

Wallowa Schools make end to mask mandate official

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA — The Wallowa School Board made it official during an emergency session Tuesday, March 1, and eliminated the requirement that students and employees wear face masks to guard against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The move came a day after Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority lifted the face mask requirement effective March 11.

“The governor and the Oregon Health Authority have returned local decision-making to us as they had in July when they first said the date of (March) 31 and then the 19th and now yesterday they’ve moved that to the 11th,” District Superintendent Tammy Jones said. “So what that means is the board is able to decide whether or not masks are worn or not in the schools, whether that’s an option. The CDC (federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends

that masks be worn for certain individuals. I’m sure there will still be health and safety requirements they’ll have in place and those decisions are now on the table for us now.”

She said she expected to learn more about OHA and CDC requirements the following day during a virtual meeting she planned to take part in. On March 2, she said the meeting just involved details of how schools and other public places are to handle the new freedom, such as urging hand washing and other cleaning, masks for those in high-risk categories and other safeguards that have been in place during the two-year pandemic.

Jones said any possible quarantines or isolation is largely up to local health officials.

She said the district regularly meets with Dr. Elizabeth Powers, chief medical officer of Wallowa Memorial Hospital, to discuss the pandemic.

“Last week, we were assured by Dr. Powers that

this was a good direction to make masks optional as a local county,” Jones said.

As for quarantines and isolation, she said, “Right now, if you test positive, it’s five days (quarantine) and then you can return and wear a mask full time,” she said. “So that would probably be a matter if they wanted to wear a mask full time or take the 10 days (quarantine).”

Jones attended the meeting via Zoom since she had come down with the virus herself.

The board voted to lift the mask mandate effective the “earliest day permissible” by the state and local health authorities.

Superintendent resigns

In another matter, the board accepted the retirement/resignation of Jones from her position as superintendent.

“I think we should skip this one,” said board Chairman Woody Wolfe, as he looked at the next item on the agenda. However, he opened it up for discussion.

Jones, who also resigned from her position on the Joseph City Council effective Feb. 15, said before the school board meeting that the two resignations are in no way connected.

“In some ways but not really,” Jones said. “It’s just time for me and my health.”

She also said she is resigning to spend more time with her family.

Her letter of resignation in Joseph said it was because of pressures and responsibilities at work. She said in a telephone interview March 2 that she was unable to attend evening meetings in Joseph because she had to be at school functions. Also, in the two weeks separating the two resignations, she hadn’t yet received financial planning information regarding her state job.

Jones plans to stay on as superintendent until the end of June.

Board member Matt Howard made the motion, saying, “Reluctantly, I move to approve the retirement/resig-

nation of the superintendent.”

The board voted unanimously to accept the motion.

This is the second time in four years the district has lost a superintendent. In 2020, Jay Hummel resigned as interim superintendent after two years on the job, being replaced by Jones at that time. Hummel had replaced Bret Uptmor, who resigned effective July 1, 2018, to take a position with the Grant School District.

Wolfe asked the board for authorization to contact the Oregon School Boards Association and employ it to begin finding an interim superintendent to replace Jones. Since it usually talks six to eight months to find a permanent superintendent, the district doesn’t have the time before Jones resigns.

Board members did note that should they be pleased with the person hired as interim superintendent, it may be possible to offer a permanent contract.

In another matter, board members agreed it is the superintendent’s job to hire

a new secondary school principal.

David Howe, the former principal of Wallowa High School, submitted his resignation to be effective March 8. However, Howe said March 2, Jones asked him to pack leave Jan. 31.

“She came up to my office about 1:30 in the afternoon and told me I would be on paid administrative leave until March 8,” Howe said. “She said I must get belongings and I’m not allowed on school grounds.”

Howe said he was not told a reason for his early dismissal either by Jones or any of the board members.

“I was continuing to function the best I could until that point,” he said. “I’m not sure what the reasoning behind that was.”

Wolfe said he could not comment on Howe’s departure “in case he has a liability case against us.”

Jones declined to say why she asked Howe to leave.

“That’s something I can’t comment on,” she said.

True Value
BARGAINS OF THE MONTH
While supplies last.

17.99
2.5 gal BlueDEF Platinum™
Helps maintain optimal fuel economy. Saves money on costly repairs.
H 104 640 1



SAVE \$5 OR MORE

M-F 8AM-5:30PM • SAT 8AM-5PM • SUN 9AM-3PM

Hurricane Creek Road
Enterprise, Oregon
541-426-3116

WALLOWA COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS
BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A **True Value**
Sale Good March 1st - 31st



SPRING is just around the corner!
How can I help with your advertising needs?

Wallowa County CHIEFTAIN

JAC's Innovative Sales and Marketing Solutions
Contact Jennifer Cooney TODAY!
jacs.isms@gmail.com • 541-805-9630





We are
HIRING
WORK WITH A DYNAMIC TEAM
& MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE
PART-TIME & FULL-TIME POSITIONS OPEN
AT OUR RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES

Learn more at wvcenterforwellness.org
or contact HR at hr@wvcenterforwellness.org
541-426-4524 x1062

WALLOWA VALLEY CENTER for WELLNESS

FREE ADMISSION

MARCH 26-27
Saturday 9:00 am–5:00 pm
Sunday 9:00 am–3:00 pm

CENTRAL OREGON AGRICULTURAL SHOW

DESCHUTES COUNTY FAIR & EXPO CENTER
REDMOND • OREGON

Powered by Capital Press & EO Media Events

Exhibitors
Many industry suppliers, retailers and service providers featuring new products, technology, and solutions.

Demonstrations

5 Buck Breakfast
SAT. MORNING 8–10 While supplies last
Sponsored by McDonalds
All proceeds to benefit Perfect Balance

KIDS' ZONE
PROJECTS AND FUN ACTIVITIES
ALL THINGS AGRICULTURE

Clint Johnson Working Dog Demonstrations
SAT. 11–NOON • SUN. 10–11

Early Day Gas Engine and Tractor Display with Demonstrations

Seminars

- Drought protection
- Water issues
- Animal care and nutrition
- What's new in the Ag Industry
- ...and much more

Good Food

For booth or sponsorship information contact Kasey Every at kasey@every-idea.com or 541-383-2669.

MAJOR SPONSORS





coagshow.com

In conjunction with the High Desert Stampede PRCA Rodeo | highdesertstampede.com