

Meals from A1

continue their education while maintaining quarantine and following social-distancing guidelines outlined by the state Department of Education (ODE).

All of this — and the ways COVID-19 has seemingly impacted every other aspect of society — is unprecedented.

“Initially, the plan was that we’ll provide whatever packets are necessary [in addition to meal delivery],” Bennett said in relation to the earliest state directives that threw school districts the nation over for a loop.

But things change fast in a world adapting on-the-fly and gripped by fears of viral infection.

“We eventually worked with our bus company to be able to designate food drop-off spots and then we thought, ‘Well, what if we put instructional assistants on our buses?’” Bennett added. “The IAs can

hand out food as well as hand back and forth the academic work for the students and the bus drivers don’t have to get up. We can give them work, collect that work and then connect back to teachers.”

The plan is now in motion in an attempt to find some semblance of normalcy during economic and social turmoil, though further developments will likely remain up in the air until new directives and guidelines are established by the state. The restart date for Oregon schools has already been further delayed to Apr. 28, but recent information from ODE has notified educators that it will likely extend beyond.

“I’m just waiting for the state to say, ‘Yes, you can do that,’ or ‘No, you can’t,’” said Bennett.

Being in a more rural community like Drain, however, brings with it unique challenges and benefits.

While the district is still working out the issue of internet availability for all

district students through local provider Douglas Fast Net — something that’s less of a problem in places like Eugene or Portland — Superintendent Bennett also stresses that the nature of smaller communities may allow for a greater degree of trust and communication.

“I think when you live in larger communities, you’re less likely to know your neighbors,” Bennett said. “That has happened over time because I would say that, when I worked in Portland, you may only know one of your neighbors.”

“Way back, kids used to leave their house and play all day with kids in the neighborhood and nobody worried about it ... because they knew that everybody was taking care of everybody. It is that takes-a-village mentality.”

And that mentality still exists in Drain and the greater North Douglas community, allowing the citizens’ familiarity with one another, extended fam-

ilies included, to aid in the fight and foster efficient, cooperative communication.

“In larger schools, a teacher might not know some of those kids,” Bennett said. “But if you teach six periods in a school with 96 kids, you’re gonna know those kids — probably their parents as well — in a way that making the phone call, sending the message to them, you’re going to be able to connect ... In a smaller school, you get to have a more personal connection and people don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”

While established relationships and familiarity in a small community carry great potential to overcome adversity, much of the benefit of these tight-knit bonds is rendered difficult when social-distancing measures advise against in-person connection.

This simply means that the old, bucolic vision of a close, rural community coming together, physically, to solve its problems

must be married with modern solutions in order to remain effective.

“The sad part about the event we’re experiencing now is, you could reach out to the community and get 20 people to come together in support, but we can’t do that,” Bennett said. “So that’s the piece that makes that experience of small communities great. But really, that support is now gonna have to look different.”

In the midst of social quarantine and school shutdowns, that different look includes the aforementioned meal drop-offs and educational resource distribution, measures already taken by NDSD.

If the school closure is eventually extended beyond Apr. 28, however, a further synthesis of the old with the new may be required, including full-scale online education and ways to deal with upcoming

high school graduations.

Despite the fluidity and confusion of the current situation, Bennett is nonetheless hopeful that some good can come out of something so unparalleled and unnerving.

“I value the one-on-one conversations far more than I value emails and online,” Bennet said. “And I think this is bringing that to the forefront. Hopefully this will bring about a focus on the importance of [in-classroom education].”

In any case, though things are still prone to and perhaps even likely, to change, Bennett and the rest of the staff at NDSD have taken the necessary steps they can to ensure that their over-arching goal — a goal that even the virus has yet to change — is met.

“Our primary goal will always be the education, health and safety of our students,” Bennett said.

Elkton from A1

hit us pretty hard.”

Trout said the city government is currently operating with three part-time employees filling various roles. Declaring a state of

emergency could open up the flow of funds to address employee shortages and may allow the city to recoup expenses should these needs arise.

“We hope we don’t have to use any of these provisions,” he said. “Right

now, we’re just preparing for the worst, hoping for the best.”

With a population around 200, Elkton is located in Douglas County, which also declared a state of emergency on March 16.

On Sunday, Douglas County Public Health Officer Dr. Bob Dannenhoffer announced one new positive case of COVID-19 in Douglas County, bringing the confirmed number of cases in the county to five.

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