

## Willamina sets Feb. 9 re-opening date for first and second graders

By Danielle Harrison

*Smoke Signals staff writer*

The COVID-19 pandemic has left Oregon schools shuttered for almost a year, but there may be some light at the end of the tunnel for local parents, teachers and students who are eager for a return to in-person learning.

Willamina School District Superintendent Carrie Zimbrick said that she hopes students in first and second grades will return to the Oaken Hills campus on Tuesday, Feb. 9, and that all students will be “fully implemented” in a hybrid model by the start of the fourth quarter of school.

Kindergartners already attend half-time, in-person classes in Willamina. Most Tribal and descendant students in Grand Ronde attend school in Willamina.

“We had our leadership team meeting to discuss the new ‘Ready Schools, Safe Learners,’ version,” Zimbrick said. “Although the bulk of the document remains the same, significant changes were made, particularly for districts choosing to open ‘outside the metrics.’ ... We made a decision to return first and second grade to a modified hybrid model, pending staff support and board support, beginning Feb. 9.”

Beginning on Jan. 1, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s instructions for returning to school became “advisory rather than mandatory,” according to a letter sent to the Oregon Department of Education and Oregon Health Authority on Dec. 23.

“Moving forward, the decision to resume in-person instruction must be made locally, district by district, school by school,” Brown said. “In addition to schools continuing to adhere to required health and safety protocols and working in close consultation with their local public health authority in understanding and considering the metrics, teachers, school staff, parents and students should be engaged in this decision-making process to allow schools to make the best

choice for their community and their students.”

Changes to the state guidance on Jan. 19 include resources to support outdoor instruction, revisions to align with the occupational safety and health rules, requiring employee representation for back-to-school planning and a requirement that districts offer on-site COVID-19 testing if they are located in counties in high case counts. Schools in Yamhill, Marion and Polk counties are currently included in that description.

The Willamina hybrid model will feature a half-day, morning or afternoon session for three hours, four days per week (Tuesday through Friday).

“Some of the priorities for opening include the opportunity to have staff vaccinated and ensuring we can meet all of the new requirements, including the potential to provide rapid testing for symptomatic students or staff,” Zimbrick said.

Lindsey Manfrin, head of the Yamhill County Public Health Department, said in the *Yamhill County News Register* that she hopes to set up a vaccination clinic in the West Valley so teachers in Sheridan and Willamina don’t have to drive far for their shots.

She said it would take only two to three days to vaccinate all the teachers in Yamhill County if sufficient doses are available, which they are not. The county plans to distribute vaccines to school districts proportionally, meaning if Willamina has 15 percent of the teachers in the county, it will receive 15 percent of the available doses.

Meanwhile, the McMinnville School District and its teachers’ union signed a memo of agreement stating in-person classes would not start until educators had received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

For more information, visit [oregon.gov/ode/](http://oregon.gov/ode/) and click on the ‘Ready Schools, Safe Learners’ link. ■



Photo by Timothy J. Gonzalez

**Technological upgrades to the Tribal Council Chambers allow Tribal Council member to see and hear remote participants on two large TV screens.**

## New camera to enable livestreaming will be added

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a central control panel for ease of access.

With the COVID-19 pandemic necessitating the use of virtual meetings, streamlining the process was key.

Tribal Audiovisual Network Technician Wendell Olson said that the system allows Tribal Council members to remain in their office or home and actively participate in the meetings hosted from the meeting room, which was being utilized while Tribal Council Chambers undergo similar, but more substantial, upgrades.

“The video conference system is PC-based so it can be used with most videoconferencing systems by simply installing the software on the PC,” Olson said. “This system is also integrated into our phone system and parts of it can be utilized for teleconferencing without the need for separate equipment.”

Tribal Council Chambers is getting all of the same features as the meeting room and also will include a public address system, new wireless microphones for Tribal Council members with built-in speakers and headphones that can be attached to the station to help those with hearing impairments.

The PA system also will directly connect to the videoconferencing system, teleconferencing and the livestream for virtual attendees, which is the primary way a meeting can be attended by non-employees during the pandemic.

Additionally, a camera to enable livestreaming will be permanently mounted overhead so that floor space currently taken up by camera equipment and videographer can be utilized for seating and will no longer obstruct the view for those seated further back once in-person meetings resume.

Both the audience and Tribal Council members will be able to view the videoconference attendees and presentations on monitors located overhead.

“In addition to the four new monitors, the audience will enjoy clearer sound from the new PA system, which includes more and better speakers located much closer to

the audience, substantially reducing the echo and other acoustical anomalies of the room,” Olson said.

Tribal Council member Kathleen George said she is grateful for the upgrades. Since the pandemic began, she has been doing a combination of working from home and in-person to reduce potential exposure because she has a vulnerable family member in the same household.

“The new technology improvements will help our meetings be more effective when we have to work remotely, either due to COVID concerns or simply when we have to be away from the office on business in the future,” George said. “I think we have all experienced some technology failures before this. I have just been dropped in the middle of meetings, sometimes over and over on the same meeting, or been able to see and hear everyone but nobody could hear me. I have seen the same things happen to other council members. Also, being able to see the other meeting participants adds an important component to effective communication.”

George said that she is particularly happy with the expanded use of remote connecting allowing more Tribal members to participate in meetings no matter where they live.

“We have had greater participation on average than in our in-person meetings,” she said. “I’m sure that Zoom meetings and similar remote options will continue so that we can expand Tribal member access to our Tribal business.”

Tribal Communications Director Sara Thompson said CARES Act funding has allowed the Tribe to make important technology upgrades.

“The Tribe was able to bring the wiring up to today’s standards as well as incorporate new technology with improved teleconferencing capabilities,” she said. “(It) can incorporate livestream events and provide higher quality audio and video for Tribal members who join business meetings from home. Technology has changed significantly over the years and we’re excited to see how these improvements will help us connect with each other.” ■

## Clothes Closet open Friday afternoons

The Clothes Closet is open from 3 to 6 p.m. Fridays on the Tribal campus near the Elders Activity Center at the end of Blacktail Drive.

The change in hours will better serve the community so people do not have to choose between going to the Grand Ronde Food Bank or the Clothes Closet. It also will be open and available to those who work.

The Clothes Closet accepts clothing, small appliances, small pieces of furniture, electronics and household goods that are clean and in good condition. It does not accept books, large TVs or furniture, but there is a community board where people can post those items.

For more information or emergency clothes, contact Lori Walker-Hernandez at 559-847-7565. ■

## Massage at Health & Wellness Center

Mind, Body & Soul Therapeutic Massage started at the Health & Wellness Clinic.

**Remember:** Appointments for massage are not managed by the Health & Wellness Center staff.

To schedule an appointment, call 971-237-2561. ■