

COVID

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InterMountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill is also a strong supporter of test-to-stay.

“Any kind of modification that keeps kids in school I support and am very appreciative of,” said Mulvihill, whose ESD serves about 20 school districts, including all six in Union County.

Mulvihill believes the test-to-stay program will benefit students in many ways.

“Less restrictions will help their psyche,” he said.

The superintendent added he thinks the program will boost the confidence of students since they will realize state officials are working to avoid shutting down schools.

“We have to learn to live with it,” Mulvihill said.

Other benefits

Union School District Superintendent Carter Wells, like many other educators, is supportive of test-to-stay because fewer students will miss classes and in-person instruction.

“We absolutely want kids in school,” he said.

Wells said that parents like it when their sons and daughters are at school, particularly when quarantined students would be home alone because both their parents have jobs.

“Parents do not want their children to be home alone,” he said.

The superintendent added when students are home with at least one of their parents, they do better on the school work they are assigned than if they are alone. Wells credits this to guidance parents provide students.

“When students are stuck they have someone who can help them,” Wells said.

Unfortunately, this is not possible for students whose parents are not at home, creating an unfair situation, Wells said.

Some drawbacks

Imbler School District Superintendent Doug Hislop has mixed feel-



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

La Grande High School Superintendent George Mendoza delivers the opening address to the La Grande High School class of 2021 during commencement on Saturday, June 5, 2021. In January 2022, Mendoza expressed support for the new COVID-19 test-to-stay program that seeks to end mandatory quarantines for students in Oregon exposed to the virus at school.

ings about the test-to-stay program. He said in one sense it is good because it will keep more students in school. However, he is worried about the possibility of a student receiving a false negative and staying in school, which would put their classmates at risk.

“It is a two-edged sword,” he said.

Hislop is glad test-to-stay also applies to staff, meaning that the Imbler School District will be less likely to have teachers sidelined in quarantine. He noted that earlier in the school year there was a point when five or six staff members, including teachers, were in quarantine because of close contacts. A shortage of substitutes forced Hislop and Imbler High School Principal Mike Mills to teach several classes.

While North Powder School District Superintendent Lance Dixon is a strong supporter of test-to-stay, he noted that the testing is only available for students who have been in close contact with a possible positive case of COVID-19 in a school setting. Students who had a close contact outside of school still must be quarantined for a number of days.

Dixon believes the reason for this may be that the state does not have enough COVID-19 test kits to test all students who

we use during the school day after the school day,” Gill said.

The agencies are also asking families and community members to do their part in helping ensure schools can continue in-person teaching and learning. Namely, ODE and OHA are urging parents to keep students home if they have COVID-19 symptoms. The agencies are also encouraging families and children to get vaccinated and get COVID-19 booster shots, and to limit non-essential activities and gatherings.

“Spread in the community is what may cause a school eventually to close to in-person instruction and go back to online learning for a short period of time,” Gill said. “The more communities can do to make sure individuals are vaccinated and boosted so there’s less likelihood that they’re spreading COVID-19 from one person to another, or less likely that they may need the services of a hospital and really tax that system — that will help keep our school staff safe and our students safe and keep them in in-person instruction.”

ODE Communications Director Marc Siegel said the agency is not planning a statewide return to distance learning, like what happened at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. But, individual school districts will be able to make that call themselves if necessary.

“For each school district, that’s a local school district decision, made in coordination with local health authority,” Siegel told OPB.

have close contacts.

“I love the concept but I don’t like the limitations,” he said.

FIELDHOUSE

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“We have outgrown our facilities,” she said.

The men’s and women’s wrestling teams currently practice in a warehouse in downtown La Grande, but once the fieldhouse opens, the wrestling teams will be able to practice on campus in the west Quinn Coliseum gym, which will be free since the track teams will be doing winter workouts in the fieldhouse.

“It will be nice to have the wrestling teams back on campus,” Weissenfluh said.

The athletic director said she hopes that the public will be able to use the fieldhouse in the future for activities, including walking and aerobic exercise.

“I’m excited about eventually involving the

community,” she said.

She warned, though, that community use will be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We will not be able to do this right out of the gate because of COVID-19,” she said. “It will not happen until down the road.”

Michael Hatch, director of Eastern’s Outdoor Adventure Program, said his program will benefit enormously by moving from its present site on the bottom floor of the Hoke Union Building to the fieldhouse.

“It will be transformational,” he said.

The additional space the Outdoor Adventure Program will have in the fieldhouse will allow the program to carry a much larger inventory of outdoor items students can check out and members of the public can rent, including rafts, kayaks,

mountain bikes, road bikes, tents, backpacks and snowshoes.

Hatch also noted that the climbing wall in the fieldhouse will be triple the size of the one his program now uses at Quinn Coliseum. Its features will include a site that will give a sense of what it is like to scale ice.

“It will have high-density foam that simulates ice climbing,” he said.

The climbing wall will be the biggest in the region. The nearest one of comparable size is in Meridian, Idaho, according to Hatch.

The EOU Outdoor Adventure Program director said the climbing wall will be so impressive that collegiate climbing competitions may be conducted in the fieldhouse in the future.

“I am really excited about its potential,” he said.

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