

Schools: Some students are feeling very isolated, teachers say

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Now, with six reported cases of the coronavirus in Clatsop County and more than 1,750 confirmed in Oregon, schools are closed through the end of the school year. The prompts Morgan sends out online or in printed paper packets have less to do with Poe and more to do with what students are experiencing now.

When he asked them to write letters, the main theme that emerged was how much they missed school.

“They acknowledged how surprised they were to be saying that,” Morgan said.

But he is in the same boat.

“I also really miss seeing them and this is just a surreal way to interact with them,” Morgan said. “I feel that sense of isolation, that sense of having taken things for granted.”

School districts across Oregon have had to adjust rapidly since Gov. Kate Brown first closed public K-12 schools in March and then announced they would remain closed through the end of the school year. Early on, districts were told to provide activities and coursework to students remotely.

The state announced guidelines for grading high school seniors last week and released further guidance for grades 9 to 11 on Thursday. Instead of letter grades, teachers are asked to give students a mark of “pass” or “incomplete” on courses. Districts will be required to work with students who receive an “incomplete” to make up the work.

Complications

In Clatsop County, limited internet access and a tourist economy hit hard by restaurant, hotel and state park restrictions complicate school districts’ work to deliver education remotely.

Most districts are asking teachers and staff to contact students on at least a weekly basis. They’re asking about more than school work, and



LEFT: Jessica Todd, who leads Astoria High School's math department, talks to students in a video while working outside her apartment in Astoria on Thursday afternoon. RIGHT: From left, Genesis Chavez, Leslee Farrow, Annette Johnson and Liane Bogh stand outside Warrenton Grade School, where parents and students can pick up learning packets, drop off library books and find school supplies.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

check to make sure basic needs are also being met.

“We have a lot of families that are struggling right now because they’re not working,” said Craig Hoppes, the superintendent of the Astoria School District.

He estimates there are still 30 to 40 students that teachers have not been able to contact since the first school closure went into effect. Some of them may be staying with family members outside of the North Coast now that child care options are almost nonexistent, Hoppes said.

All the school districts have turned to Google Classroom as a primary platform to continue to deliver instruction and assignments, but teachers are also using a variety of other online tools. Some of these are new to teachers and students, or — if not new — have not been used to the extent they are being used now.

All districts in Clatsop County are providing printed packets as an alternative for students who either prefer pen and paper or who do not have internet access.

The Warrenton-Hammond School District has loaned out over 500 computers, but Superintendent Tom Rogozinski estimates more than 20% of the district’s students do not have reliable internet access.

Some of these students have taken to parking at school lots to use the district’s Wi-Fi

to download what they need for assignments. The Knappa School District specifically set up areas in school parking lots for parents and students to use the internet.

As early as March 13 — the last day students in Seaside were in actual school buildings — the Seaside School District was able to send Chromebook computers home with students who did not have their own devices and set up internet access for them. The district has since added students in kindergarten through second grade to the list.

have reliable internet access. Some students who said they did have internet were using a parent’s phone as a hot spot.

“That’s not really reliable,” Phillips said.

Because of the school district’s small size, teachers are able to customize the packets to the student. If a student seems to be doing well, they may receive more rigorous work to complete the next week.

Some parents have reached out to the school, worried about their kids not being prepared next school year. They

the best, but I don’t think anybody will know until we get there.”

Difficult to engage

Even with resources at hand, it may be difficult for some students to engage with their lessons right now.

Jeremy Hirsch, who teaches social studies at Broadway Middle School in Seaside, has students who have had to become the primary caretakers of younger siblings while their parents work. He thinks of his students who are living in poverty or those who may live in tumultuous homes.

“I know that I don’t know what home life is like for everybody,” he said. It is tricky enough even in stable homes, he noted, thinking of his own household that includes him and his wife — both teachers — and their children — all college students — who are now crowded at home and trying to adjust.

A lot of students are feeling very isolated, teachers say.

Then there is the challenge of translating certain classes into an online format or folding what can be provided online into a printed packet.

Matt Pierce, the choir director at Astoria Middle School and Astoria High School, is figuring out how to take a class based on community and real-time feedback and create something “choir adja-

cent.” He’s looking at ways he and his students can still sing and make music together, remotely.

One of the first projects he assigned was a talent show. He asked kids to make videos of themselves and showcase a talent. Some kids played instruments or drew pictures. One baked cookies.

The state’s assessment guidance aside, teachers say their first concern is that students are safe and doing well emotionally. Next, they hope students take this time to learn something new and do a little bit of school work each day.

“Every household is dealing with the anxiety of this situation,” said Rod Heyen, the principal of Warrenton’s high school and grade school. “I don’t want to add to the anxiety.”

Also, he added, without the day-to-day, face-to-face interactions of a normal classroom setting, “we’re crazy to say this is the equivalent of them being in class for the fourth quarter of school.”

When schools reopen, he expects there will be a need to review lessons and pick up some of what may have been lost.

“I don’t see any way around that,” he said, “but I also think it’s something we can do.”

Kirsten Norgaard, who owns Kit’s Apothecary in downtown Astoria, has a daughter in eighth grade and a son in fifth grade. They are not going to learn as much this spring at home as they would in a classroom, she said. But that’s fine.

“It’s just going to be different,” she said. “I told the kids, ‘You know, kind of imagine this like you get to decide what you want to learn more about right now. Is there a time in history or a certain country ... what do you really want to learn about?’”

Her son’s response: Football states and basketball player Wilt Chamberlain.

“OK, that’s fine,” Norgaard told him. “Write a paragraph about it.”

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Rod Heyen | principal of Warrenton’s high school and grade school

The Jewell School District never even contemplated going online, however. Instead, the district has been distributing paper packets twice a week.

“A full online learning platform in Jewell is not going to work,” Superintendent Stephen Phillips said.

Initial surveys of Jewell’s students — just under 200 enrolled in K-12 classes — showed that nearly half did not

asked if packets could be made available through the summer.

“I think we’re probably going to be better prepared than most districts,” Phillips said, “but there is a lingering fear because we’ve lost some instruction time and we’ve lost, obviously, a lot of face-to-face time.”

“What we find come this fall is going to be kind of interesting,” he added. “I hope for

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