

DISTANCE

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from my computer,” Cahill said. He would prefer to be moving, though, and he is not alone among educators suddenly teaching remotely from their homes.

La Grande Middle School health and physical education teacher Melinda Becker-Bisenius shares this sentiment.

“I’m used to being more active. I was taking 15,000 steps a day and now I’m taking 1,000,” Becker-Bisenius said.

The health and physical education teacher said she misses the fast-paced, activity-filled days she is accustomed to at the middle school and thinks many students also want to return to the more invigorating traditional school experience. She noted even students who did not appear to like school are indicating they are bored and want to be come back.

Becker-Bisenius is asking her students to keep daily exercise logs, which they are turning in online. She and Doug Schow, also a PE and health teacher at La Grande Middle School, are hoping to make online exercise presentations for students later this spring.

Exercise is something March wants to get more of during her long days as a distance educator.

“I am not living a healthy lifestyle. I am not walking around,” said March, who anticipated she would be taking many more breaks than she has been.

Going online is ‘crisis education’

The switch to distance education has given La Grande High students more flexibility, but March said this has cost them some stability.

“They now have to organize their days. Before, we (the school) organized it for them,” the Spanish teacher said.

As an educator, March is striving to remain upbeat in the face of a challenging situation.

“We are surviving, (but) it is definitely not a career highlight,” she said. “I have not heard anyone say they love it.”

Chris Leavitt, the choir teacher for La Grande’s middle and high schools, echoed this sentiment.

“Online crisis education is not the same,” Leavitt said. “You cannot compete with face-to-face instruction.”

Still, Leavitt, like his

colleagues, is working hard to make the best of difficult circumstances. He is conducting auditions online for the high school’s wind ensemble and has arranged for renowned jazz musician Dmitri Matheny of Centralia, Washington, to provide an online workshop for his students. Matheny had been set to meet with Leavitt’s students in late May until the stay-home restrictions were imposed.

Online education bringing out sensitivity

Carla Arnold, Central Elementary School’s music teacher, is becoming accustomed to looking at a sea of young faces on her computer screen as she leads classes in song and conducts practices for the school’s fiddle club, which does so several times a week. The Google tool Arnold uses allows a student to receive special attention, such as for tuning a ukulele, from another music educator while temporarily disappearing from the main screen.

Students are muted during class sessions, but those who raise their hands are un-muted and immediately can speak to Arnold. Often the children do so to request a favorite song for Arnold to lead them in.

“It is sweet,” she said.

The Central teacher, like many of her colleagues, agreed that teaching online is more taxing.

“By the end of the day, my eyes are so tired,” she said

La Grande Middle School teacher Klel Carson said he has been struck by how understanding teachers and students have been with one another in the midst of the temporary switch to distance education.

“I feel there is a lot of grace both ways for teachers and students,” Carson said.

The LMS teacher noted tech-savvy students have been quick to assist teachers with computer issues.

“The kids have been amazingly helpful,” he said.

Carson said he is looking forward to incorporating some of what he is learning about technology into his classroom when traditional school classes begin again. Technology has its benefits, but Carson said it will never top a traditional classroom.

“No online school in the world can create one-to-one relationships (like a classroom setting can),” Carson said.

important,” she said. “I want the community to understand what’s going on learning-wise in the school, from science classes to music to recess. If people don’t know what’s happening, they don’t know what to celebrate.”

Jones also said she values school activities, such as music and intramural sports, that keep students engaged and communicating and gives them opportunities for leadership. She views school security as another important issue that goes beyond fences and locked doors.

“It’s partly how as a staff you train, how you train the students, and how to be aware,” she said.

One of her highest priorities is to continue planning Wallowa’s school renovation project and the upcoming bond. Her experience includes passing three bond measures, a number of levies and work on planning a new school where she became the principal. Community involvement is critical in such projects, she said. Planning for the school, she said, took meeting people in their homes and listening to them.

“My strength is bringing people together and developing relationships and a community,” she said. “We can be leaders in the county.”

CUTS

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for spending-cut proposals now envisions a total of \$1.847 billion to cut. In practice, the ending balance is never zero, though in the 1981-83 downturn, it got down to \$3 million of a general-fund budget of just under \$3 billion by the end of the cycle in mid-1983 — and that was after the Legislature raised personal income taxes to balance the budget.

Potential offsets

The request for spending-cut proposals do not take into account some other factors:

- State reserve funds, which total just under \$3 billion, about 14% of the general-fund budget. Only the Legislature can tap those funds — a general reserve and a lottery reserve earmarked for education — and lawmakers are barred from spending all the money in a single budget cycle.

• Oregon’s \$871 million share of \$150 billion that the federal CARES Act allotted to the states. The state total is actually \$1.6 billion, but it includes money for Portland, Multnomah County and Washington County — all with populations exceeding 500,000 — that they can seek directly from the U.S. Treasury. But the law, and recently released Treasury guidelines, bar states from using the money to offset projected shortfalls — only to cover expenses connected with the pandemic. However, Congress is considering more aid to state and local governments in a future relief plan.

- Options affecting employee pay, such as salary freezes and unpaid furloughs. State budget officials said in their memo that recommendations would be considered on a statewide basis, not by agency.

Also, although the request by budget officials calls for cuts amounting to 8.5%, the reductions are unlikely to be across the board. The state cannot reduce debt repayments or some services mandated by law, although such services can be reduced to a specified minimum.

While Brown has the authority to cut across the board, only the Legislature can approve selective spending cuts. A special session for that purpose, whether called by the governor or legislators themselves, is likely to await the May 20 forecast.

On Brown’s behalf, Merah concluded:

“... In this time of crisis, Oregonians rely on state services more than ever, so cutting critical state services will be a last resort.”

Limited exemptions

Although Brown has ordered a partial hiring freeze, it does not affect such agencies as the Oregon Health Authority or the Employment Department, which is raising the number of claims-processing employees from 100 to 800 to handle a deluge from unemployed workers.

Some agencies are exempt from the request because they fall outside the governor’s budget authority. Among them: the Legislature itself, state courts, Oregon Lottery Commission, secretary of state and state treasurer, the latter two being independently elected officials under the Oregon Constitution.

The Department of Justice and the Bureau of Labor and Industries, though led by elected officials, are subject to executive budget authority.

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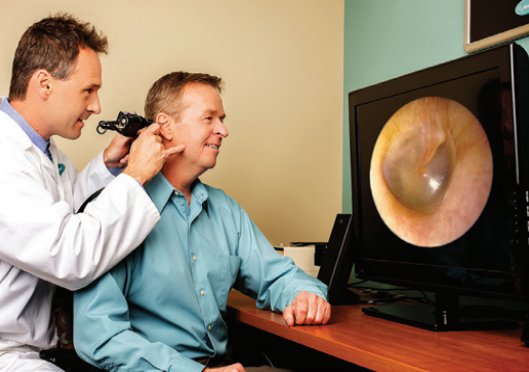
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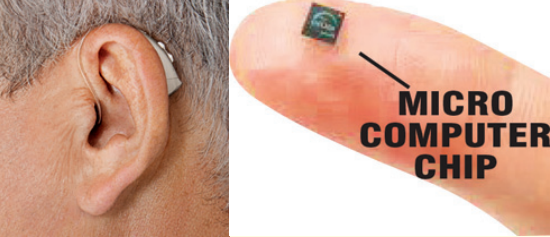
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