

# Survey: Younger Oregonians more worried about virus

By Dick Hughes

For the Capital Bureau

Younger Oregonians are quite concerned about coronavirus compared with older Oregonians, according to new research.

The data released by DHM Research in Portland undercut the narrative prominent in national media that young people as blasé about COVID-19 and feeling invulnerable.

"If you look at these numbers, younger people are more concerned about being infected. They are more concerned about other people being infected," said John Horvick, DHM's director of client relations and political research. "They feel less prepared. They have a lot more concern about being able to pay their bills."

Most Oregonians were concerned that they or someone close to them would become infected with the coronavirus. Fifty-three percent of respondents ages 18-29 worried about personally contracting COVID-19, compared with 61% in the 30-44 age group; 55%, ages 45-64; and 40%, ages 65 and older.

DHM conducted the online survey with 507 Oregonians during March 24-30.

Oregonians' outlook for the short term remains dim. Seventy-six percent said problems associated with coronavirus would get worse during the next week. That number dropped to 51% who said the problems would be worse in a month, and only 14% who expected things to be worse in six months.

A "consequential minority" of Oregonians were unsure what is meant by such terms as social distancing (12%), quarantine (13%), self-isolation (16%) and shelter in place (24%), although the latter phrase has been replaced in Oregon and some other states with "stay home." The numbers varied by geography, education level and other factors.

Among other findings:

- 40% of Oregonians said they were not prepared to deal with a coronavirus infection in their household.
- 41% might need help paying for basics needs like food, medicine and utilities.
- 28% might need help picking up prescription drugs.
- 22% said the news coverage of coronavirus has been exaggerated; 24% said has been underestimated.
- 78% of Oregon Republicans approved of President Trump's response to the coronavirus; 12% of Democrats and 45% of non-affiliated and other party voters approved.
- 75% of Oregon Democrats approved of Gov. Kate Brown's job performance regarding coronavirus compared with 31% of Republicans and 52% of non-affiliated and other voters.
- 40% of respondents said Oregon was on the right track, a drop of 5 percentage points from late last year.
- 46% said local governments should go ahead with planned May ballot measures for schools, roads, public safety or other public services.

## TEACHERS

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Packets containing educational materials and information about the future of Oregon's school schedule were mailed from the staff to families last week.

This week teachers are continuing efforts to provide online learning for the older students, Witty said.

"We're trying to move quickly to try to meet ODE (Oregon Department of Education) guidelines," he said.

The state sent out one set of instructions in late March, and by 9 p.m. Monday, March 30, the plan had been changed to include the online lessons.

Witty said online instruction had always been part of the Baker School District's plan for older students, but Grades 4-6, and possibly third-graders also are now included in that strategy.

He said the District is scrambling to determine which families don't have internet access and to ensure it is available for those students. The District hopes to receive grant money from a philanthropic source to fund that access. Witty said he expects to hear from the source early this week.

The superintendent estimates that 40 to 50 households in the District do not have internet access.

"Our system would give access for Chromebooks only for educational purposes," he said. "Our commitment is access equally to a platform in education."

Students in kindergarten, first and second grade will study

"There is no way of escaping that families will have to play a more critical role in educating their children."

— Mark Witty, Baker School District superintendent



through packets. Witty said Washington schools, which are a week or two ahead of Oregon in the home schooling process, have found that approach works better for that age group.

"There is no way of escaping that families will have to play a more critical role in educating their children," Witty said.

The school staff is encouraging parents to help their children follow a schedule and to set up a place for them to work on school assignments.

The goal is to help students "establish habits and patterns as we move forward," Witty said.

For children who are in day care throughout the day, that might mean evening studies with their parents, he said.

The coursework will emphasize the "power standards" of instruction with less than the usual time spent on school work, Witty said.

"In a couple of weeks we'll send out a survey asking 'how long does it take for your child to complete a task?'" he said.

As he has throughout the period of school closure, Witty reminds staff, families and students that sacrifices are being required for the greater health of the community.

"We want to do the best job we can, but it does require a level of collaboration that heretofore hasn't been asked," he said.

In a message sent to Oregon school superintendents and principals on March 30, Colt Gill,

ODE director and deputy superintendent of Public Instruction, stated that there is a "strong possibility that our students may not come back through our school house doors this academic year."

Witty said the ODE has yet to send school districts clear direction on that issue.

In the meantime, the District has established child care at Brooklyn School for about 10 children of emergency services and health care workers. Children of essential emergency service workers who are preschool age and younger are being cared for by registered child care providers in the community through Child Care Resource and Referral, he said.

Free lunches and breakfasts for everyone 18 and younger continue to be distributed at neighborhood schools Monday through Friday. Witty said the District provided 392 lunches on Monday along with 390 breakfasts for Tuesday morning.

The weekend backpack program also is continuing through community volunteers. The packs are filled with staples to help families prepare meals through the weekend.

District employees donated toilet paper, a hard to find commodity in the community in recent weeks, to add to goods contained in each backpack.

