

Officials react to shifting of fall sports

By Corey Kirk
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The Baker School District athletic director and the Baker High School head football coach said they understand why Oregon's high school sports governing agency decided to postpone fall sports until 2021.

The Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) announced Wednesday that football, volleyball, soccer and cross-country will move to the spring of 2021.

"I was happy that we had something," said Buell Gonzales Jr., Baker School District athletic director. "After that I was able to study it and I thought it was thoughtful, it's not a one size fits all, which I was very appreciative of."

Jason Ramos, in his second year as Baker High School varsity football coach, said he has empathy for OSAA's executive board.

"The OSAA kind of had to do what they did, because kids need to be in school if they need to be involved in activities," Ramos said. "I guess I was kind of disappointed with the metrics in keeping the kids out of school."

The OSAA's schedule calls for all three



Kathy Orr /Baker City Herald file photo-2019

The Baker Bulldogs won't return to the football field until February 2021.

sports seasons — fall, winter and spring — to be played during 2021.

The schedule:

- Winter sports — basketball, wrestling and swimming. First practice date is Dec. 28, 2020, with the first contest date of Jan. 11, 2021.
- Normal fall sports season, including

football, volleyball, soccer and cross-country. First practice date is Feb. 22, 2021, with the first contest date of March 8.

- Traditional sports season, including baseball, softball, tennis, golf and track and field. First practice date is April 19, with the first contest date of May 3.

Gonzale sees challenges with the condensed schedule.

"When we get closer we need to see what counties are in position to play and what counties aren't," he said. "That is a foreseeable problem when some of the traditional schools you are used to playing aren't ready."

Weather is a possible factor as well.

Ramos said he's concerned about football and other outdoor fall sports happening during February and March, when snow is hardly uncommon in Baker County.

"It is generally a concern for us, you wonder sometimes if that was taken into consideration," Ramos said. "There are places that will struggle to have the right weather at that time, we just want to have the opportunity to play and put the safety measures in place, but that is something that we will tackle when it happens."

COVID-19

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Priscilla Lynn, CEO of Saint Alphonsus in Baker City, said the hospital had adequate supplies of tests based on current demand

Lynn recommends residents who have COVID-19-like symptoms, such as a fever, cough, difficulty breathing, headache or muscle aches, to visit the hospital's curbside drive-in evaluation clinic at the southeast side of the hospital, on Midway Drive just south of Pocahtontas Road. The clinic is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to noon and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

She said there has been an increase in visits to the clinic over the past several weeks.

Lynn said Saint Alphonsus continues to participate in an OHA program designed to test up to 15 people per week who have no symptoms but visit the hospital's emergency room for a different reason.

"We have a target to collect 15 samples from asymptomatic patients who have a visit in our emergency room each week but are finding that we have fewer volunteers for the study than expected," Lynn said.

"We are working with OHA to find ways to increase the volume of samples from our community testing."

SCHOOLS

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Witty told the Board Thursday that the eastside concerns for the one-size-fits-all metrics, announced July 28, are supported by a group of 10 local leaders and state officials formed to consider the issue.

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett is among the members of the Rural Schools Public Health Metrics Review Work Group.

Under the current metrics, Baker School District would not be able to open in-person school on Sept. 8.

Witty presented a table showing metrics for the most recent three-week period, during which Baker County only met two of the nine metrics.

However, Witty told the Board he believes the task force will use its influence and its members' knowledge of their own communities to help revise the metrics, and possibly allow them to be regulated by local health departments in rural communities to better fit the small number of residents and the large number of square miles those counties encompass.

"I do believe the push to set the metrics a little more reasonably is being heard for sparsely populated counties," Witty said. "I believe that will put us in a better position to be in in-person school, but we're not in that position at the beginning of the school year."

"I do believe the metrics will change, to be more favorable."

One change Witty expects is that the state will no longer require school districts to meet metrics not only for their county, but also be dependent on statewide metrics.

The system Brown announced July 28 wouldn't allow in-person classes if the statewide case positivity rate — the number of tests that are positive — was more than 5% in any week over a three-week period.

That change will help make it possible for Baker to reopen classrooms down the road, but not immediately since the county metrics are not being met, Witty said.

State officials are slated to announce possible changes to the metrics on Tuesday, Aug. 11.

Witty said he sought the Board's approval of the startup using comprehensive distance learning for all students this week to help staff and families prepare for the change.

The District had hoped that would not have been necessary, based on earlier coronavirus numbers in Baker County, which were at 38 as of Friday, but had held at just one case from May 6 through June 30, when the number of cases began to steadily climb.

The District's initial plan was to bring students in kindergarten through sixth grade back to in-person classes Monday through Thursday

as usual. Grades 7-12 were to have been served in a hybrid program, which would have split students into two groups that would have rotated between online classes two days a week and in-person classes two days a week.

Witty noted that although community spread is not an issue for some of the smaller and more remote districts in the county, such as Pine Eagle in Halfway and Burnt River in Unity, the increase in cases linked to Baker City appear to be.

