

New Moscow charter school nearly full of students

Palouse Prairie fills 73 of its 87 seats; Moscow School District looks at potential layoffs

By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

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Seventy-three local students have secured slots at a new charter school that will open in Moscow this fall, while two Moscow teachers could find themselves without jobs next school.

Palouse Prairie Charter School officials announced Saturday they'd filled 73 of the available 87 seats through a lottery process. The rest of the seats will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Nils Peterson, chairman of the Palouse Prairie board of directors, said all but six of the students live within the Moscow School District.

Moscow School District officials have predicted the district will need to cut two teachers for next year to cope with the decreased enrollment.

"This is on top of the state reduction," Superintendent Candis Donicht said today.

Donicht said based on the results of the lottery, she still believes the district will need to downsize by two positions.

The state funds school districts based on 99 percent of their previous year's enrollment to protect districts that suffer decreased enrollment from one year to the next.

"The 99 percent is designed to give us a net when we have lost enrollment," Donicht said. "So the impact is lessened for this year, but it flows into (future) years ... It lessens it to a degree, but it's still a major cut."

According to Idaho State Department of Education data, the state spent an average of \$5,644 per student during the 2007-08 school year.

However, Idaho Department of Education spokeswoman Melissa McGrath said it's "virtually impossible" to calculate how much state funding would decrease for the Moscow School District with a loss of about 70 students.

She said funding is based on the types and ages of students in addition to the numbers of students.

Donicht said she has had several notices of retirement or resignation from elementary school teachers, and still hopes to be able to ease job cuts through some attrition.

The next step for the Palouse Prairie board of directors is to hire a school director and teachers.

Peterson said the school has a "large pile" of applications for both director and teachers.

Ashley Ater Kranov, vice chairwoman of the board of directors, said the board has 10 highly qualified applicants for the director position from all over the United States.

The board began screening applicants last week, and hopes to have an accepted offer by mid-May or sooner.

The board also is preparing to put out a bid for remodeling on the old Brown's Furniture building at the corner of Lauder Avenue and South Main Street.

"This is a big milestone to pass, and we are looking forward to hiring teachers and directors," Peterson said. "Our focus right now is just to get the school open successfully."

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