

# Governor: Schools will stay closed this academic year

■ Seniors who were passing all classes when schools closed will graduate on time

## From staff reports and The Associated Press

Baker School District students will not return to their classrooms this spring.

Whether the 114 seniors at Baker High School will have a commencement at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium on June 7 isn't known.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced Wednesday afternoon that public schools, closed since March 13 due to the coronavirus pandemic, will not reopen for the remainder of the academic year.

High school seniors who had passing grades in all courses on that date and were on track to graduate will receive their diploma.

"We shut schools down on March 13 and where a senior was at that moment in time will be frozen," Baker School District superintendent Mark Witty said Wednesday afternoon. "If they had a passing grade then, they have a passing grade for the semester."

The district's remote learning schedule will start Monday, April 13.

Seniors who want to continue to pursue advanced placement classes and take the AP exam for college credit can do so, as can students enrolled in dual credit classes working to earn credit for both high school and college course-

work, Witty said.

Seniors who were not in good academic standing on March 13 will still have some work to do to ensure they graduate with their classmates, Witty said. Staff will be analyzing the transcripts of those students to determine how much work remains.

"We want to engage those who need help to get their diplomas," he said.

Those students will have until Aug. 31 to improve their grades and graduate with the Class of 2020, said Colt Gill, director of the Oregon Department of Education.

For seniors who have met that goal, Baker High School and Eagle Cap Innovative High School staff will continue to work with them to ensure that they have "transitional supports" in place to help them move toward their post-high school goals, including completion of college and scholarship applications, Witty said.

The staff also will be meeting with seniors and their families to develop a plan for honoring this year's graduating class, if the governor's social distancing order remains in place through the June 7 graduation date set earlier in the year.

This Friday, the lights at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium, at Ninth and E streets, will be turned on at 8:20

p.m. and will remain lighted for 114 seconds in honor of the number of students scheduled to graduate this spring.

Witty said alternatives to the traditional commencement might range from posting an appropriately organized commencement online or perhaps allowing students to drive in their vehicles down Main Street in a graduation parade for the community.

"It's something we've never done before," Witty said. "It will take a little bit of time to ascertain how to move forward."

The governor's announcement Wednesday placed the state's more than 550,000 students and their teachers in uncharted territory as districts with vastly different resources plan for weeks of remote learning.

"Missing school is especially difficult on our students and their parents," Brown said. "To all the moms and dads, I can't imagine what you're up against balancing parenting during this very scary crisis."

Last year, Oregon saw signs of improvement in its fight to raise high school graduation rates, which have been some of the lowest in the nation. In 2019, 80% of students graduated — an all-time high since the state tightened how it tracks the rate more than a decade ago.

## COUNTY

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The county's general fund contingency for the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, is \$692,000.

"I think that what drove this whole discussion on the funding restrictions is the fact that we have the unknown on the road pact now, we have the unknown for the lottery funds, we have the unknown on the (lodging tax) funding," Bennett said.

Both Bennett and Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said the county has more questions than answers right now regarding the actual financial effect on the county.

"I think that one of the things that's somewhat stressing is that legislature will likely not meet until May, mid-May, so we really have no guidance whatsoever," Bennett said.

One project that isn't being held up by budget concerns is the construction of a new Eagle Valley Rural Fire Department station in Richland. The project is paid for by a federal Community Development Block Grant the county received four years ago.

Commissioners voted Wednesday to award the construction contract to

Gyllenberg Construction of Baker City.

Commissioners initially awarded the \$1,363,000, job to Gyllenberg Construction in November 2019, but that was contingent on either the county or the Eagle Valley Rural Fire Department or the county raising more money, as the bid was about \$75,000 more than the \$1,288,700 available through the grant.

State officials, who administer the grant, increased the amount to the maximum of \$1.5 million, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture added \$80,000. The Leo Adler Foundation contributed \$60,000, and Idaho Power Company \$5,000.