"I don't think the Health Department could say we don't have a community spread at this time," he told the Board.

During Thursday's meeting, Jodi Thew, the District's director of federal programs and curriculum, Angela Lattin, director of the Baker Early Learning Center, and Barry Nemec, special education director, outlined plans for the school opening under the comprehensive distance learning plan and child care service to be offered to District staff.

Thew noted that principals are planning virtual orientations for families to introduce them to new technology purchased by the District to ensure a more successful online experience for students and staff than what they experienced this spring.

All students attended classes online during the spring term.

The District has five priorities for fall classes under the distance learning model, Thew said. They call for virtual face-to-face instruction for students at least once a day, structured student interactions, teacher-recorded lessons that students can watch later, and parent notification of the set schedule for students at each grade level along with expectations regarding attendance and grading policies.

Thew said student letter grades will be awarded based on their mastery of the state standards under the new system rather than the pass-fail grading that the state allowed in the spring.

Teachers will work from their classrooms and maintain set office hours to answer questions, Thew said. They will contact parents weekly to let them know how their students are progressing and check on students who miss a scheduled session either by phone or through a home visit.

Instruction for students in kindergarten through sixth grade will average 120 minutes to 180 minutes per day through the Zoom video-streaming computer app, and most assignments will be submitted through the Schoology system. Assignments will be provided to be completed during the remainder of the day and paraprofessional educators will be available for tutoring, Thew said.

She presented a sample

schedule that shows K-3 students attending a three-hour block of classes. In the example, Group A would be in class from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Office hours would be from 11 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Group B students would be in class from noon to 3 p.m. with office hours from 3 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Students in Grades 7-12 also would follow a set schedule with direct instruction being provided for 150 to 280 minutes per day with assignments being given to complete during the remainder of the day, Thew said.

Lessons will be submitted through Schoology or Acelus, another online learning platform, and students also may earn high school credit by submitting a proficiency portfolio.

Teachers will have office hours and paraprofessionals will be available to help students with their assignments via Zoom sessions. Paraprofessionals also will be available to provide virtual support to second language learners and students needing special education, Thew said.

A sample schedule for Grades 7-12 shows students attending each class through a seven-period day for 30 to 40 minutes per class with a 5- to 15-minute break between classes. Teachers will be in their offices from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. and tutoring will be offered from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Nemec, the special education director, said special education case managers will work to implement each special education student's individualized education plan as written, to the extent possible.

About 90% of the District's students who receive special education services are included up to 90% of their day in classes taught by their regular education teachers, he said. The special education teachers will be available to provide additional support as needed. And accommodations will be made for those who need more assistance.

Occupational, physical and speech therapy will be provided by District staff through a teletherapy model, Nemec said.

The District also will be watching for social-emotional issues children might be experiencing, he said.

Nemec noted that calls to child protective services have been down during the pandemic.

"We typically call in to report abuse and neglect," he said of school staff. "We will work with the staff to make sure kids are being taken care of as our community standards are set."

Student leadership opportunities at the secondary level and student government for elementary students also will continue through distance learning along with Friday-Plus programs and Chess for Success.

The weekend Backpack Program will continue to send food home for families in need. And daily meals, breakfast and lunch, will be offered as they were during the spring. Lattin said the District's transportation system would be used for meal and backpack delivery.

Total online learning programs, a different type of remote education, also will be available for families. Those lessons, which don't involve students watching their teachers in real time, will be offered on the platform used by Baker Web Academy. Students will work at their own pace with Baker School District teachers meeting with families twice a week to report on the children's progress, Thew said.

Students in Grades 7-12 who choose the Web Academy platform will take part in courses with staff from Eagle Cap Innovative Junior Senior High School. They also will proceed at their own pace,

with some courses online and others offered through packet work, Thew said.

Baker Middle School Principal Skye Planagan and Baker High School Principal Greg Mitchell also have proposed a possible hybrid model. That system would use both types of online instruction.

One system would feature a teacher providing livestreamed classes. The other would offer online classes that are not provided through a live instructor.

More information will be available for families next week during registration at the individual school buildings (*see registration schedule on Page 3A*).

The Baker School Board's next meeting is set for Thursday, Aug. 13. It will begin at 6 p.m. via livestreaming through the Zoom app.

Also as part of the opening of school, which will require Baker School District and Baker Web Academy staff

to work in their classrooms while providing comprehensive distance learning, the District will offer temporary child care. Students in kindergarten through sixth grade are eligible for the child care program, Lattin said. The care also will be offered, by request, for children in seventh and eighth grades.

The child care service will be provided from 7:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. on school days only, mostly at Brooklyn Primary School, which passed inspection as an operational child care center in the spring.

Classified staff will be training to provide the child care in partnership with Child Care Resource & Referral. No care is available for preschoolers or toddlers, which said is planned to be available at some point at the Baker Early Learning Center, Lattin said.

Meals will be provided. The child care staff will not be teaching the students, Lattin said.



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