SHAKE-UP

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through. We had almost every family dinner around the table."

Educational impact

In mid-March schools in Oregon were closed at part of the initial steps taken to counteract the pandemic, and in April classes reopened in an online format.

Parker is a multidisciplinary teacher at the sixth-grade level. One of the major challenges, he said, was connecting students with the material and supplies needed for online study, but he praised the efforts made by the school district.

"It was a major adjustment for kids and families, and as educators. I think our district really tackled the challenge and embraced it, all the way from administration down to the teachers, our cooks (and) custodians," he said. "Our entire district staff really tried to make it the best we could for kids and their families."

Although Jill already instructs in an online format at Baker Web, she also meets in person with students in an advisory role, and the pandemic has highly altered that aspect of her job.

She said her students' lives were heavily impacted outside of school.

"Our students were a little bit lucky that their schooling wasn't interrupted, per se, but their lives were interrupted. I have a student who does plays at Elgin Opera House," she said, adding that the student has an interest in pursuing acting. "There isn't a timeline when it can open back up."

Staff photo by Ronald Bond

The McKinley family, back row from left: Parker, Cade, Shea and Jill. Front row, Emma and Ryker.

BWA won't be conducting those in-person meetings all this school year, which Jill said will be a challenge.

"That's kind of weighing on me," she said.

Business

Parker McKinley co-owns We Paint La Grande, and while there was an impact with the business — he said things were put on hold during the first month of the pandemic — it wasn't nearly as severe a hit as others in the region have taken.

"We've been able to keep our employees working and business moving forward," he said. "We've had a few customers who were a little bit uneasy with the state of the pandemic, and we were more than happy to accommodate that. People have been good to talk about it. If they wanted us to put them on hold and wait, we've done that. We had another that wanted to communicate (by) phone. All of those are just a part of our community working together."

Spring sports cancellation

There were high expectations for the La Grande High School baseball team, which Parker would have been coaching for his seventh season this spring, as the squad was loaded with seniors and athletes who had been part of the football and wrestling state championships earlier in the school year. He said he held out hope as long as possible that the season would happen, but as state mandates in April kept Oregon largely closed, the Oregon School Activities Association eventually was left with no choice but to cancel the spring season.

"I didn't want that to be taken away from the kids. My biggest hope was for that big group of seniors, and certainly the high hope we had for success for the year," he said. "It was going to be a lot of fun to be part of. Even more important, that group of kids committed four years to the program. You practice and play (as a) freshman, sophomore, junior and really all of it is for that year, the senior year."

He said when he realized the season was gone, he was left speechless.

"When it finally did set in that it wasn't going to happen, that we were going to lose (the season), it was really hard on me, and I didn't know what to say," he said. "I was trying to find something positive to say, that leadership quality I feel I have. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to help guide them."

Jill McKinley is on the board for La Grande Little League, which during the spring also had to cancel.

"I knew when that decision came down, it felt like it was disappointment after disappointment," she said. "Everyone had that experience."

Home life

While there was more time at home together during the quarantine, there also was a unique aspect of both educators now teaching from home and simultaneously helping their own children — ages 14, 11, 8 and 6 — adapt. Two of their children had better success adjusting to the online study format, but the other two really missed the social interaction.

"Our second grader, Ryker, he did fine, but our youngest, she's a personality," Jill said. "She is as social as her dad. She really missed her kindergarten teacher. Those little people run on routine."

Both also said that despite taking a positive outlook on life, they experienced personal challenges during the early stages. For Parker, it was the inability to have even a hint of an idea of what the day would bring.

"The constant changing, wondering, shutdowns, closures, it was really hard to navigate through. It was not something anybody had ever experienced," he said.

Jill called the quarantine hard, and added that despite the benefits of extra family time, at some point you are bound to go a little stir-crazy.

"As much as I love our home, I don't want to be here 24/7 through the whole school year," she said.

Perspective

Even with the plethora of changes, cancellations and the unknown that still lies ahead, the McKinleys feel fortunate.

"Parker and I both have commented we're super lucky," she said. "We both have jobs, both have job security going into next year."

Parker said faith was a key for the family as well.

"We did a lot of praying, a lot of trusting in what was going on and knowing we were trying to make decisions the right way and for the right reason," he said. "I believe we are being looked out for. I believe that faith has played a major part in it too."

They also commended each other for what they brought to the table while going through the last few months. Jill pointed to Parker not only helping set structure at home with the changes, but how he dealt with the challenges, especially with the loss of baseball.

"Parker handled not having a baseball season so well that I was thoroughly impressed with how positive he maintained," she said.

Parker added the rest of the sixth-grade teaching staff and his coaching staff was a huge support, but said his wife was vital.

"She is by far a rock that I can lean on," he said. "She understands everything that goes into what we have to do as far as coaching (and) teaching. She gets it and supports it 100%."

