



Mapleton staff and Salty the Sailor welcomed back students on March 3. Classrooms and hallways demonstrate the COVID-19 safety precautions the school district has prepared to be able to resume in-person instruction.



PHOTOS BY CHANTELE MEYER/SIU-SLAW NEWS



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Working with the older students will also allow the campus to go over the safety measures in place to prevent exposure to COVID-19. These include wearing a mask at all times, except for during designated mask breaks; washing hands often; and remaining in assigned cohorts. Mapleton High School has posted reminders of these rules in the hallways, along with traffic dividers and hand sanitizing stations. The bathrooms are also single-occupancy and clearly labeled with one cohort each. Drinking fountains are still available, but only the water bottle filling stations can be accessed. As O'Mara said, "All the little things that need to happen to so we can get people back." After teacher Louis Burruss did a demonstration of the proper way to wear masks, the administrators talked to the students about what a school day will look like. Students have been assigned homerooms, where they have a bin to hold their belongings. "In order for us to get all of our kids on campus, we have assigned grade levels

to classrooms. So, while our 11th and 12th graders are one cohort, there's an 11th grade classroom and a 12th grade classroom. And then the teachers are moving to the classrooms to teach," O'Mara said. She later explained that teachers and staff have had to adapt, with several of them sharing wide open rooms as combined office spaces. This all works together to make sure there are enough designated classrooms. "The teachers and staff have been amazing," O'Mara said. "It's not ideal to have teachers moving between classrooms, but we worked hard to make sure they taught the same class in the same classroom. For us to be able to get all kids on campus, that's what had to happen." The teachers have rolling carts to help move their materials back and forth. "We also are so thankful that we had our remodel with the bond we passed, because we have a brand-new HVAC unit, so ventilation is not an issue," O'Mara said. With new windows and external doors outside most classrooms, airflow has been increased.

The school district has been able to rearrange things as needed, adapting spaces to allow for maximum distance and limiting exposure. One of those changes is converting a space into an isolation room with its own entrance. This is where people will go if they exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 while on campus. "Please make sure if you have any signs of COVID — fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath or you lose your taste and smell — stay home. If it's at school, you let staff know immediately," O'Mara said. Mapleton juniors and seniors join grades one through six in their return to campus. "It's been really great at the elementary," O'Mara said. "They're getting into the routine. You know, it's

hard. It's tough. But staff are happy, kids are happy." Even the kindergartners, where this has been their first experience in school, have adapted to the masks and social distance. It helps that many were able to attend in-person preschool for part of last year. "Primary [school] kids do have a hard enough time with spatial reasoning and body awareness, so the six-foot distance is really tough. In fact, we just tell them to stretch out their arms and fingers and keep that distance," O'Mara said. By bringing back the oldest high schoolers early, the district hopes to set up a routine for the rest of the school. "We brought our 11th and 12th graders in first because first of all, they're the closest to graduating. They

need support and we need them on campus to be able to do what we need to do for seniors to ensure they graduate, get scholarships, have life plans, things like that," O'Mara said. "I was really honest when I told them, they are our leaders." Next, the ninth and 10th grade students will return to campus on March 10, followed by the middle schoolers on March 15. "You can feel the energy," O'Mara said while walking the halls. "Even just yester-

day as we were putting these (barriers and signs) up, training staff and talking about it all, the energy level has been so cool. ... All the hard work of Zoom, Google Classroom, meetings, virtual instruction, all the screens with black boxes and names on them — now they're becoming faces. And that's what we need, and this is what we were waiting for — our kids back on campus." For more information, visit mapleton.k12.or.us.




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