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"It's ironic that exactly a year ago today we were celebrating Gov. Kate Brown's ceremonial signing of the Student Success Act and its historic investment in our students," said Oregon School Boards Association Executive Director Jim Green in a statement. "Now we are looking at budget cuts."

But as districts will be facing budget cuts, they could also be facing sweeping social distancing guidelines from the state when the 2020/21 school year begins, which could require a degree of distance learning no matter what is decided.

Ultimately, as Siuslaw Elementary Principal Mike Harklerode pointed out, the problems of getting students internet access is an issue that predates COVID.

"We have families that struggle and need us, and we have our families of means who expect, and frankly deserve, a first-class education from their kids," he said. "They all come to the same school. Schools have always been an equalizer for us in our society. A free public education is one of the pillars of American democracy."

But schools now face an uncertain future.

"We have to evolve, we have to adjust, we have to maintain relevance in an age where parents have more and more options," Harklerode said. "None of that is specific to COVID-19. COVID has put a spotlight on some of those inequalities, and they matter that much more when we're discussing connectivity as a major issue."

Distance learning, no

matter what form the school comes back to in the future, will be a part of the district come the fall.

"We will have elements of online learning with us, even in elementary school. While we're struggling through this, we're getting better," Harklerode said. "Our students are getting better at learning this model, and we're in a period of rapid growth, in terms of online options."

Internet access has been a barrier for many families in the district to varying degrees, but Harklerode said it wasn't the only barrier, as getting students the equipment needed for online education is also a struggle. The district has been successful in getting Chromebooks out to students during the shutdown.

"There will come a time when high-speed internet access will become a public responsibility to provide," Harklerode said. "It might not be through the schools, but it very well might be. Computer access will also be a problem. Is it ours to fix? I'm not sure."

There are multiple instances in history where schools worked to fix societal issues, from transport to schools to teaching English to nonnative speakers.

"I could make the case that providing internet access, because we would be providing education, is our (problem) to fix as well," he added.

But the principal questioned whether or not this was the time to work on the larger societal issues.

He suggested a thoughtful, rolled out approach to deliver service to those who don't have it, to improve it for those who do have it, is

a good approach.

"More of an evolution and not a revolution," Harklerode said. "I'm not sure the current plan is going to help enough students next year to be a solution during the COVID-19 crisis. I encourage the board to think about this beyond the circumstances of COVID. ... I know the professionals in this district would like us to be taking the lead, but I don't know if providing internet for all would be feasible next year considering the budgetary restrictions and reductions that we're facing."

Lane County Community and Economic Development Manager Austin Ramirez, who attended the meeting to give his viewpoint, stated that this is an equity issue.

"Who's going to fix the problem, and whose problem is it?" Ramirez asked. "I don't know if you waited to try and find someone else to fix this, I don't know if that will actually happen, to be honest. There are not a lot of communities that have an ISP in their community."

When done right, Ramirez stated that a fiber infrastructure could last upwards of 50 years.

"Any investment you make in fiber will be a long-term investment for current students, and future generations. Think about not just the typical classroom setting, but the future of education," he said.

But like the district, funding is not fluid.

"Lane County has supported fiber projects in other parts of the county. Our budget has been severely impacted, so I am unable to make any finan-

cial commitments at this point," he said.

Instead, Ramirez was able to provide a list of state and federal resources that could help the district fund internet, and offered the help of staff in researching and filling out forms.

Siuslaw Superintendent Andrew Grzeskowiak, reporting from information gathered at a recent statewide meeting with other superintendents, stated that there will most likely be a need in September for distance learning.

Under this, it is possible that the state could require a minimum need of 35 square feet per person in any given classroom. That would mean that classes could only handle 15-18 people per class, considerably smaller than what was allowed pre-COVID.

"We've talked about doing two consecutive days for one group, two consecutive for another, and having an online day," Grzeskowiak said, pointing out that the plan is only theoretical — and that things can change rapidly over the summer.

"You would see all the ninth and 10th graders on campus on Monday and Tuesday, for example, with all teachers teaching all those kids throughout the room. Wednesday is deep cleaning, but also an online day," he said. "Then on Thursday and Friday, you have the 11th and 12th graders on campus to do the instruction that is harder to do online, and then the ninth and 10th graders are doing online supplemental learning."

