

State releases guidelines for reopening schools

Precautions for the coronavirus

By JACKSON HOGAN
Bend Bulletin

This fall, Oregon’s K-12 students may finally get to return to their classrooms for the first time in half a year, based on new state safety guidelines. But school won’t look the same as it did before COVID-19.

New behaviors and rituals will need to be learned: Desks will be 6 feet apart. Face coverings will be required for most school staff. Elementary students won’t share glue sticks.

“There is no doubt this spring was hard on students, families and educators,” said a statement signed by state education and health directors Colt Gill and Pat Allen. “And yet, we believe returning to school, the planning it will require and the shifts in adult and student behavior it will require will be even more difficult.”

Much of the state’s long list of reopening requirements and recommendations fall under a few ideals: Keep students and staff at a distance from each other, wipe down and sanitize objects frequently and make sure everyone washes their hands



From left, triplets Gabriel, Elizabeth and Isabelle Wilcox wait in the end zone before passing across CMH Field to graduate from Astoria High School.

as often as possible.

Schools will be required to keep students in isolated groups, or cohorts, whenever possible. Cohorts must allow for at least 35 square feet per person, including staff, and they’ll be assigned certain spaces only for their use. That includes bathrooms as well as classrooms, according to the state.

The state guidelines admit keeping students in rigid cohorts is harder in middle and high schools —

where students see multiple teachers in a day — but the state still recommends that all schools make plans to reduce mixing student cohorts.

School schedules will also be modified to keep as

few students in hallways and shared spaces as possible.

Furthermore, just about every object in schools that students touch, from desks to school bus seats to library books, should be sanitized frequently, according to the state.

Face masks and coverings will be required for all staff who are regularly within 6 feet of other people in school, bus drivers, staff who prepare or serve meals, and school visitors. Front office staff will be required to wear larger, plastic face shields, or be behind a plastic barrier.

Students will not be required to wear face masks — although it is recommended, particularly for middle and high school students, who will have to mix with other students more often — and schools must continue to educate students who don’t wear masks.

Frequent hand washing will be recommended for students and staff and required before eating meals. Elementary students will be required to wash their hands before and after using playground equipment.

Before walking into a school building or school bus, each student and staff member must be screened for COVID-19 symptoms.

This can be done with a parent or guardian’s confirmation, or through a visual check.

Every school district and private school will need to fill out a state form, a blueprint for reopening with checklists of requirements to keep students and staff safe.

If a school district chooses to stick with temporary distance learning, or a hybrid of in-school and distance learning, the district must describe how that will look for its students and staff. Districts must also have plans in place in case of a local spike of COVID-19 cases.

School districts receiving federal grants for disadvantaged students must also consult with local tribal agencies before sending in its completed checklist. Districts should also meet with students, families and other community groups to shape their individual plan, the state recommended.

Then, school districts’ reentry forms must be approved by a series of groups, in this order: the local school board, the local public health agency and the state Department of Education. These blueprints for reentry must also be posted to school district and school websites for the public to see.

Rentals: Prices have continued an upward trend even during the pandemic

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Gearhart enacted vacation rental rules several years ago and is not taking any new applications. The city allows people who already have a vacation rental to pass it on to their family, but not with a sale.

Seaside allows a percentage of properties in an area to be used as vacation rentals. As long as the property owner complies with short-

term rental rules and meets inspection, they can go before the Planning Commission to get approval.

Cannon Beach passed an ordinance that limited property owners to a 14-day permit allowing two vacation renters a month, while allowing the city to better enforce short-term rental regulations and penalize those without licenses.

Astoria does not allow vacation rentals and has

begun more closely tracking and licensing homestay lodging.

Balensifer said homeowners should be allowed the chance to make a side income through homestay lodging, but that he wants to avoid the impacts seen in Seaside from an influx of vacationers to short-term rentals.

“We don’t have a big problem with it yet, but ... these people getting second

homes and stuff like that, that could become an issue in Warrenton,” he said. “And I think it’s important for us to get ahead of that before it becomes a problem in our town.”

A Clatsop County housing study last year found that vacation rentals and second homes are eating up a substantial share of the housing stock, driving up rental and home prices. The study found that 27%

of homes in the county are vacant, with construction of second homes outpacing those for long-term residents.

Prices have continued an upward trend even during the coronavirus pandemic, with many out-of-state buyers flooding the market. City Commissioner Pam Ackley, a local real estate agent, said the county doesn’t have the supply to meet the demand of people

wanting to move to the Oregon Coast.

“We are experiencing a big influx of people wanting to move out of the huge metro areas into Oregon and coastal communities where they can work remotely,” she said. “We’re seeing a lot of it. We’ve got people coming from the East Coast, California, Washington, Idaho — mostly California, people who can now work remotely.”

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