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Board gives final approval for new theme school

The committee outlines the vision and goals for the new elementary school

The Crook County School Board gave unanimous final approval Monday evening to move forward with opening a kindergarten through fourth-grade theme school in Pioneer South next fall.

The Crook County Theme School Committee, comprised of more than 25 Crook County educators, collaborated and worked for several months and made their recommendation to the board during a regular CCSD Board meeting Jan. 13.

“In an effort to address the surging enrollment in the district, we propose to the board to open a theme-based school to serve kindergarten through fourth-grade students with adventure, art and technology themes,” said CCSD Superintendent Dr. Sara Johnson.

The committee is still working on details, but plans call for applications to open this spring. Families will need to go through the application process in order for their students to attend.

It will open in September with two classes for each grade level, totaling 240 students, and will use all 10 classrooms in Pioneer South.

Johnson has named current Barnes Butte Elementary Principal Jim Bates as principal of the new theme school.

“With a servant’s heart, I want to do this. I love my town and the families,” Bates said. “I am thankful to have the skills to be able to help. It’s not about ambition; it’s my desire to serve the district, the kids and families.”

Plans call for renovating the vacant Pioneer North building and moving Pioneer Alternative High School across campus from the Pioneer South building to Pioneer North.

On Monday evening, the board also authorized the use of the Design Build Management form of contracting for the renovation of Pioneer North and associated buildings. This method of contracting is useful when the construction needs to be completed on a short timeline, and can also save money.

The students in the Therapeutic Learning Center elementary behavior program will move from Pioneer South into Barnes Butte and Crooked River elementary buildings. The district’s technology department will remain in the northwest wing of the Pioneer South building for the time being. The district’s central kitchen will also stay at Pioneer South.

The committee will work with the community and the board to come up with a name for the school. In the meantime, the committee will continue to plan staffing, student recruitment and selection, and

budget allocations and management. They will also address special education services, the facilities plan, transportation plan, technology, Title I status, and curriculum.

“Adventure learning is an approach that employs active learning in and beyond the classroom in which students engage in cross curricular authentic learning experiences,” Johnson explained.

Outcomes of an adventure education program include integration of real-world challenges into experiences, leadership, rigorous learning in all subject areas, literacy across all subjects, cultural competency, interpersonal skills, applied problem solving, communication, practical skills, adventure minded, and comprehensive experiences.

The school will utilize art and technology applied across the curriculum to enhance student learning and experience. The curriculum will also include outdoor education, cooperative learning, service learning, environmental education, vocational education, physical education, and approaching life and learning as an adventure.

“We have a lot of resources in the community. Wouldn’t it be fantastic to highlight those in a school that was a different offering for kids?” Johnson said.

With the district’s renewed focus on Career and Technical Education, the new elementary school will also focus on technology.

Art will be another focus of the theme school.

“If we build the arts in the theme school, we believe that could overflow and splash over into the other parts of the community,” Johnson said.

The new school will be connected to families and the community through local history, city and county partnerships, library connections, as well as technology and local technology partners. Other connections include natural resources, Career and Technical Education, university and college connections, community service, and comprehensive personal health.

Johnson said the theme school will address the enrollment surge, expand educational choices in the community, and provide specialized instruction.

The committee plans to be able to serve 290 students in kindergarten through fifth grade in the theme school’s second year. Beyond that, they will determine the needs and space and consider serving approximately 365 kindergarten through eighth-grade students at Pioneer Complex.

Johnson acknowledged that there is much work to be done before the school opens in September, however, “We are still on target with project planning,” she said.

About Crook County School District

Crook County School District is a thriving, rural, growing district in Central Oregon, serving more than 3,000 students from all across Crook County. It is an organization with integrity, a model for educational success, and a recognized leader for excellence in helping students dream, learn and succeed.

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