

Schools: ‘We will need to improve our distance learning game’

Continued from Page A1

Insurers have informed school districts they likely cannot provide insurance against claims related to communicable diseases, potentially opening school districts up to a vast — and expensive — liability.

Oregon’s budget has a \$3 billion gap and school districts will eventually have to grapple with a state funding shortfall. How much, they don’t know. Local school districts are anticipating 10% to 17% in reductions. They expect several lean years will follow.

As Tom Rogozinski, the superintendent of the Warrenton-Hammond School District, told board members at a recent meeting: “It will be a year unlike any year in the recent history of public education.”

Operational blueprints

The Department of Education requires schools to come up with a plan for next school year, an “Operational Blueprint for Reentry.” While the state is allowing schools and districts a large amount of leeway in developing the plans, they must work closely with public health officials and hit on several key elements of health and safety.

One of the challenges will be how to get students to the buildings, and — once they arrive — to their classrooms, safely. How to organize cafeteria meals and, if necessary, classroom cohorts and keep students from mixing is another puzzle. All the districts will need to account for even more robust cleaning and sanitization routines.

Rogozinski asked the Warrenton-Hammond School Board to approve several more staff in-service days ahead of students’ first day back in September, to buy more time to “really dial in, with our staff, all the new protocols that will absolutely be in place.”

Another big question facing every school district in the county is how many students



Kindergarten teacher Tami Stelzig drives through the car parade with her family.

will actually return if classrooms reopen.

Enrollment is a metric used to determine how much state funding a school district receives. The Astoria School District’s robust enrollment numbers in the past five years are one reason they are starting out the next fiscal year with a healthy beginning fund balance — money they hope will provide a small cushion during what they expect will be several difficult financial years for the state.

For students who may stay home and learn remotely, equity is another challenge, and one districts faced when all students were forced into a distance learning model this spring.

Many districts assembled distance learning programs on the fly as the coronavirus spread and building closures loomed. The Department of Education modified assessment requirements, but some sort of grading is expected to be used next school year to make sure students are on track.

“We will need to improve our distance learning game,” Rogozinski told board members last week, adding, “It can’t be what it was this year, which was all sporadic.”

The Warrenton-Hammond

School District sent out a parent survey this month, looking for feedback as staff and the school board think about how to offer programs and services next year. Many parents wrote back about the difficulty in managing their children’s school schedule in tandem with a household and a job. They worried their children learned less than they would have in a school setting.

For more rural schools, internet access also cut into the quality and types of materials students could access.

Will students return?

Craig Hoppes, the superintendent of the Astoria School District, knows around 30% of the district’s parents are unsure if they will send kids back at all. A few have already told him they will not send their children to school until there is a vaccine.

The district’s board plans to pass a budget this month that assumes all students and teachers are back in classrooms starting in September like normal, even though they know this is unlikely to be the case.

Astoria School District had 1,914 students enrolled before schools shut down statewide because of the coronavirus. Under state guidelines, Hop-

pes knows the district — and likely every school district in the county except maybe the tiny Jewell School District — will not be able to have every single student back in class and meet public health and safety criteria for social distancing.

And though the district is committed to following all the safety guidelines, Hoppes noted: “The tricky part with that is I can work hard to make sure kids are safe, but I can’t control where kids go after school hours.”

Many teachers in the county say they long to be back in the classroom. It has been hard, not really knowing how kids are doing, connecting only through a screen, if at all.

“We will do our best regardless, but my thought is I want to be back in the classroom with my students, to be able to connect with them and help them the best I can,” Hankwitz said after the staff parade.

She thought of one mom and her daughter, who had been at the high school at the start of the parade. The mom texted Hankwitz to let her know they were heading up to the Peter Pan Market on Niagara Avenue so the girl could wave hello again, in real life.

Mustangs: ‘We don’t get to choose what horse we want’

Continued from Page A1

While the wild mustangs are technically rounded up and captured, it’s more of a “rescue,” she said.

“People have mixed feelings on the competition and wild horses,” Inniss said. “When I applied to adopt Chico three years ago, I was sitting in the bleachers and some lady said, ‘This is awful. These horses are pulled from their homes.’

“The problem is, they’re grazing animals and they overpopulate. Eventually they end up starving themselves and dying in the wild of starvation. The BLM (Bureau of Land Management) has the program where they have roundups to get these horses.”

In the wild, mustangs are subject to infection or injuries caused by other horses, or attacks by other animals.

“Adopting them and taking them in, they can live up to 30 years,” according to Inniss.

The captured horses are tagged, the numbers are put into a computer system, then matched with a trainer.

“We don’t get to choose what horse we want,” Inniss said. “It’s just a lottery draw.”

