

EDITORIAL

The right call on school start

The Baker School Board made a disappointing decision Thursday. That it was also the right decision — indeed, the necessary decision — doesn't ease the disappointment. The Board decided that all classes will be conducted online when the school year starts Sept. 8. The school district's goal was to have in-person classes for grades K-6, and a hybrid model for students in grades 7-12, with those students attending classes in school two days a week and online the other two days. But based on the requirements that Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced July 28 — metrics related to COVID-19 cases that counties must meet to make schools within their borders eligible to offer in-person classes — Baker schools can't currently qualify. And although a task force of local officials from rural counties, including Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett, has been lobbying state officials to ease those requirements for counties including Baker, there is no guarantee that the campaign will result in Baker schools being able to welcome students into classrooms in September. Meanwhile, hundreds of local families are trying to figure out their fall schedule. And with only a month before school starts, parents need to know whether their kids will be learning in a classroom or at home. The bottom line is that the Board needed to make a decision. And because it seems unlikely, based on recent trends in the number of COVID-19 cases and the rate of positive tests, that the district will meet the state's requirements for in-person classes by Sept. 8, a completely online curriculum was the only plausible option.

This is hardly ideal. Online school creates challenges for the district's 1,700 students, their teachers and their families. The district has used federal COVID-19 money to improve its online teaching system. But now officials will need to strive to ensure that all students have the computer and internet access necessary to participate in classes. Some parents probably will have to give up jobs, or substantially change their work schedules, to be home with elementary school students. The metrics the governor announced July 28 aren't quite as strict when applied to allowing in-person classes for K-3 students. Baker superintendent Mark Witty said Thursday that he expects to review the situation for those students after a month, to see if it's possible to resume in-person classes, and undertake a similar review for grades 4-12 around the middle of October. State officials are scheduled to announce potential changes to the July 28 metrics on Tuesday, Aug. 11. Those changes could make it possible for smaller school districts in the area, including Huntington, Burnt River, Pine Eagle and Powder Valley, to have in-person classes for some or all students. State officials have said the overriding goal is to have students return to classrooms as soon as it's safe to do so. Officials need to acknowledge that conditions in counties such as Baker, where test results suggest the virus is not widespread and where no outbreaks have happened, warrant the resumption of in-person classes sooner than in counties with significantly higher rates of COVID-19 cases.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



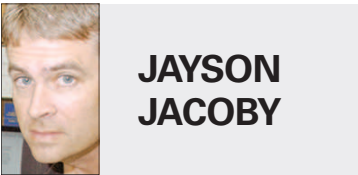
OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from Bloomberg News: In a country where COVID-19 remains out of control, it's wrong for anyone not to wear a mask on a commercial airplane. Increasing evidence shows that good cloth face coverings significantly lower the spread of the novel coronavirus at close quarters — and that not wearing them is risky, because this germ is so often breathed into the air by people who don't yet know they have it. One passenger on a flight from Singapore to Hangzhou, China, was infected by neighboring passengers when he merely let his mask slip below his nose while talking with his family. It is one thing for people to take chances with their own health. It's quite another when their reckless behavior also puts others at risk. The evidence clearly shows that this is the case with masks during the pandemic. In fact, people who choose to risk their own health this way are exposing others to potentially worse danger. Smoking is banned almost everywhere — including on airplanes. During the pandemic, all air passengers should be required to wear masks, and face legal penalties if they don't. Most Americans have come to understand the need to mask up. Seventy-two percent usually do. But 18% rarely or never do, and some of these objectors apparently want to remain maskless on airlines. This imperils the health of innocent strangers, including flight-crew members for whom the cabin is a workplace. Airplane ventilation systems remove almost all germs from the air, but it takes a few minutes for exhaled virus particles to reach the filters. Major airlines already require passengers and crew members to wear masks, but their

rules come with exceptions (one airline excuses children under age 8, for instance) and, most important, aren't always enforced. In a couple of instances airlines have refused entry to unmasked passengers or removed someone from a plane after boarding, but as things stand there's not much they can do to keep irresponsible passengers from removing their masks during flight. An FAA rule could set penalties for noncompliance — just as some governments do. Many cities where the coronavirus is uncontained are levying \$100 fines for going without a mask near other people in public places. Research has shown that such mandates work. Enforceable mandates increase the number of mask wearers and reduce new infections. If 95% of Americans were to wear masks, more than 30,000 lives could be saved over the next few months, according to the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. When masks do not prevent transmission altogether, they make infections less severe. And they do so without appreciably limiting people's intake of oxygen. Air travel is still a fraction of what it was before the pandemic. For airlines, as for the U.S. at large, it will be impossible to return to normal unless COVID-19 is contained. Masks are one of the most effective strategies. Democrats in the House have introduced legislation that would authorize the Federal Aviation Administration to require masks on all U.S. flights and impose criminal penalties for failure to comply. It should be passed without delay.