The packs had been supplied to about 140 families before the schools were closed, Witty said.

# Blue Mtn. Community College to raise tuition by \$2 per credit

By Kathy Aney

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Blue Mountain Community College board members voted unanimously Wednesday evening to raise tuition.

In-state tuition will increase \$2 per credit hour next year from its cur-

rent \$108. BMCC President Dennis Bailey-Fougner recommended the bump, along with equal increases in each of the following two years.

Currently, the college's tuition hovers in the middle of Oregon community colleges, with Lane Community charging the most at \$118

and Chemeketa at the bottom with \$91 per credit hour. Factoring in fees makes Blue Mountain Community College the most expensive of the state's 17 community colleges at \$6,188 annually for tuition and fees together.

Because of the school's relatively

high cost, the college's Integrated Budget Committee earlier urged against a tuition hike, but said if a hike had to occur, to keep it at \$2 or less.

With no tuition increase, "BMCC would not see any increase in revenue and our financial deficit would not

change," Bailey-Fougner said. "If we do not consider modest and predictable increases, BMCC will need to cut \$2.8 million for 2021-22. The recommended increases will help the deficit ever so slightly."

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## COUNTY

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Bennett said the county's goal was not to restrict county residents from using the Snake River Road.

But he concedes that the wording might have implied otherwise.

In cases when access is limited on roads due to forest fires, for instance, the lone exception typically is for property owners only, not county residents in general.

Bennett said that in response to many questions and complaints about the initial closure order, he talked with other county officials, including District Attorney Greg Baxter, who drafted the order, about ways to clarify the county's intent.

On Saturday afternoon Bennett, acting as the incident commander under the county's emergency declaration for the coronavirus pandemic, issued a new order rescinding the road closure.

The new order, which will be in effect at least until April 18, prohibits overnight camping and other overnight uses, including fishing, on public sites along the Snake River corridor from the county's northern boundary to its southern. That includes sections of Oxbow Reservoir as well as the whole of Brownlee Reservoir.

"Our only goal was to cut the crowds and the unsanitary conditions."

— Mark Bennett, Baker County commissioner



Fishing is allowed during the daytime, and the Snake River Road remains open to all traffic.

"While the original intent was not to restrict local access to the river, some of the questions we received showed how additional flexibility in the language of the order was needed," Bennett said in a press release the county issued Saturday afternoon.

He said Monday that the two other commissioners, Chairman Bill Harvey and Bruce Nichols, endorsed his decision.

Bennett said county officials have been striving to deal with coronavirus issues while still complying with Oregon's Public Meetings Law, which requires the county announce meetings in advance.

Baxter said the county has the legal authority, under its emergency declaration, to restrict vehicular access to roads should officials deem that necessary to protect public health.

However, Baxter said the county can't close a road to everyone except Baker County residents.

Bennett said he's satisfied that the amended order, by fo-

cus on camping and other overnight uses, addresses the concerns that prompted the initial order.

He said county officials, including the Sheriff's Office, have fielded multiple calls over the past week or so from residents who had seen groups of anglers, many in vehicles with Washington or Idaho license plates, gathered along Brownlee Reservoir. Bennett said people reported these groups were not complying with social distancing guidelines, and that in some cases they didn't have toilets.

"That prompted us to start taking a look at it," Bennett said.

Preventing such congregations, with its inherent risk of spreading the virus, is "the only tool we have as a county

to try to prevent this," he said.

Bennett said the county isn't trying to discourage people, whether or not they live in Baker County, from spending time outdoors, including fishing at Brownlee.

But he said the county has an obligation to try to take action if, as people reported, some users were not following social distancing recommendations.

"Our only goal was to cut the crowds and the unsanitary conditions," Bennett said.

Tracy McCue, who owns T&T Country Store in Huntington, at the southern end of the Snake River Road, said she supports Bennett's decision to prohibit overnight camping along Brownlee Reservoir.

McCue said she's actually seen fewer visitors this spring than usual.

She has seen many vehicles with Washington or Idaho license plates, and had customers buying fishing

tackle, but she hasn't had trouble keeping her shelves stocked.

McCue said that like most store owners she has limited how much toilet paper and paper towels individual customers can buy.

Theron Hampton, who owns the Hitching Post motel and store in Richland, at the north end of the Snake River Road, also said he has not seen a major influx of out-of-state visitors since the pandemic started.

Hampton said workers have been sanitizing surfaces frequently in both businesses.

He said he hopes things return to normal as soon as possible.

"May is usually a huge month for us," Hampton said. "My business depends on

summer business to get us through the winter."

Visitors, especially those who have boats, have limited options for launching now.

All official boat ramps on Brownlee are closed, including the BLM's Spring Recreation Site near Huntington, Baker County's Hewitt and Holcomb parks near Richland, and Idaho Power Company's parks, which will be closed at least through May 14. There are several places along the reservoir where people can launch boats despite the lack of a paved ramp.

Farewell Bend State Park, a popular camping area, is also closed.

The county has delayed the opening of Hewitt and Holcomb parks until at least May 1.

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