That’s how she was matched with “Sedona,” a 3-year-old Strawberry roan mustang.

Sedona was vaccinated, but that was her only human interaction before ending up with Inniss.

Sedona is approximately 5 years old, 15 hands in height (60 inches), “but she’s got some legs on her,” Inniss

said.

After a short familiarization process, Sedona and Inniss have bonded, and the two will perform in the upcoming challenge.

On Sept. 26, Inniss will be one of about 30 other trainers competing in the Extreme Mustang Makeover Challenge, showing two judges how far they have come with their mustangs.

Sedona will compete in body conditioning, judging what the horse looks like nutrition-wise, its muscle and coat, and hoof care.

They will also be judged on showmanship, how well the trainer and horse are working together, and in-hand or riding trails in the adult riding division.

Inniss is “super happy” with the progress she has made with Sedona. She has three other horses, “and they all seem to get along with her. They’re all sticking by her. I can approach her and put a lead to her halter, but it takes a few tries to get her.”

Inniss is also a “tip trainer,” offering people lessons in training horses (see “Inniss Equine” on Facebook).

“My goal is to always teach the safety portion of having a horse, how to approach it, and what to look for in body language.”

As for Sedona, she may yet end up with Inniss for good.

“I went into this thinking this is a project horse that I was going to train and compete with,” she said, “but she’s kind of tugging at my heart strings. It’s the personalities that win me over.”

Mural: Film company commissioned a local artist to paint the murals

Continued from Page A1

“The school district has to keep their mission in mind and they have to be respectful of the funds made available to them to do things,” he added. “I get that saving a mural was not at the top of their mission. Their mission is educating children and that obviously has to be at the top of their to-do list.”

But Burns is glad they were willing to work with the historical society to come to a solution on preserving parts of the mural.

Though he would prefer to be able to save all of the artwork, “it’s better than it being destroyed and thrown into the junk pile.”

The film company behind “Kindergarten Cop” commissioned local artist Judith Niland to paint colorful murals at the school nearly 30 years ago. Of the scenes depicted, a nearly 12-foot tall cartoon

giraffe is prominent.

Burns was not sure what specific elements most resonated with fans of the movie, but said the giraffe rose above the rest — literally.

“The giraffe did resonate with us, but we were basically asking for whatever pieces could come off cleanly and that’s been part of the challenge,” he said.

Besides the giraffe, the historical society also has a section with a cop character in a traditional blue uniform.

The pieces are probably too large to display in the historical society’s Oregon Film Museum, located in the historic Clatsop County Jail, Burns said. But the historical society is exploring the possibility of expanding the museum.

“We collect things with that thought: That space will not be an object in the future,” Burns said.

Cruise: Port has canceled all but three scheduled visits

Continued from Page A1

after working for the past few months with federal, state and local officials, as well as hospitals, on operating protocols.

The company’s ships are all under 200 passengers and were planning to run at 75% capacity.

“We were surprised and disappointed by the last-minute changes, but understand the difficulty leaders face in that state,” she said in a statement. “We hope to participate in reviving the state’s economy, and still believe we are uniquely positioned to do so.

“We will continue to do our best to support all our local partners throughout the region, and look forward to resuming small ship cruising

in the Pacific Northwest in the very near future.”

County Manager Don Bohn said the length of the prohibition on cruise ships will likely depend on the virus. “As I understand it in a nutshell is that the state ... decided to look at the river cruise ships from a statewide perspective, given the length that the river cruises are traveling and the ports along the way,” he said.

Oregon has experienced a surge in cases recently, breaking single-day records.

Union County, which had an outbreak tied to a church, the voluntary agreed on Wednesday to move back to phase one restrictions, the first county to retreat.

Gov. Kate Brown

announced that Multnomah County, the state’s largest by population, could enter phase one on Friday, but, starting next Wednesday, people in Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Hood River, Marion, Polk and Lincoln counties would have to wear masks in grocery stores and other businesses as precautions.

The CDC’s no-sail order on cruise ships was originally issued in March and set to expire in April. But the federal agency extended it another 100 days to July 24, or until the expiration of the national public health emergency or a rescission of the order by the CDC director.

The Port has canceled all but three scheduled cruise

ship visits from what was supposed to be a record-setting season. The Oceania Regatta on Sept. 19, the Seven Seas Mariner on Oct. 1 and the Norwegian Sun on Oct. 15 are the only cruise ships still scheduled to visit Astoria.

Will Isom, the Port’s executive director, said the cancellations are related to the prohibition Canada has placed through October on cruise ships with more than 100 people. Most oceangoing cruise ships coming through Astoria are transiting north or south to and from Canadian or U.S. waters.

“This, in effect, was the final straw that caused cancellations of Alaskan cruises for the remainder of the year,” he said.

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