

Local & State

CHANGE

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But there's a problem. Madeline tells Nickell that the ball doesn't bounce well on carpet, so she takes her computer outside to the sidewalk. Nickell waits as the screen shot moves through Madeline's house and into the sunshine. Once set, Nickell stands from her desk to demonstrate the move she wants Madeline to mimic.

This is the current reality for Nickell, and for the district's speech language pathologists. When the district moved to distance learning in April, these specialists quickly changed how they serve kids.

"We had to change everything over to online. It's a big change," said Ellen Jacobs, a diagnostician and speech language pathologist who serves the Halfway area.

After training in teletherapy, these specialists began planning sessions that didn't require in-person activities.

"We had to change our materials, change our schedules, and find a platform that worked best," said Anna Swart, a speech language pathologist who works with students at Brooklyn Primary, Haines, and Keating.

Practice was also necessary. "We spent hours and hours preparing and practicing with each other," said Amanda Johnson, a speech language pathologist who works with students in grades 4 to 12.

Speech language pathologists focus on language skills, including grammar and sentence structure. "You start with oral lan-

guage, then it goes to reading and writing. If you have deficits in oral language, it will



Hawkins

spill over into reading," said Emily Hawkins, a speech language pathologist who works with kindergartners and first-graders at Brooklyn Primary.

The scheduling waited until each school set times for distance lessons. Then it was time to call every family and arrange a time that worked best.

One advantage: They don't have to work around classroom schedules.

"The benefit is that these kids are a lot more available," Nickell said.

The requirement that an adult is home during each session has been a plus.

"Another good thing is the parent relationship," Jacobs said. "I'm seeing them every time. They can help and I can give them ideas."

In school, most of these sessions involve groups of students. That's not possible with everyone at home, unless a family has siblings who receive these services.

Nickell schedules three or fewer sessions each day. But the preparation begins long before she logs into a Zoom meeting with a child. After she plans her lesson, she mails worksheets or activities to the family.

In her session with Madeline, Nickell led her through cutting out and folding a shark-themed fortune teller by using a document camera connected to the computer.

"Slow and steady wins the race," Madeline said as she concentrated on her cutting.

Nickell doesn't typically use



Lisa Britton/For the Baker City Herald

Ellen Jacobs, a speech language pathologist for the Baker School District, meets remotely with Ethan Kellar.

"Another good thing is the parent relationship. They can help and I can give them ideas."

— Ellen Jacobs, speech language pathologist

crafts in her therapy sessions, but she's discovered these activities are good for sequence directions, perception, cutting, folding, and using both hands.

"Who knew it was such a great activity?" Nickell said, smiling as Madeline held her finished paper shark up to the screen.

Every work day is packed for the speech language pathologists.

Johnson is providing direct service to about 55 students, which means her days are full of nine to 10 back-to-back Zoom sessions.

"I had to look at each kid, their schedule, and piece it all together," Johnson said.

Moving to teletherapy does have its challenges — mainly a reliable internet connection.

"It can be a struggle, especially if there's a lag or the voice doesn't match up," Swart said.

Hawkins has had the computer screen freeze up, and only audio when the video disappeared.

"But you muddle through it," Hawkins said.

All of these specialists say the best part is having face-to-face time with students — even if it is through a screen.

"It's wonderful to have social interaction," Hawkins said. "I miss seeing them, and they crave seeing people from school."

Now that they've jumped into the world of teletherapy, each specialist says they've discovered tools to utilize in the future.

For Jacobs, who serves Halfway students, this distance approach could be an option during harsh winters. But it would be better, she said, for the students to be at the school with a more reliable internet connection.

"I couldn't tell if they were saying a 't' or a 'k,'" she said of the first week of Zoom sessions.

Seeing children in their home environment is also a different experience.

"I've met the family dog," Nickell said with a smile.

Most of the speech pathologists have also had to juggle their schedule since their own children are home as well.

Most businesses report declining sales

By Michael Kohn
The (Bend) Bulletin

More than 70% of Oregon business owners report a decrease in sales since the start of the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new survey of 5,000 businesses around the state.

The survey — conducted by Business Oregon, Travel Oregon and the Oregon Small Business Development Center Network — also revealed that 44% of businesses have cut hours for workers and 27% have laid off employees.

While relatively high compared to the pre-COVID-19 era, the numbers weren't surprising given that the state has been

on lockdown orders for six weeks.

The statistics mirror what has been reported by the Oregon Employment Department, which said last month that 12% of the total workforce had filed for unemployment within the first five weeks of the stay-at-home order.

The survey was open for two weeks in April. Around 69% of responses were completed by businesses with fewer than 10 employees.

While 40% of businesses have made temporary closures, around 2% said they are permanently shutting down their operations, according to the report. In rural areas, 45% have made temporary closures and 3% permanently closed.

Among the businesses surveyed, 28% said they saw their revenue plummet 90% year-over-year in the month of April.

The ability to work remotely has helped some firms carry on their business as usual — 33% of respondents said their workforces could work remotely.

The leading categories of work that could be done remotely include information, 85%; professional and business services, 66%; and financial activities, 61%.

At the other end of the spectrum, just 6% of restaurant/bar and food service jobs could be done remotely and just 7% of jobs in accommodations could be done remotely.

