

SCHOOLS

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"I've just been in a two-hour meeting with the leadership team today developing tentative plans for reaching out to families," Witty said Thursday in a telephone interview.

Administrators meet in the north conference room at the District Office.

"Each staff member has a table that is sanitized," Witty said. "We practice social distancing and sanitization."

Administrators are prepared to adjust as things change.

"We're developing tentative plans for reaching out to families within the next 48 hours by (school) principals," Witty said.

He ticked off a short list of some of the work in progress, including developing a plan, as directed by the governor, to provide child care for the county's emergency responders and health care workers.

Breakfasts and lunches will continue to be handed out curbside at schools, with Keating being added beginning Monday. Also beginning Monday, hot meals will be provided at noon and a breakfast for the next day will be delivered at the same time. (See related information on Page 2A).

A total of 320 children 18 and younger were served Wednesday, Witty said, and the numbers have been increasing by 30 to 40 daily.

The District is prepared to serve as many children as necessary in the coming days to help ease the burden of families in financial distress and to ensure that young people do not go hungry, he said. They do not need to attend Baker schools to join the meal program. And participants may pick up food at the school most conveniently located to their homes.

Instructional programs are at the core of the discussions. Witty said administrators will meet with certified staff, including teachers, on March 30 as plans move forward. Roles for classified employees also will be determined in the coming weeks.

"We're going to get more guidance from (the Oregon Department of Education, ODE) by the end of the week or the first part of next week about what education will look like — including special education, counseling services and Wi-Fi," Witty said.

Graduation requirements for seniors and testing procedures also will be discussed.

Witty said he will meet on a conference call with the ODE staff at 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays so that he can have high quality information as quickly as possible.

In a message that went out to District

staff Thursday, Witty outlined plans for the mandatory March 30 meeting for certified employees, some of whom will gather in the morning by grade level and area of expertise at staggered 30-minute periods in elementary and middle school libraries. Baker High School staff will attend a virtual morning meeting with BHS principal Greg Mitchell and assistant principal Chelsea Hurliman.

Thomas Joseph, principal of Eagle Cap Innovative High School, will meet with his staff to schedule online learning programs for their students. And special ed and counseling staff will meet the afternoon of March 30 with Barry Nemecek, special ed director, and Silas Turner, BHS guidance counselor.

In his letter to the staff, Witty reminded the District employees of their blessings — and their obligations — going forward. Witty wrote that in his visit with Brent Kerns Thursday, the Baker Justice Court judge told him that as of Saturday 600 employees will have been laid off throughout the community as a result of the statewide measures taken to stop the spread of coronavirus.

"We are blessed that our base pay will stay the same throughout this time frame as long as we provide the services required by the Oregon Department of Education," Witty wrote. "I would encourage all of us to consider ways we can serve our neighbors and the greater community during this time."

Although next week is the regularly scheduled spring break, Witty said he will gather the administrative team on Wednesday to continue planning.

The superintendent said they are working to develop the best systems to support students and families.

"We have no qualms about doing whatever it takes to get that done," he said.

Witty said he believes it is imperative that the District's leadership team and staff pull together to mitigate the impacts of the school closures.

One way of doing that will be for the District to track the cost of providing child care for emergency service workers.

"If we have positive revenue, we will donate that to the food bank or to other organizations in the community to help those who are less fortunate," he said.

Witty says he is asking his staff to be "service-minded" and to be cognizant of everybody's health as their work continues.

"It's critical we give one another grace," he said. "We've got to figure out how we can help each other, and this might be for an extended period. This is uncharted territory."

Sports

Baker athletic director talks coronavirus and sports

By Corey Kirk
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Being over 330 miles from home, Baker School District Athletic Director Buell Gonzales Jr.'s day did not go according to plan.

Ready to watch the Baker girls basketball team make a run for its second straight state title, Gonzales, alongside coach Matt Sand, had to break bad news when they were en route to the gym.

Baker's game wasn't going to be played in front of empty bleachers.

The Bulldogs' season was over because of a more daunting opponent than they could meet on the hardwood.

Coronavirus. "That was crushing for them," Gonzales said of the Baker girls, who were set to play on March 12. "It was one of the harder conversations I've ever been a part of as an educator."

As he watched the news break about coronavirus, Gonzales was glued to its progression. When the Utah Jazz and Oklahoma City Thunder NBA game was postponed due to Utah center Rudy Gobert testing positive for the virus, Gonzales said it felt like the situation was destined to hit home.

"It seemed like the sports world started to fall apart at that point," Gonzales said.

The very next day — March 12 — the Oregon School Activities Association

"It was one of the hardest conversations I've ever been a part of as an educator."

— Buell Gonzales Jr., Baker athletic director, talking about March 12 when the Baker girls basketball team learned it wouldn't have a chance to defend its state championship



announced the cancellation of all the remaining state basketball games, forcing the Bulldogs to come home.