SCHOOLS

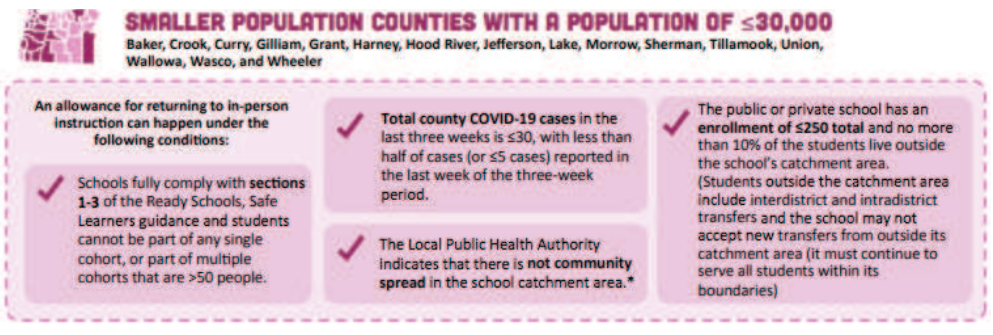
Continued from Page 1A

There are statewide and countywide exceptions to allow some schools to reopen, according to the update. If a county has fewer than 30 cases per 100,000, kindergarten through third grade are allowed to reopen.

A district in the county is allowed to have in-person instruction for all grade levels if there are less than 30 cases per 100,000 for three weeks and if the district has less than 250 students enrolled, provided it is able to comply with the guidance set out by ODE and gain approval from its local public health agency.

When addressing the requirement for physical distancing, the Oregon Department of Education said students must never be excluded from face-to-face instruction, disciplined for struggling to learn, and/or disciplined for struggling to adhere to new procedures for how school operates. Schools and teachers are encouraged to work with students regarding any struggles that may occur when adjusting to this new model of learning.

The Oregon Department of Education maintains all students from kindergarten up and all staff must wear face coverings. While a face covering is preferred over a face shield the alternative is acceptable in certain situations. Face coverings can be removed in some situations, such as when staff are working in their private office or when a "sensory break" is given for a student who needs to remove their mask away from the other students.



Contributed by Oregon Department of Education

The Oregon Department of Education has released new guidelines that allow for in-person education. For counties with less than 30,000 residents, in-person instruction can resume if all requirements have been met.

If a student will not wear a face mask, they must still have access to learning. The most common way this will be done is through distance learning. However, if a student or staff member cannot wear a mask or participate in distance learning due to a disability, accommodations can be made. A school must have physician's orders stating the child cannot wear a mask or an already established Individual Education Plan or 504 plan in place to make exceptions to the mask requirement, according to ODE's guidelines.

Attendance is still required in distance learning, according to the ODE requirement. In distance learning or a hybrid model, if there is no interaction from a student over a 24-hour period, the student is considered absent for the day, or for the class depending on grade level. Interaction can include logging into video calls, turning in assignments, emailing a teacher or utilizing online classroom systems and logging in that day.

"Attendance data won't and should not be used in the 2020-21 school year for comparative or accountability reporting but as a potential tool in helping understand the changes happening in how and where students learn and teachers teach," the guidance stated. "What is most important at this time is our collective effort to support active engagement and provide resources to meet students and families experiencing challenges with staying connected."

Regardless of the model of learning being used, ODE requires students be taught emergency preparedness. The guidance mandates 30 minutes a month be dedicated to teaching emergency procedures. For hybrid or in-person instruction, schools are required to conduct monthly fire drills, and twice a year a school must conduct an earthquake drill and a safety threat drill. COVID-19 procedures can be utilized if they do not compromise the drill, and if distancing procedures cannot be implemented the drill must be over in less than 15 minutes.

After-school programs, extracurriculars and sports must also follow ODE's guidelines. Union County's school districts will be announcing their complete and updated reopening plans by Aug. 17. There are no more anticipated changes to guidelines from the Oregon Department of Education before school begins.

CALLS

Continued from Page 1A

La Grande Police reported eight calls in 2019 and 13 in 2020 at Bud Jackson's Eatery and Taps, 2209 Adams Ave.

Owner Ron Bruce said the place has had a few calls for disorderly conduct when people would get upset after being cut off.

Additionally, he said he recently made a call about vandalism.

"People aren't coming down here to get drunk," Bruce said. "They're here to have good food, play some pool and have a good time."

Throughout the pandemic Bud Jackson's has remained open for takeout, and when allowed it opened its doors for dining in.

Justin Marler manages Benchwarmers Pub and Grill, 210 Depot St. Benchwarmers had three calls in 2019 and none in 2020. He said the calls for service were likely medical emergencies.

"As far as disorderly conduct calls go, we haven't had to make one in a few years at least," Marler said.

Benchwarmers closed just before St. Patrick's Day and has since reopened with reduced hours and seating.

Hideout Saloon, Jefferson Street Depot, Long Branch Bar and Eats and Side A Brewing did not respond to requests for comment. Hideout had seven calls in 2019 and eight calls in 2020, Jefferson Street Depot had five calls in 2019 and six calls in 2020, Long Branch had eight calls in 2019 and 6 calls in 2020, and Side A Brewing had three calls in both 2019 and 2020.

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