Second round of business loans benefits Oregon

By Jamie Goldberg
The Oregonian/OregonLive

Thousands of Oregon small businesses that were unable to access Paycheck Protection Program loans from the Small Business Administration during the program's first round of funding have managed to secure loans in the program's second round.

Data released by the Small Business Administration shows that 31,119 Oregon businesses received approval for loans through the program between April 27 and May 1. Those businesses will receive just over \$3 billion in funding for an average loan size of just over \$97,000.

The Paycheck Protection Program, which is supposed to give small businesses a lifeline during the COVID-19 crisis, was criticized in April for giving loans to large companies and favoring certain states over others. Congress approved an additional \$310 billion for the program in late April after it ran out of its initial funding in 13 days. Applications for the second round of funding opened April 27.

Some of the issues that marred the program during the first round of funding seem to have been addressed during the second round.

A total of 18,732 Oregon businesses had loans approved during the initial round of funding. Those businesses received \$3.8 billion for an average loan size of just over \$200,000.

After that first round, an analysis by Bloomberg ranked states by loan amounts as a percentage of eligible payrolls. Oregon was near the bottom, at 42.2%.

After the first week of second-round funding, Oregon businesses had received nearly 76% of what they were eligible for under the program, according to Bloomberg. That's close to the national rate of 81%.

Oregon businesses secured about 1.1% of the \$342 billion in loans reported as of April 16, a little less than its 1.4 % share of the U.S. population. But Oregon businesses had secured 1.7% of the \$175.7 billion in loans approved in the second round of funding as of May 1. The program still has

\$134.3 billion left to distribute nationwide.

The Paycheck Protection Program loans were designed to give businesses with fewer than 500 employees loans to support eight weeks of payroll, while allowing businesses to use leftover funds on mortgage interest, rent and utilities. If employers maintain pre-COVID levels of employment after eight weeks, the loan is forgiven. Unforgiven balances convert to a two-year loan with an interest rate of 1%.

The program was criticized in April after reports emerged that large publicly traded companies, including national restaurant and hotel chains, had received millions of dollars in funding through the program. At the same time, small businesses in Oregon and throughout the country were complaining about difficulties accessing program funding.

The Paycheck Protection Program presents 'Catch 22' choices as restaurants navigate the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Oregon's U.S. senators Jeff

Merkley and Ron Wyden, both Democrats, were among 22 senators who sent a letter to Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin and Small Business Administrator Jovita Carranza last week urging them to develop strong supervisory mechanisms to ensure that the second round of Paycheck Protection Program funding reached struggling small businesses. "As small business owners await distribution of the additional funding provided for the program in the Paycheck Protection Program and



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LOCAL BRIEFING

Eastern Oregon University planning virtual ceremony for spring graduates

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University, along with many other colleges and universities, is postponing its in-person commencement exercises this spring.

EOU will honor spring graduates with a virtual recognition ceremony on June 13, the same date the in-person ceremony was scheduled to take place on campus. The recognition event will recreate EOU's typical in-person ceremony as closely as possible, with speeches and conferring of degrees via video.

"Graduation is a very special time and a meaningful milestone in our students' education and we want to celebrate that accomplishment," said VP for University Advancement Tim Seydel. "Given that we cannot hold major public events, we are finding alternatives for now, and looking forward to a time when our graduates can join faculty, staff and families in person."

EOU is working on plans for a possible in-person ceremony this fall. Graduates will also have the option to walk in the June 2021 commencement ceremony.

Two Baker City students earn degrees from Boise State University

BOISE — Stephen Schott and Dusty Gyllenberg, both of Baker City, are among 2,785 students who have earned degrees this spring from Boise State University.

Schott earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biology.

Gyllenberg will receive a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering.

BSU's virtual commencement ceremony, along with shout-out videos from students and faculty, can be viewed at boisestate.edu/commencement

Baker County plans to apply for federal aid to help small businesses

The Baker County Board of Commissioners has set a special meeting for May 15 to have a public hearing regarding the county's application for a \$150,000 federal grant to help small businesses affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The public hearing will start at 9 a.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St. The public can attend remotely by going to www.bakercounty.org and clicking on the link for "upcoming online commission sessions" and choosing the May 15 meeting. The public can make comments during the meeting or submit written comments by 5 p.m. on May 14 by emailing to hmartin@bakercounty.org

County officials estimate the grant, if received, would benefit at least 15 people or businesses, all of whom would be low- or moderate-income.

More information is available by calling 541-523-8200.

Available Through The Library

Although the library is closed, ebooks are available through the Library2Go service. There's a link on the left side of the screen at www.bakerlib.org. Patrons can access Library2Go with their library card number and PIN.

NEWLY ADDED

- "Lean On Me," Pat Simmons
- "Wow, No Thank You," Samantha Irby
- "Separation Anxiety," Laura Zigman
- "One Little Lie," Colleen Coble
- "County Strong," Linda Lael Miller

ALWAYS AVAILABLE

- "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," Jules Verne
- "The Woman in White," Wilkie Collins
- "The Adventure of Tom Sawyer," Mark Twain
- "The War of the Worlds," H.G. Wells
- "The Innocence of Father Brown," G.K. Chesterton



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