While the need will be there, the funding to ensure internet access for all

students most likely won't be by the time school starts. So instead, the district will have to look at piecemeal approaches. One would be installing WIFI spots throughout the district, either by mobile bus or in grange or fire stations.

"Springfield is deploying buses out to as many open areas as possible," said Siuslaw School District Financial Officer Kari Blake. "They are regularly getting 1,000 feet of distance, but it changes with weather, it changes with sites. Someone pulls up into an empty parking lot, [and the students] would log into the WIFI. Our geography is a little challenging here, in terms of getting WIFI out, but I would love to see buses in neighborhoods where we could park a bus and allow students to stay in their homes. I do know Springfield has been very happy, and found it to be successful."

However, busing internet will take up resources for the district, as it would have to pay drivers to sit at specific locations for two-hour periods to ensure work can be completed.

"As remote as some of those areas are, it's going to come down to how much time we can allot to each location, and if we can get kids there," Grzeskowiak said. "And there's spots out in rural areas with range halls and fire stations where we can tell parents we'll be there at that location for specific times. Hotspots could serve a common area. Most of the apartment complexes have a common building, but even then, if it was close to a fiber line, you could put a wireless router in the building, and kids

could go there as needed." Board member Suzanne Mann-Heintz suggested raising subsidies for children to get WIFI in their homes.

"Think about our generous community, and those that are willing to support our community with school supplies and helping with lunch programs," she said. "Our internet is \$45 a month. What would be wrong with going out to pay for families to get internet access and a modem, until we can come up with a more solid plan?"

Ultimately, the district will be looking at multiple solutions to provide the internet.

"There's no one size fits all. It's going to be a mosaic," Grzeskowiak said.

"I like the term mosaic," Mann-Heintz said. "A varied approach to things, and that's the way we should go. I definitely think the administration will continue to research and come up with options and solutions. There's a whole lot of things we'll have to be doing. Re-working the curriculum, it's huge."

She stated that down the road, it would be great for the entire community to have access to fiber optics.

"But right now, we need to come up with economic plans that are feasible and that can be scaled down to address those who have access. As Andy said, a lot of our students do. It feels like a Band-Aid, but that's where we're at right now. It's doing those bandages until we can come up with a better plan."

*For more information about Siuslaw School District, visit [siuslaw.k12.or.us](http://siuslaw.k12.or.us).*

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which is located on the right side of the cemetery's driveway. Over the next few weeks, Mapleton carver Mic Johnson will be working on the 11-foot-tall memorial, inscribing the phrase, "Dedicated to

those who served in the US Armed Forces, and in loving memory of those who gave their lives in defense of our country."

Medallions of the five main service branches will be inset above the inscription.

There are also plans to

have small metal plaques on the memorial, where veteran's names and information, living or dead will be inscribed.

Gerber stressed that any veteran can be honored in the plaques.

"We do want to make it clear that we're opening to

honoring all military veterans, not just those buried at Deadwood," she said.

Sitting near the memorial is also a newly planted cremation scattering garden, which is covered with rhododendrons, hyacinths, Bleeding Hearts and azaleas. It's part of a host of

upgrades made to the cemetery over the years, including restorations of gravestones of veterans resting at the site.

"In Deadwood, we have more than three dozen veterans buried, including two from the Civil War and one from the Spanish American War," Gerber said.

Volunteers have been working to restore and identify the gravestones, and replacing headstones that have been weathered with time.

The placement of the memorial is particularly important this year as the annual Pioneer Heritage Day event, held on cemetery grounds, had to be

cancelled due to concerns over the current pandemic. Volunteers placed flags on all veterans' graves before the holiday, but the placement of the monument on Memorial Day shows the community still cares about its veterans.

"It's a chance for the cemetery to show how important veterans are to our community," Gerber said.

The Deadwood Pioneer Cemetery is currently hoping to raise \$2,000 to cover the remaining costs of the memorial.

To purchase a plaque for a veteran, or to make a donation, visit [deadwoodcem.org](http://deadwoodcem.org), email the cemetery at [deadwoodcem@gmail.com](mailto:deadwoodcem@gmail.com) or call 541-999-2209.

For the plaques to honor veterans, up to three lines of text are allowed, as well as the service branch insignia if desired.

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