

## Schools: A lot of cases are household contacts

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"I'm not going to sit here and say it's not spreading," he said. "I don't have a case rate. We could track that but on a daily basis, we're spending anywhere from six to eight hours just contact tracing, and I haven't gone back to look at the numbers. We do have some close contacts and we do have some spread, which we hadn't seen prior to the break. It's not great."

McClellan assured parents that positive cases among students are typically linked to off-campus activities, rather than from student-to-student contact in the classroom.

"I can also say, just not with definitive data, but a lot of our cases are household contacts, just by contact tracing every day," Hoppes added.

Recognizing the challenge at schools, the Oregon Health Authority indicated the state would update its guidelines to lessen the burden of contact tracing.

The state said it would no longer consider masked contact in K-12 settings, including school buses, to be an exposure, regardless of distancing.

While many parents praised Hoppes and other school district administrators for their efforts in keeping students in classrooms, one parent pressed the superintendent on why the district is sticking to in-person learning as virus cases rise.

"There is a balance that



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School district leaders told parents the goal is to avoid a return to remote learning.

the district is trying to find, and I spend a lot of time thinking about this," Hoppes replied. "The balance is what is healthy and safe for students from a health standpoint, and the impact of students being in school, from an academic, as well as an emotional and mental health standpoint ... We do have an online option for parents. But at this point, we think it's advantageous ... for kids to be in school. And we want to have kids remain in school."

Other questions from parents included topics such as a potential vaccine mandate for students, natural immunity and the guidelines for students without booster shots.

McClellan told parents that

any vaccine mandate for students would not come down within the next year due to the lengthy process it would take.

### Test-to-stay

As vaccines are now approved for children ages 5 and older, the school district has adjusted protocols and implemented a new strategy for how to manage exposures for unvaccinated students, referred to as "test-to-stay."

Instead of having to immediately quarantine after being identified as a close contact to a virus case, unvaccinated students can now take measures to remain at school. The unvaccinated student must test negative twice within a seven-day

period and be symptom-free to continue to attend classes.

"This has been a good protocol for us for the past week. We have been able to keep a lot of kids in school," Hoppes said.

Hoppes applauded the community and Columbia Memorial Hospital for stepping up to assist with testing. The school district performed 40 to 50 tests this week alone, he said.

Regarding a question about the possibility of across-the-board virus testing for students, Hoppes said there are no plans to do so, and that testing all students would likely need to come from at-home tests.

Lalich said supply chain issues could complicate the delivery of at-home tests.

## Flooding: County strained its resources

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If the state's Office of Emergency Management also declares an emergency in Clatsop County, federal resources may come to the county's aid, Brown said.

Last week, in the wake of snowfall that began on Christmas, the North Coast saw flooding and breached dikes, as well as landslides, downed trees and other hazards that harmed public infrastructure and private property. Some roads were blocked. School districts canceled classes. Warrenton declared an emergency.

The county strained its resources — personnel, water pumps, sandbags — during the wet weather.

"(T)he flood hazard was of such magnitude and severity that it is beyond the county's response capability," according to the resolution, which was approved by county commissioners on Wednesday.

"We brought it all and we didn't have any more to bring," Brown said in an interview.

The county has asked cities and special districts — like fire districts, school districts, water and sewer districts — to survey the damage and report back.

As of Thursday, the assessment was not finished, but the county's Public Works Department knew by Jan. 7 that it would exceed the threshold, Brown said.

"I probably received as many constituent phone calls in the last few weeks as I have in the last three years, and especially because a very large part of my district is susceptible," Com-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Trees off state Highway 202 were partially submerged by high water last week.

missioner Pamela Wev said, "and I just can't say enough about how responsive our staff has been."

Wev's District 3 covers central Astoria and Miles Crossing, Jeffers Garden, Fort Clatsop, Lewis and Clark, Youngs River, Olney, Green Mountain and parts of Walluski.

During the deluge, Warrenton's stormwater system was overwhelmed. Typically disconnected watersheds were connecting. "If Alder Creek would have overran by another inch or so, there would have been severe damage to the city," Mayor Henry Balensifer said.

The mayor said the city sought help from the county — looking for additional pumps and qualified personnel to run them — and was more successful getting help from the Oregon Military Department. Crews from

Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center and Salem showed up.

In the end, Warrenton used pumps from the city's and the military department's firetrucks to reduce the floodwaters.

