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Klamath Falls City Schools

District Newsletter
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The Ponderosa Re-Make

“So where are you going to stick the sixth graders? Did you guys make sure there was enough room at Pondo before deciding to move them over there?” These are two questions that have been voiced by a number of people since the decision was made in July to change Ponderosa from a grade 7-8 junior high to a grade 6-8 middle school. Below are the answers to these questions.

First of all, it is important to make clear that any facility plan will include a library. A recent newspaper headline left the impression there would no longer be a library. The current library is much bigger than what is currently needed. Therefore, we will likely remodel that space into three classrooms and move the library to a smaller area. However, books and other resource materials will still be available for checkout as they are currently.

Secondly, before a decision was made to move sixth graders, careful evaluation was done to make sure enough classroom spaces are available at Ponderosa to house another grade. A full capacity, three-grade operation would require 28 instructional spaces. Ponderosa, before remodeling, has 29. With minor remodeling, several more classroom spaces could be created. So, space is not a problem.

Once the board decided to add a grade level, careful work was done to determine the best design to accomplish a couple of objectives: One is to keep sixth graders largely separate from seventh and eighth graders. Another way of putting this is to create a school-within-a-school for sixth graders at Ponderosa. The second objective of this planning work was to ensure adequate and effective space for the instructional needs of the students.

In answering how to accomplish these objectives, two options surfaced. One would be to remodel three spaces on the southwest corner of the school near the cafeteria. The three spaces are the current shop area, the music classrooms, and the library. This would provide three classroom pods of three classrooms each. This creates nine classrooms or the number of rooms needed for next year’s sixth graders. This would also create a section of the building that would be reserved for sixth graders. This area is also close to the common areas of the cafeteria and gyms.

A second option would be to build three new classrooms in that general area across from the current music rooms. This would also require remodeling the shop and the current library. This option would allow us to keep music where it currently is and reserve spaces in the building for future expansion should enrollment increase down the road. Like the first option, it would provide a school-within-a-school section of the building for sixth graders.

The KFCS Board of Directors approved moving forward with drawing the plans for the new classrooms in the second option. They also approved putting the project up for bid. This allows

them to determine if the costs for this option is within the parameters they have set for the project.

While the second option is preferable as it would allow for future growth and require less re-location remodeling, both plans would work for the creation of a sixth-grade center at Ponderosa. The three different three-classroom pods will be teams each consisting of about 75 students and three teachers. This will be a great collaborative arrangement for the sixth-grade students and teachers. It is an exciting programming change that has the potential for accomplishing excellent student outcomes.

Other Notes:

1. At their October 8 meeting, the KFCS Board of Directors voted to close Fairview Elementary School starting in the 2013-14 school year. The transition planning has begun. Drawing up district elementary boundaries is the first step. The goal of this phase is to assign Fairview students to a location or locations closest to their homes; trying to keep as many as possible within walking distance is the goal.

The second phase of this work will be to assign Fairview staff to their new schools. The Fairview teachers will be assigned to schools proportionate to Fairview students assigned to the buildings. The plan is to use the school-closing cost savings to keep classroom sizes as close as possible to their current levels. These savings will help with this goal but cannot guarantee it as the district has a \$972,000 PERS increase to budget for in the 2013-14 school year.

An orientation plan will be devised for Fairview students and families in which parents and students will have a chance to visit the new school(s) and get to know the staff, principal, and structure of the new learning community.

2. The following is a correction related to PERS information presented in the last district newsletter. I apologize for the errors made and any inconvenience or hardship these errors may have caused.
 - a. Public employees covered under the Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) who were hired before January 1996 are classified in Tier 1. The funds contributed to their pension accounts will be given a guaranteed eight percent increase until they retire. Upon retirement, the increase is based on cost-of-living and determined by the PERS governing board.
3. KFCS was a selected recipient of a grant given by the CLASS Project in Oregon. Their funds largely come from state foundations. The grant is for re-writing its teacher evaluation plan. The team that was formed to do this work meets monthly in the boardroom and is open to the public. Updates and information is found on the district website under the "Class" link on the right side of the home page.

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