

THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896



January 6, 2022

THURSDAY EDITION

\$1.50

COVID-19 test program for schools less restrictive

Most local superintendents like test-to-stay program launched by state

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — The days of mandatory quarantines for Oregon students with close COVID-19 contacts are ending. The reason? The Oregon Department of Education recently implemented a “test-to-stay” program in which schools can provide COVID-19 tests to unvaccinated students who have been exposed to the virus and are asymptomatic. Students who test negative two times in a seven-day period will be allowed to remain in school rather than required to quarantine at home.

“We know the critical importance that school attendance has on student success,” said Oregon Department of Education’s director, Colt Gill, in a statement when the program was announced in November 2021. “Using test-to-stay as part of a layered set of protocols in schools will keep students and educators in classrooms, maximizing days spent in school learning, growing and thriving.”

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza believes the program is a plus.

“It will provide more opportunities for students to be in school,” he said.

Less restrictions

Students who have been exposed to COVID-19 in a school setting will take two COVID-19 tests: The first “soon after exposure” will usually occur at school, and the student will be tested again five to seven days later.

“Doing tests twice during that weeklong period should pick up the vast majority of students who are exposed who may come down with COVID-19,” said Oregon Health Authority state epidemiologist Dean Sidelinger, “and allow them to safely participate, not just in classroom settings, but in other structured educational settings while they’re wearing a mask, without missing out on that in-school, in-person experience that they’re having this year.”

See, **COVID**/Page A5



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Snow accumulates on the nearly finished frame of the Eastern Oregon University fieldhouse on Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2022. The new facility is expected to be ready for use by fall 2022. School officials say that once the fieldhouse is completed it will be the largest building of its kind at any college or university in Oregon, Washington and Idaho that is not a NCAA Division I school.

‘It will be transformational’

EOU’s \$9M fieldhouse set to be completed before fall term starts in late September

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A major step will soon be taken in the construction of Eastern Oregon University’s \$9 million fieldhouse.

Crews are expected to begin working on the interior of the building after its exterior is completed in about three weeks, according to John Garlitz, Eastern’s director of planning and facilities. Once the exterior is completed crews will be able to start work on the interior since they will be protected from the elements by the exterior panels being installed.

“The shell of the fieldhouse is almost finished,” Garlitz said.

The installation of electrical wiring and a heating, ventilation and air conditioning system are among the first things that will be done once the interior work starts. Garlitz anticipates the fieldhouse will be ready for team practices and use by Eastern students by the time the fall term begins in late September. The fieldhouse’s features will include expansive practice space for athletic teams,



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Equipment sits inside the main building of the nearly finished Eastern Oregon University fieldhouse on Tuesday, Jan. 4, 2022.

three health and human performance program classrooms with lab space, and space for the EOU Outdoor Adventure Program.

Work started on the fieldhouse in the summer of 2020. Once completed, the fieldhouse will be the largest building of its kind at any college or university in Oregon, Washington and Idaho that is not a NCAA Division I school, according to Ben Welch, EOU’s head men’s and women’s

track and field coach.

Welch said the fieldhouse will provide his teams with a much more spacious place to practice in the winter. The Mountaineers’ track team presently conducts its winter practices in Quinn Coliseum’s west gym, which has 4,545 square feet. But in the fieldhouse, he said, his team will have access to about 48,000 square feet for practices. The fieldhouse’s track and field facilities will include a

long jump runway and pit as well as high jump and pole vaulting sites.

“It will be a great recruiting tool. Not everyone has a facility like this. It will make Eastern a little more special,” said EOU assistant track coach Joe Brogdon, who specializes in coaching javelin throwers.

Eastern’s track and field teams will be among the most frequent users of the fieldhouse, but it will be available to all of the school’s athletic teams. Jacob Plocher, EOU’s women’s soccer coach, said he will welcome the availability of the extra practice space the fieldhouse will provide his team, especially when weather conditions are less than ideal.

“We need more open space because our numbers are larger,” he said. “I am very excited.”

Plocher said the fieldhouse will also be a plus even in late summer because it will give his team a place to practice when outdoor air quality is sometimes poor due to wildfires.

Anji Weissenfluh, EOU’s athletic director and women’s basketball coach, said the fieldhouse’s extra space is badly needed since a number of sports have been added at the university in recent years, including baseball, women’s lacrosse, men’s soccer and men’s and women’s wrestling.

See, **Fieldhouse**/Page A5

EDUCATION

Schools urged to drop extracurricular activities

Oregon education, health officials warn of ‘rapid’ COVID-19 transmission in school activities

By **MEERAH POWELL**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon’s education and health leaders say if schools continue to host extracurricular

activities, “they should expect rapid transmission of COVID-19” that could prevent students from being able to attend class in-person due to isolation and quarantine periods.

Oregon’s education and health leaders put out that warning in an advisory Monday, Jan. 3. The agencies say schools and organizations must either pause extracurricular activities or ensure they follow specific COVID-19 safety protocols.

If schools choose to continue extracurriculars, the agencies said they need to clearly communicate the

potential risks to families.

The message from the Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Health Authority comes as schools around the state begin their new terms and the omicron variant of the coronavirus continues to spread.

“It’s all about trying to continue to ensure that our students can attend school in-person every day,” ODE

Director Colt Gill told OPB.

Gill said that includes schools continuing to enforce the mitigation efforts they have already been using — including wearing appropriate face coverings, following physical distancing guidelines, frequent hand washing and use of ventilation systems.

See, **Schools**/Page A5

INDEX

- Business.....B1
- Classified.....B3
- Comics.....B5
- Crossword.....B3
- Dear Abby....B6
- Horoscope....B4
- Lottery.....A2
- Obituaries....A3
- Opinion.....A4
- Spiritual Life A6
- Sports.....A7
- Sudoku.....B5

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight
39 LOW
Cloudy, showers

Friday
42/33
A little snow

CONTACT US

541-963-3161
Issue 2
3 sections, 30 pages
La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page A4.



8 51153 00100 6

SATURDAY

SUNSHINE, BUT DARK DAYS FOR DEER

Online at lagrandeobserver.com