The effects continued, as one day later Gov. Kate Brown announced that public schools would be closed until March 31, and the OSAA followed suit in banning spring sports games and practices.

When it came time to tell spring sports coaches, Gonzales knew that these coaches had to have been prepared.

"The information was out in front, it wasn't a shock to anybody," Gonzales said. "The coaches were super disappointed, as well as the kids." As the head of the athletic department, the safety of Baker's student-athletes is his top priority. However, he does empathize with those who feel possibly cheated out of another season in their sport, especially Bulldogs who are set to graduate in a couple of months.

"The only thing that you can fashion this to is injury," Gonzales said. "It's the finality of it."

As the number of cases continued to rise, Brown extended the school closure to April 28, and the OSAA did

the same.

That eliminates most of the spring sports schedules for Baker baseball, softball, track, golf and tennis.

However, the season is still not lost, as OSAA officials hope to bring back sports by late April. Gonzales is ready to work with other schools to make the proper modifications to get the most out of the remaining schedules if possible.

"As a league we are moving forward with creating league schedules," Gonzales said of the Greater Oregon League, which includes Baker, La Grande, Ontario and Mac-Hi. "It would start with a week or two of practices, and then go right into league play."

As the spring season continues to loom with uncertainty, Gonzales hopes Baker's student-athletes take what their sport has taught them in the Baker community and translate it into fighting this pandemic.

"You can do it by being patient, listening to other people and helping out your community when you can," Gonzales said. "Now is the time to step up and continue that mantra."

WOMEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Three Ducks named to All-American team

By Doug Feinberg
AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK — Sabrina Ionescu has joined an elite group, becoming a three-time All-American.

The Oregon senior shattered the NCAA career triple-double mark and became the first player in college history to have 2,000 points, 1,000 rebounds and 1,000 assists. She earned a spot on The Associated Press women's basketball All-America team Thursday as a unanimous choice from the national media panel that votes on the Top 25 each week.

She was joined on the first team by Oregon teammate Ruthy Hebard, Baylor's Lauren Cox, Kentucky's Rhyne Howard and UConn's Megan Walker.

Ionescu is the eighth player in women's basketball history to earn AP All-America honors three times.

"Sabrina is a transcendent basketball player," Oregon coach Kelly Graves said. "There's really nothing that she couldn't do on the court. She was the ultimate leader."

Ionescu averaged 17.5 points, 9.1 assists and 8.6 rebounds this season as well as having eight of her 26 career triple-doubles.

Hebard was on the receiving end of many of those passes and averaged 17.3 points and 9.6 rebounds to help the Ducks win the Pac-12 regular season and conference tournament.

"I'm happy for Ruthy. Sometimes she gets overlooked. She's so darn good and important to what we do," Graves said. "Not that she played in the shadows so to speak, but she wasn't on top of everyone's mind."

Oregon teammate Satou Sabally made the second team, giving the second-ranked Ducks three of the top 10 players in the country.

MEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Pritchard 1st-team All-American

By John Marshall
AP Basketball Writer

The college basketball season came to an emphatic, dramatic end with the cancellation of the NCAA Tournament. The dream of playing under the bright lights of March Madness, of possibly hoisting a national championship trophy, wiped out by the coronavirus.

"Getting these awards, it brings brightness to my life right now," Seton Hall's Myles Powell said. "To have it end so

quickly was just like ... man."

Powell added to his load Friday when he joined Dayton's Obi Toppin, Iowa's Luka Garza, Marquette's Markus Howard and Oregon's Payton Pritchard on The Associated Press All-America first team.

Pritchard went to the Final Four with Oregon as a freshman and was hoping to lead the 13th-ranked Ducks back as a senior. He never got the chance, but will go down as one of the greatest players in program history.

The 6-2 guard was the first player in Pac-12 history to have 1,900 points, 500 rebounds and 600 assists during his career. He also was the fourth player in conference history to lead in scoring (20.5 points) and assists (5.5).

"Obviously, it means a lot," Pritchard said. "Making first-team All-American is what a lot of people dream for, so for me to be making these first-team All-Americans, especially AP, it means all my hard work paying off."

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Tom Brady signs with Tampa Bay

By Fred Goodall
AP Sports Writer

TAMPA, Fla. — A new look for the NFL: Tom Brady in Tampa Bay pewter and red rather than Patriots red, white and blue.

The six-time Super Bowl champion quarterback

signed a two-year, \$60 million contract in free agency Friday, embarking on a "new football journey" with the Buccaneers.

The 42-year-old quarterback who spent the first 20 years of his career with the Patriots announced his deci-

sion in an Instagram post, adding he's thankful for the opportunity.

"Excited, humble and hungry ... If there is one thing I have learned about football, it's that nobody cares what you did last year or the year before that," Brady wrote.