Real heat prompts a search for cool relief

I spent a goodly portion of my lunch hour the other day searching in vain for a sheet of plastic. This is not as refreshing as a nap. Or reading a book, or eating Cheetos, to cite two other things I especially enjoy doing during the mid-day break. My failure to find the plastic was particularly vexing because it is a substantial piece, measuring maybe 3 feet by 2 feet. It's not as if I could have inadvertently kicked it under the bed, which is the long-term repository for books, maps and a variety of other items I vaguely remember and sometimes lament. The plastic also happens to be transparent, or nearly so, but I don't see as how that much changes the matter. I can't very well argue that the thing is camouflaged, the reason being that its edges bristle with several finger-length swathes of black velcro. I needed this sheet because it's what I wedge into the window frame in our bedroom, where it temporarily stands in for the screen. This is after I have wrestled an air-conditioner into the gap, a task that my fingers consider an act of criminal stupidity. (And one that my back, the past few years, has treated with increasing suspicion.) Since it was already 93 degrees at noon, at least according to the most ambitious instrument in my network of some half a dozen thermometers, I considered this a quest of considerable importance.



JAYSON JACOBY

Our other window A/C unit was droning away but I could sense that its chilly exhalations were not up to the task on a day when it was apt to still be stifling even after the sun slid behind the Elkhorns. Real summer had arrived, and as is my custom I was ill-prepared to deal with it. It's not that I was wholly unaware of the heat, which is of course the characteristic that defines the season. I had hefted the other air-conditioner into its slot back in early June, after the temperature reached the upper 80s on a couple of afternoons. But that was a different sort of heat. A hot day in early June lacks malevolence. You know the torrid temperature will last for just a few hours, that the evening breeze will blow with a face-soothing coolness. But come late July, and the broiling air has more weight. There is a tangible treachery in a thermometer that reads 95 at dinner time, and any wind that blows then is an ill wind, the fevered and fetid breath of some bad-tempered brute. Anyway it was hot. And although I hadn't decided to actually lug the other air-conditioner from the shed, I was mulling the idea. Only there wasn't any point in

it if I couldn't hunt up that sheet of clear plastic. I finally found it propped against the wall near our front door. I hadn't the slightest memory of putting it there, although I suppose I must have done so. With that minor mystery solved I drove back to work, sweltering because 1 mile is too short a commute for the car's A/C to get up much momentum. But even so I felt a palpable sense of relief. It was gratifying to know that later, if I exhausted my patience with the oppressive air, I could take meaningful action. A slightly smashed finger is nothing against the refreshing caress of artificially cooled air.

It has been a particularly sunny summer; it seems to me. This is hardly shocking, of course, in our arid valley sheltered within the concentric circles of two rain shadows, those cast by the Cascades and the Elkhorns. Even the soggiest period hereabouts is frequently interrupted by clear days. And July and August are rarely soggy. During a run of nearly cloud-free days my thoughts drift back to another summer, one distant both in time and in space. The summer of 1914 in Europe was forever after celebrated as the apotheosis of the season, a span of brilliant afternoons fading to the warm golden dusk, soft and comforting.

Climate records largely confirm this. But that summer's reputation has little to do with statistics. Europeans deified that summer because it was the last in a long era of general peace on the continent. But only in part — the summer was scarcely a month old when, on July 28, World War I started. It was natural for people, during and after the catastrophe of the first modern industrial war, to remember that summer with particular fondness. It was the epitome of the "before" — before society had to confront the havoc wrought by rapid-firing artillery and phosgene gas and Maxim guns. Before Verdun and the Somme and Ypres, heretofore mere place names, became synonyms for slaughter. The summer of 2020, the summer of the coronavirus, is a different season, to be sure. Most notably, the pandemic, unlike the war, arrived well before the solstice. But we are living through another great upheaval, another milestone. And I can't help but wonder, in the years and the decades ahead, how we will think of this summer, another sun-drenched season when it seemed at times that nothing would ever again be as it was before.

The technology of 1980 is in many ways laughably archaic. Compared to a cellphone loaded with thousands of mp3s, a Sony Walkman cassette player seems about as complicated as a hatchet.

But in one narrow measure I believe we reached a pinnacle of achievement 40 years ago that we have yet to surpass, and so far as I can tell probably never will. By "we" I mean AC/DC, the Australian rock band. On July 25, 1980, the group released the album "Back in Black." Never before, and not since, has the electric guitar sounded better than it does in that recording. The brothers Angus Young (lead guitar) and Malcolm Young (rhythm guitar) crammed "Back in Black" with a series of riffs, played through Marshall amps, that managed to sound even crunchier than on their previous record, 1979's "Highway to Hell." The Youngs' guitars — Angus played a Gibson SG, Malcolm a Gretsch White Falcon — combined the heavy distortion of hard rock with a precision that to my ears no band has ever equaled. The brilliance of their work is best appreciated by listening to the songs with a good pair of headphones. The straightforward music that AC/DC played long since went out of fashion. And sadly, Malcolm died in 2017. But I suspect that guitarists today who tried to replicate the sound that infuses "Back in Black," even with the dubious aid of computers, would fail, and by a wide margin, to accomplish what the Young brothers did without employing a single microchip.

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