston School District schools have students in them again.

The return to classes is extremely limited — less than 100 children in a district of more than 5,000 students — but district administrators hope it is a gateway to something more.

“We really have done a thorough job of getting staff and students ready because we want this to be successful,” Assistant Superintendent Bryn Browning said.

For all students to return, school districts must meet a list of strict metrics, including fewer than 10 new confirmed COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people in the district’s county and fewer than 5% of COVID-19 tests conducted in the county coming back positive. But the Oregon Department of Education has told districts they can begin “limited in-person instruction” for certain groups of students if no students enrolled in the district or staff employed by the district have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

Umatilla County Public Health only releases general numbers for

COVID-19 not tied specifically to school districts, so the *Hermiston Herald* and *East Oregonian* have not been able to track the metrics for limited in-person instruction in the same way the public can track the metrics for general cases per 100,000 and test positivity in the county.

Browning said Hermiston School District brought back special education students and students in the Newcomers program, which is for students who have lived in the United States for less than a year.

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Ben Longergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Some selected students are returning to the classroom for two hours a day in Hermiston School District.

UPDATES

Ballot drop boxes provided in area cities

Ballots for the 2020 general election are due on Nov. 3, 2020, by 8 p.m. Ballots should be filled out and placed in the envelop provided, and the envelop must be signed in the appropriate place for the ballot to be counted. They can be mailed back using the U.S. Postal Service by dropping them in a mailbox (no postage required) but must be received, not just post-marked, by Nov. 3.

Ballots can also be placed in a secure dropbox, where they will be picked up and taken directly to the county elections office as long as they are dropped in by 8 p.m. on Nov. 3.

Ballot drop boxes for the 2020 elections are at the following locations, according to the Oregon Secretary of State’s website:

Umatilla County

- Athena City Hall, Athena
- Confederate Tribes Nixyaawii Governance Center, Pendleton
- Echo City Hall, Echo
- Hermiston City Hall, Hermiston
- Milton-Freewater City Hall and Police Station, Milton Freewater
- Pilot Rock City Hall, Pilot Rock
- Stanfield City Hall, Stanfield
- Umatilla City Hall, Umatilla
- Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton

Morrow County

- Ione Dropbox, 260 Spring St., Ione
- Morrow County Bartholomew Building, Heppner
- Morrow County Boardman Building, Boardman
- Morrow County Planning Department, Irrigon
- Morrow County Public Works Building, Lexington

If you have not received your ballot, or it has been damaged, contact your county elections office for a replacement. Umatilla County elections office: 541-278-6254 or elections@umatillacounty.net. Morrow County elections office: 541-676-5604 or bchilders@co.morrow.or.us.



Hermiston Herald, File

The Portland General Electric coal-fired plant in Boardman went offline permanently on Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020.

Coal plant closes



Associated Press, File

The Boardman Coal Plant closed on Thursday, Oct. 15, 2020, as a part of the federal government’s plan to reduce carbon output.



Hermiston Herald, File

A stacker reclaimer digs up scoops of coal to feed a conveyer belt that fuels the Boardman Coal Plant in this undated file photo.

Boardman Generating Station powers down permanently

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

As Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay drove past the Boardman Generating Station on Friday, Oct. 16, she felt a little sad.

The station had provided a steady supply of high-paying jobs since the station came online in 1980. But on Thursday, Oct. 15 Portland General Electric powered the station down for good, leaving Oregon with no more coal-burning plants in the state.

“It’s the end of an era,” Lindsay said. “PGE and the plant have been great partners.”

The plant, located just south of Boardman, was the last coal-fired generating plant in the state and could burn as much as 8,000 tons of coal per day. According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, it was the largest single source of greenhouse emissions in Oregon.

It was those emissions that caused PGE to strike a deal with regulators in 2010 that the plant would stop burning coal in 2020.

“Our customers are counting on us to deliver a clean energy future,” PGE President and CEO Maria Pope said in a statement on

Oct. 15. “PGE’s Boardman closure is a major step on our path to meeting Oregon’s greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and transforming our system to reliably serve our customers with a cleaner, more sustainable energy mix.”

The plant employed 110 PGE employees and a variety of contractors in its prime, and had 67 employees remaining at the time of its closure. “Many” of the plant’s employees have transferred to jobs at other locations within the company or retired, according to a news release, while others will no longer be employed by PGE.

Although the plant will no longer be generating power, some employees will remain at the site over the next year to complete cleanup operations in preparation for a planned demolition and removal of the plant in 2022.

Spokesman Steve Corson said the jobs at the plant were technical, skilled positions that often paid more than \$100,000 a year.

The utility offered employees several resources in deciding on their next steps, including setting up a scholarship fund at Blue Mountain Community College

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