## Coronavirus update

Bennett acknowledged the hard work of employees at the Sheriff's Office, Health Department and other county agencies.

"All of them really stepped up," he said.

Bennett said Baker City Manager Fred Warner Jr. and Byan Tweit are working on an outreach program for local businesses to help them access loans and other financial aid.

Harvey said the county continues to operate, taking phone calls and emails from residents.

## VIRUS

*Continued from Page 1A*

None of those counties has reported any deaths from coronavirus. All deaths in Oregon attributed to the virus have happened in counties west of the Cascades.

Nancy Staten, administrator for the Baker County Health Department, knows that the "0" next to Baker County in the OHA chart showing confirmed cases doesn't mean the virus hasn't infected any county residents.

Many people who are infected have no symptoms, but they're still able to spread the virus to others.

Staten also recognizes that compared to some of the six Oregon counties that also have no confirmed cases, relatively few Baker County residents have been tested for the virus.

But that discrepancy could mean residents are doing more, not less, to contain the pandemic, Staten said.

The comparatively small number of tests could reflect that county residents who have mild symptoms consistent with possible coronavirus infection are heeding the advice of the OHA to stay home rather than visit the hospital or a medical clinic and potentially expose others, or themselves, to infection, Staten said.

The OHA's coronavirus

*"There's a variety of patients using the site; there are some who meet the criteria for testing, some who are symptomatic but do not meet the CDC's testing criteria, and some patients who really are looking for reassurance and education."*

— **Patricia Lynn, president, Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center-Baker City, talking about people who have visited the drive-up coronavirus evaluation site**

guidelines state that: "We do not recommend testing of asymptomatic persons or those with symptoms that do not necessitate medical evaluation. Individuals with mild symptoms should remain at home until symptoms resolve."

"A lot of people don't meet the requirements (for testing)," Staten said.

Priscilla Lynn, president of Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Baker City, said an average of four or five people have been visiting the drive-up evaluation site that Saint Alphonsus and St. Luke's Eastern Oregon Medical Associates set up last week at 3820 17th St. The service has been available weekdays from noon to 4 p.m.

"We have capacity to handle more patients and are currently re-evaluating our hours of operation and the location," Lynn said. "There's a variety of patients using the site; there are some who meet the criteria for testing, some who are symptomatic but do not meet the CDC's testing

criteria, and some patients who really are looking for reassurance and education.

"The drive-up assessment site was designed to keep possibly infected patients out of the emergency room and clinics, in hopes to avoid the possible spreading of the virus," Lynn said. "We are thankful that Baker City residents are following the directives to call their provider before coming to a health care facility, and that they are practicing social distancing and shelter-in-place guidelines."

Lynn said residents with questions about their symptoms can also call the Saint Alphonsus hotline, which is staffed by a nurse seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. PDT, at 208-302-2683.

Lynn said the Baker City hospital staff continues to prepare for treating coronavirus patients.

"We are collaborating with local health care providers, other Eastern Oregon hospitals, Baker County, Saint Alphonsus Health System and our Trinity Health home

office in Michigan," she said. "This collaboration includes seeking resources for equipment, supplies, staffing, and other support that may be needed to continue to provide quality care to our patients. We are working on additional ways to deliver quality healthcare to our community through alternative methods, including telehealth."

Staten said that in addition to people with potential coronavirus symptoms staying home, it's also possible that few county residents have symptoms. They, too, would have no reason to visit the hospital or a clinic seeking a test.

Lamb, the county's public health officer, reiterated the advice that Staten and the OHA have for people with symptoms that are consistent with coronavirus — but also with several other respiratory ailments.

"If you become sick with a fever or cough, isolate yourself at home to help prevent spread of the illness, just like you would with other viral illnesses," Lamb said in a Tuesday press release. "There are certainly people with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection, but we are still seeing influenza, parainfluenza, respiratory syncytial virus, metapneumonovirus and other viral respiratory illnesses. For influenza, we have some antiviral medications

that can help fight the illness. For the rest, we do not have any treatment."

