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## Brown orders schools to reopen by mid-April

Governor says science is clear that schools present low risk of transmission

By JADE MCDOWELL AND  
BRYCE DOLE  
East Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced on Friday, March 5, that she was directing all Oregon schools to offer hybrid or full in-person

instruction to all elementary students by March 29 and all sixth-12th grade students by April 19.

She said the science is “very, very clear” that with proper safety measures in place, there is low risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools.

“Thanks to the smart choices Oregonians have made, our COVID-19 numbers have declined,” Brown said in a statement. “All but six counties now meet or exceed Oregon’s advisory metrics for a return to in-person, hybrid learning

for all K-12 grade levels. And, five of those counties meet the advisory metrics for a return to elementary school.”

School districts may still offer comprehensive distance learning to students who wish to remain fully online, the news release stated, and it will be an option for when “community transmission rates of COVID-19 warrant a transition, as determined by state or local public health directives.” Offering at least some in-person instruction will no longer be optional for districts

whose COVID-19 numbers meet state guidelines for reopening, however.

According to a letter Brown sent to the directors of the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Education, a majority of Oregon students have not returned to the classroom yet. Brown put the number of students getting at least some in-person instruction at 160,105 students — less than 30% of the state’s total student population, according to ODE data.

“I am using this phased approach

because, as we have seen from school districts that have returned to in-person instruction successfully, schools will return our youngest learners to school first, and apply the lessons learned from that implementation process to reopening middle and high school buildings,” Brown wrote.

The announcement comes 10 weeks since Brown relaxed the state’s role in school reopening decisions. On Dec. 23, 2020, the

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## COVID-19 VACCINE

## Typo sparks vaccine confusion

Umatilla County to receive fewer doses than expected, again

By BRYCE DOLE  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Last week, Umatilla County health officials received an email from the Oregon Health Authority promising counties across Oregon a sharp uptick in their weekly allocated COVID-19 vaccines — an increase from 700 doses to 2,400, including 1,600 more first doses of the Moderna vaccine.

With the new doses, Umatilla County health officials hoped to revise plans and speed up the upcoming vaccination schedule after shipments and events had been delayed time and time again.

On Monday, March 1, however, Joe Fiumara, the county’s public health director, received some unfortunate news: The increase was a one-time shipment.

“Turns out it was a typo,” Fiumara said of the email from the state. “And 700 of those doses was a one-time boost because our per-capita rates were low. We’re expecting 900 (first doses) next week, not 1,600.”

In the email, state officials said nine counties would receive a one-time increased shipment of doses to improve their vaccination rates. However, according to

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## EO SPOTLIGHT

## ‘CRISIS LEVEL’

Pendleton housing hits extreme seller’s market; Hermiston invests in infrastructure to spur new housing projects

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When the Umatilla River floods hit Pendleton in 2020, hundreds of residents were rendered temporarily homeless.

The Oregon Legislature eventually stepped in to provide millions of dollars worth of rapid rehousing money to organizations like the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon to help displaced residents find a new place to live.

But the nonprofit struggled to find homes for the flood survivors in Pendleton’s existing housing market, according to CAPECO Chief Executive Officer Paula Hall. There were few housing options on the market, and even available homes were often unaffordable for the displaced residents, many of whom came from Riverview Mobile Home Estates. Kate Gonsalves, a senior communications coordinator with Oregon Housing & Community Services, said the rapid rehousing money was soon repurposed for a different Pendleton housing project.

Pendleton and communi-



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A sale pending sign is bathed in light from the setting sun on Thursday, March 4, 2021, in Pendleton.

ties across Eastern Oregon have been plagued with tight housing markets for years, but people in the local real estate industry are saying the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the disparity between supply and demand at all levels of the market.

## COVID-19 further tightens the market

The real estate industry measures the health of a housing market by looking at the number of months it would take to sell all properties currently for sale at the average monthly pace, according to Texas A&M University.

Jef Farley, a longtime Pend-

leton real estate agent, said a balanced market is five months. At the end of 2020, Pendleton had less than a month’s worth of stock.

While home buying has been aided by low interest rates on home loans, Farley said the pandemic-induced rise in telecommuting has led to more people interested in living in Pendleton.

Pendleton has become an extreme seller’s market.

“We are at a crisis level,” Farley said.

Real estate agents aren’t the only ones noticing this trend.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Genna Banica, an

escrow manager with Pioneer Title & Escrow in Pendleton, said she initially worried that work was going to slow down as people looked to stay in their current homes as the virus spread.

“We didn’t know it was going to be so busy,” she said.

Even as the coronavirus has begun to recede in 2021, Banica said coming into work early, staying late and skipping lunches is still the norm to deal with the high volume of work. Banica said she recently dealt with 24 requests for refinancing and new home purchases over four

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Houses line the North Hill in Pendleton on Friday, March 5, 2021.  
Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

