



East Oregonian, File

First-grade students eat a meal at their desks prior to the start of the school day at Washington Elementary School in Pendleton on the first day of in-person instruction on Feb. 22, 2021.

Masks:

Continued from Page A1

Mulvihill pointed out local school districts now have much more experience with infectious disease outbreaks than in early 2020.

"Districts can react rapidly and get teed up to plan mitigation efforts," he said. "We can fall back on policies and procedures which we know will work, and ramp them up quickly."

He said a lot of positives came out of the experience in the past two years.

"We're now used to working closely with Umatilla County Public Health to keep an eye on what's going on. We're better prepared than in the past," Mulvihill said. "We don't jump to any conclusions based on an advisory from the state, whether for COVID or the flu."

Mulvihill noted the county is diverse. During pandemic surges, masking, distancing and online learning mandates were statewide, so every district in Umatilla County had to comply.

"Ukiah and Hermiston might not both need to follow the same protocols," he said. "Each district can now monitor what's happening locally and adjust accordingly, rather than follow state or county mandates."

Local schools will do all they can, he said, to keep doors open for students.

"Right now our emphasis is on finishing the year, having graduations, track meets and all the events that our kids have so sorely missed," he said. "It has been tough on the kids."

Some precautions still in place, others optional

Masks are optional in the Umatilla School District, Superintendent Heidi Sipe reported.

She referred to a March 11 district press release that asks for "respect for others" when it comes to mask wearing, and an additional learning guide states social distancing remains in effect, as well as regular cleaning and sanitizing of high-touch areas and free COVID-19 testing is available at the school for symptomatic students with a parent's permission.

Sipe said the district tracks cases weekly. On May 16, she said the district's last case was April 22.

Dirk Dirksen, Morrow County School District superintendent, said COVID-19 worries have decreased along with concern. He said there

have been no reported cases in Morrow County schools in at least a month and maybe only one or two since February.

"Knock on wood," he said, adding he hopes cases do not reemerge.

As for protocols, he said schools require adults to sign in at an office upon arriving at a school. At that time, they have to commit that they do not have COVID-19 or symptoms.

"We also would ask parents to keep kids at home with any COVID symptoms," he said, and schools send students home if they have symptoms.

Dirksen said schools are equipped with COVID-19 tests from the state of Oregon and masks are optional for students and staff, both on school grounds and in buses.

He said he has kept an eye on COVID-19 numbers in the district. In recent months, he said, cases are declining throughout Morrow County. The superintendent said it is possible case numbers are higher than what is reported in the school district and throughout the county.

"When kids are home with the flu, we don't call them up and tell them they have to call the health department," he said.

Jake Bacon, Hermiston School District assistant superintendent, said concern about COVID-19 has drastically reduced, and contact tracing is a thing of the past. Masks in his district are optional, for both staff and students. This remains the situation both on school grounds and on buses.

There was a COVID-19 case last week, he said, but a lot is unknown as reporting is not mandatory. The district still has recommendations, though.

"An individual who tests positive, they should isolate for five days," he said. After five days, and after 24 hours of being fever free, they should wear masks for days six through 10, he said.

Bacon said cleanings and sterilizations have decreased in recent weeks, but schools still are wiping down tabletops and promoting hand washing.

The Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Education also reminded schools that students or staff with COVID-like symptoms have to stay home, and asked families to not send their sick children to school and to seek a test and, if the children are eligible, to get them vaccinated.

— Oregon Public Broadcasting reporter Elizabeth Miller and The Oregonian reporter Fedor Zarkhin contributed to this report.

Dog:

Continued from Page A1

Morgan said her husband also came.

"He wanted to go get her himself, but they wouldn't let him," she said.

Umatilla Tribal Fire Department Capt. Darrell Welch and firefighter Josh Hoeft responded as well with harnesses, rescue rope and a dog catching pole from an off-duty animal control officer, according to CTUIR. Members of the Umatilla Tribal Police also were on the scene.

The rescue plan was to establish an anchor to a large boulder, according to the press release, and Hoeft headed down the steep slope.

Morgan said as Hoeft got closer, other first responders asked if he needed anything else.

"Yeah," Morgan responded, "better footing."