Brown said the county had run out of pumps, and that the emergency management office tried to help Warrenton in multiple ways.

Since Warrenton is a signatory to ORWARN (Oregon Water/Wastewater Agency Response Network) — which puts it in a mutual aid agreement with other signatories — the city needed to lean on fellow members, such as Astoria and Seaside, before asking the Office of Emergency Management to mobilize resources, she said.

"We considered the options, and they weren't tenable," Balensifer said.

The mayor said Warrenton and the county will need to perform an after-action review. "We're going to have to work out some stuff with them," he said.

Brown, in an email, said, "The situation highlights work we can do at the county level to help communicate the process more effectively — we want everyone to feel well-served and are committed to understanding how to make that happen."

## Armitage: Several commissioners pointed to her experience in Salem

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from Arch Cape, were also vying for the appointment.

The three candidates were selected last week by Democrats from among a slate of eight contenders at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center. In the first round of balloting, Busch, who is running in the Democratic primary for Senate in May, had walked away with 73% of the weighted vote.

"I'd like to thank the (Democrats) who voted for me and the commissioners who appointed me," Armitage said in an interview. "I would like to thank the two women — Melissa Busch and Nadia Gardner — who ran this race alongside me."

"And I especially want to thank Sen. Betsy Johnson for setting such a strong example of what good public service looks like in this district."

Unlike Busch, Armitage said she will not run in the Democratic primary for Senate. State Rep. Suzanne Weber, R-Tillamook, is giving up her House District 32 seat to campaign in the Republican primary for Senate.

"I am definitely not running for any office in 2022," Armitage said.

Armitage emphasized her experience serving as a legislative aide during the 2016 and 2017 sessions. She is an alum of Emerge Oregon, a program that trains Democratic women to run for office. She will represent Senate District 16 when the Legislature convenes for a short session in February.

On Friday, several county commissioners — including Clatsop County commissioners Mark Kujala and Lianne Thompson — pointed to Armitage's experience in Salem.

Commissioners Courtney Bangs and John Toyooka also voted for Armitage. Commissioner Pamela Wev cast the sole vote for Gardner.

Lindsay Berschauer, the chairwoman of the

Yamhill County Board of Commissioners, said of Johnson: "One of her biggest strengths was her communication style and her ability to reach out across the aisle and talk to anybody."

"And in the spirit of that, I was very impressed with Rachel. She did reach out to me almost immediately to have a conversation, and we had a lovely conversation," she said. "We likely don't agree on much and we would probably vote opposite of each other. But we had a lot of things that we did talk about and saw in common."

Berschauer said that Armitage was the only candidate who reached out to her. "I really appreciate that," Berschauer said.

Johnson, a centrist Democrat from a family tied to Oregon politics and government, had led the district since 2006 after several years in the state House of Representatives. She served as co-chair of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, which crafts the state budget. She often sided with Republicans on issues such as gun rights and environmental regulation.

Among the eight candidates Democrats considered for the vacancy, two well-known names — former state House representatives Deborah Boone, of Hamlet, and Tim Josi, of Tillamook — came in last.

In reaction to the news of Armitage's appointment, Andy Davis, the chairman of the Clatsop County Democrats, said, "I think that that was a reasonable outcome. I understand the commissioners' desire to have someone with some legislative experience in the seat, and I don't think they are out of line to want that in a candidate."

"So I think Rachel seemed like a natural fit for that, and certainly the county party will support her and hope that we can play any part we can to make her successful in that short role."

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## Dispute: The Roberts plan to appeal

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appeals court maintained that it was not the Legislature's intention to preempt the ability of local governments to apply standards like setbacks that have a purpose other than reducing density.

Haystack Rock LLC, the nonprofit Oregon Coast Alliance and the League of Oregon Cities supported the city in the challenge.

The League of Oregon

Cities submitted an amicus brief to the appeals court, writing that the court's decision would "significantly affect the ability of cities in Oregon to plan for and guide development of housing within their jurisdictions."

Meanwhile, the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland and the Stafford Land Co., a residential developer, submitted amicus briefs in support of the Roberts, echoing the couple's

arguments.

The Roberts plan to appeal to the Oregon Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the couple has applied for a second building permit for a smaller house that meets the oceanfront setback standard. The City Council plans to hold a public hearing for a driveway access easement agreement — a requirement before the building permit is considered — in March.