Happy New Year!
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Agate School hallway revamp discontinued

Original plans to split 10-foot main corridor in half called premature and an increased safety hazard

by Steven Vetter
Managing Editor

AGATE — The Agate School Board is interrupting plans for extensive hallway and access renovations after realizing its knee-jerk reaction to unfounded student safety allegations a couple months ago was premature.

During the Dec. 22 school board work-study session and business meeting that followed, directors indicated that events alleged to have occurred between secondary and elementary students did not happen and have decided that preliminary plans to split the elementary hallways into two narrower paths will not move forward.

"I wish I could go back and take back the decision last month, especially now that things turned out to be not true," said newly elected board vice president Chris Sonnleitner. "Pretty disappointed in that decision now."

Director Ray Martin also reiterated that reactions to parents' allegations of student impropriety during the Nov. 17 board meeting were premature.

"Disappointing that we reacted to something that, in the end, didn't really happen," Martin said.

During the November board meeting one elementary mother said a secondary student had inappropriately interacted with her kindergartner and that Superintendent/Principal Melinda Walls violated school policy and child welfare law with her handling of the situation. The mother vociferously demanded the board fire Walls immediately, a request that was not met.

In a follow-up interview with *The I-70 Scout* Dec. 4, Walls said that the allegations against the secondary student were false and that the request for her firing was in reaction and payback for a staff member recently fired for cause.

"The one thing I will say is that cameras don't lie," Wall said. "People do lie and, in this case, we have video that can prove it."

During the December meeting, board members decided to not move forward with an approximately $100,000 project to split the elementary hallways and reconfigure front office access. In addition to the false student interaction allegations, the board was informed that the project appeared to cause additional safety concerns and will probably not meet state building code.

"You're talking about changing up the hallway, splitting it up, but that's a serious safety situation," said Agate Fire Chief Larry Rector, noting that plans were to narrow the main elementary hallway from one 10-foot corridor to two 4-foot hallways. "If the school is at capacity and everyone is trying to escape [an emergen-

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ISAAC MANAUGH/The I-70 Scout

The Byers Park & Recreation District hosted a special holiday book reading by special guest Mrs. Claus at the Quint Valley Quonset Dec. 21.

Byers supt. contract moves to year-to-year after '26-27

by Steven Vetter
Managing Editor

BYERS — At his own request, longtime Byers superintendent Tom Turrell will start the 2026-27 school year on what, in essence, is a one-year contract.

During the Dec. 18 Byers School Board meeting, Turrell reiterated his desire from two years ago to do away with the longstanding three-year rolling contract and go year to year.

"When I first started here, the goal of mine was to see my kids grow and hit graduation at one school, and that has happened and then some," said Turrell, who has been Byers superintendent for 20-plus years. "By no longer doing a rolling three-year contract, it doesn't hold the board hostage. By not extending it now, I'll have one year remaining starting July 1 and then go year-by-year. I see it working OK for both sides."

The board is currently in the superintendent evaluation process.

During personnel discussion, Turrell said that plans to have the vacant secondary principal position mostly filled by high school math teacher Corey Green has been put on hold and that he will continue to perform many of those duties.

"At this stage, I think my best math teacher needs to be teaching math and reopen that position after this year," said Turrell, noting that a promising midyear math teacher/interventionist hire

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AdCo officials' names used in scam

by Douglas Claussen
Publisher & Editor

BRIGHTON — The Adams County Sheriff's Office is warning residents of a new scam where the perpetrators pose as Adams County officials — including Commissioner Lynn Baca.

Baca, 55, represents District 5, which encompasses all of eastern Adams County. Her name appeared on fake invoices sent to parties who have submitted permit applications to Adams County Community & Economic Development.

According to a sheriff's report, CED had been receiving information about the false invoices, which requested a $4,800 "application approval fee" related to clients' genuine permit applications, since approximately Aug. 12. The e-mail explains the fees, asks for payment by wire, and indicates that instructions would be sent when the recipient replied. The communication is signed "Lynn Baca, Chair," who is not authorized to send invoices.

Baca

The report continues that CED had had difficulty contacting all of its new applicants about the fraud but, on Dec. 1, received a remittance by mail, which was given to a sheriff's deputy at the Adams County Government Center in Brighton. The victim, an Agate resident, had received an invoice from the "Adams County Planning Commission," an entity that does not send invoices.

How the suspects obtained the applicant information is unknown, but permit applications are public records on the county website. The fee amount requested was "outrageous," the report continues; the usual fees range from $800 to $1,000.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

During the Dec. 18 Byers School Board meeting, members of Tiffeny O'Dell's environmental sciences class discuss their pollinator box project that is expected to come to fruition this spring along the walking trail on the south side of campus. The class received a $500 grant award from the Butterfly Pavilion.