As of Wednesday, the OHA reported that 17 Baker County residents had been tested, with all those tests being negative.

Staten said the OHA daily tally is lower than Baker County's count because of a lag time in reporting. Most tests are being done at private labs rather than the Oregon State Public Health Lab. According to OHA, of the 24,564 Oregonians tested, 21,700 — 88% — had their samples analyzed at a private lab.

As of Wednesday the county's records showed 30 negative tests, with nine tests pending.

Of the six other counties with no confirmed coronavirus cases, four have tested more residents than Baker County has.

Here's the list (the number of tests is from the OHA tally):

- Baker County — 18 tests (population 16,820)
- Coos County — 275 tests (population 63,290)
- Gilliam County — 9 tests (population 1,990)
- Harney County — 39 tests (population 7,360)
- Jefferson County — 81 tests (population 23,840)
- Lake County — 38 tests (population 8,080)
- Wheeler County — 4 tests (population 1,440)

One thing that isn't affecting Baker County's testing total is the availability of testing, Staten said.

There is no shortage of tests, she said.

According to OHA guidelines, people who are "suspect cases" can be tested at the discretion of a health care provider. Those tests would be done at private lab. Staten said the state lab is only testing people who have been hospitalized with coronavirus symptoms.

OHA defines a "suspect case" as a person with:

- fever, cough, shortness of breath, or respiratory-tract illness (pneumonia) AND
- a history of close contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset OR
- a history of exposure to a high-risk setting (e.g., cruise ship, long-term care facility, or other institutional setting) within 14 days of symptom onset OR
- hospitalized with apparent viral pneumonia

Staten emphasized that although she encourages people with mild symptoms to call their medical provider rather than visit the hospital or a clinic, those who have a medical emergency, whether or not it might be related to coronavirus, should not hesitate to seek help.

# New medical panel advising governor on virus

**By Dick Hughes**  
For the Oregon Capital Bureau

Gov. Kate Brown has created an eight-member panel of medical professionals to advise her on the state's coronavirus response.

The committee, which includes Bend pulmonologist Louis D'Avignon, convened via videoconference for the first time on Tuesday. Members are to meet twice weekly to review Oregon's testing capacity, hospital capacity, acquisition of personal protective equipment and effectiveness of social distancing measures.

Brown also extended indefinitely her mandate that bars, restaurants

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— **Oregon Gov. Kate Brown**

and other eateries serve only takout or delivery items, with no on-site consumption allowed. That executive order had been scheduled to end on April 14.

In a telephone conference call with Oregon members of AARP, Brown reiterated that social distancing has helped "flatten the curve" — slowing the rate of new cases of COVID-19 so as not to overwhelm the state's

health care system.

"While we know what we're doing is working, we have to embrace the reality that unfortunately Oregon may see an increase in cases in the coming days and weeks," Brown said.

Brown and Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum, who joined in the conference call, emphasized that there is no coronavirus vaccine or



miracle cure, despite what scammers may claim.

"The only thing we know that works is social distancing" to reduce the likelihood of transmission, Brown said.

Earlier Tuesday, the state's top emergency management official encouraged Oregonians to enjoy the nice weather but stay close to home and practice social distancing.

Andrew Phelps, the director of the Office of Emergency Management, suggested that people garden, mow the lawn, and open their home's doors and windows to let the fresh air in, but not participate in group sports or large gatherings.

Phelps said it was too early to tell when Oregon might ease rules on social distancing and restrictions on business operations.

"We're not going to know when we're out of the woods until we're out of the woods," he said.

Phelps also announced that Oregon would receive 78 pallets of personal protective equipment on Wednesday from the U.S. Agency for International Development. Although he did not have specific numbers, Phelps said the shipment would include tens of thousands of masks, gloves and other protective gear, which the state would distribute to counties and tribes.

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