She said Azra was skittish and backed away as Hoeft tried to put the loop of the catch pole around her neck, but she could see her husband and Hoeft called her name. Azra inched close enough for Hoeft to gently catch her with the pole.

After securing the dog to the pole and an additional rope, according to the press release, rescuers pulled Azra approximately 30 feet uphill.

Morgan said when Azra saw her husband, she came running.

Getting back to normal

ODOT received the report of a dog on a cliff starting



Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation/Contributed Photo

First responders pose Thursday, May 12, 2022, with Azra following her rescue from a cliff overlooking Interstate 84 on Cabbage Hill about 9 miles east of Pendleton.

May 10, two days before the rescue. According to the press release, one state transportation worker reported seeing a coyote along the road and staring up at the cliff, but workers didn't see the dog at that time.

"So she was on the ledge for at least two days," Morgan said.

The ledge and cliff, however, may have helped protect Azra because it prevented her from crossing the busy freeway.

"I really think that was

a blessing in disguise that she couldn't get home," Morgan said.

Once Azra was home, she ate, drank and slept for about two days, Morgan said, and suffered some scrapes and cuts. She also was "pretty traumatized" from the experience.

Morgan said Azra hid out in her igloo, barked out of fear at cars passing by and was a "little more velcroed to me" than usual. By May 15, though, she started showing signs

of getting back to normal and playing with the other dogs.

Pets become our family, Morgan said, and thanks to the help of a lot of people, a member of her family made it back home.

"The community thing in particular, I'm really pleased about that," Morgan said. "That's really awesome to me."

And now, Morgan added, she has the medical OK to again take her dogs for morning walks.

Totem:

Continued from Page A1

earlier this month from Bellingham, Washington, with stops across Washington, Oregon and Idaho. The inspiration for the totem's journey comes from the story of Tahlequah, the southern resident orca, whose "tour of grief" captivated global audiences in 2018 when she carried her deceased baby calf 1,000 miles across 17 days.

And the evening featured "Whale People: Protectors of the Sea," an immersive video presentation on the plight of Northwest salmon and orcas. Connor said Pendleton and Eugene were the only two stops on the totem's journey to also have the "Whale People" exhibit, which began with an innovation and addresses from the Jameses and officials with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The event was in the works for a while, Brigham told the crowd of 25 or so, and explained how tribal people view life as connected. Taking care of the environment and natural resources, she said, ensures our survival.

Cor Sams, member of the CTUIR Board of Trustees and chair of the tribes' fish and wildlife committee, told the audience about the tribes'



Phil Wright/East Oregonian

Lummi elder and master carver Doug James and wife Siam'elwit address the audience Saturday evening, May 14, 2022, during the ceremonial opening of "Whale People: Protectors of the Sea" outside Tamastlikt Cultural Institute near Pendleton.

long connection to salmon.

"In our creation story the salmon gave up its heart so we can live," she said, and in turn, the people would care for the salmon. Policymakers, then, she said, have the duty to speak on behalf of the salmon.

But breaching the Snake River dams carries consequences for irrigators and the power grid, she said, and the goal of removing those dams is to continue to meet all the needs the dams now provide.

Teegan Herrera, chair of the CTUIR Junior Youth Leadership Council, was direct in his assessment: "Salmon extinction is not an option. Not for us and not for the orca."

Lummi elder Doug

James at the mic said Tahlequah was sending a message about what is happening to the environment.

"If one species dies it affects everything," he said. "There's a chain reaction."

He said it was up to people now to preserve the world for the next generation and save "our relative, salmon." The staple of tribal people throughout the Columbia River Basin, Doug James said salmon are like the canary in the mine shaft, and like Tahlequah, the salmon are trying to tell us something as well.

Doug James' wife, Siam'elwit, also addressed the audience. She said rivers across the United States are drying up, furthering the

loss of salmon. Indigenous people have the right to speak up, she said, and to work for unity to restore what has been lost.

Jewel James during the ceremony said environmental degradation is nothing new. Tribes along the Snake River during the Oregon Trail pointed out the waste the pioneers left in their wake, he said, and Indigenous people have been bearing the brunt of that since.

"Name the social economic ill," he said, "and it's always worse in Indian Country."

And now, he said, it's about calling other groups to stand up behind tribes as they push for dam removal on the Snake River.

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