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Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant Union High School senior Paige Weaver takes in teacher Andy Lusco's lecture on the nuances of the judicial branch of the U.S. government on Wednesday, March 2, 2022.

Oregon bans sale of Russian vodka

By ALEX WITWERT
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — The Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission banned the sale of Russian vodkas in all Oregon liquor stores on Monday, Feb. 28, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Independent operators of liquor stores were directed to take Russian vodkas off their shelves, aligning Oregon with other states that have acted to ban the sale of Russian made products as a part of economic sanctions against Russian operated businesses, according to a press release from the OLCC.

In Oregon, the OLCC effectively owns the supply of alcohol in the state, serving as a state-run monopoly for the industry.

"The state controls all the liquor that is in the store," said Liberty O'Dell, manager at La Grande Liquor and Smoke Shoppe. "In fact, they are still the owners of the liquor. We're beholden as agents of the state to follow their guidance. We don't take steps ahead of the OLCC when they make guidance like that. It's similar to a library in that we don't actually own the product. The liquor is owned by the state."

Customers in and out of the liquor store commented on passing about the banning of Russian vodka from store shelves. La Grande Liquor, however, only had two bottles of Russian-made vodka — Russian Standard Vodka — and O'Dell said it was "an item that doesn't sell very well in the first place."

Customers were understanding, according to O'Dell.

"I think everybody understands why we're doing it," he said. "The questions we've been getting is 'what's Ukrainian vodka — and how do I get some?' So my next order, that's what I'll be doing, is ordering some Ukrainian vodka."

Eastern Oregon produces several vodkas, including Glacier 45 vodka distilled in Baker City, and 276 Vodka produced by Oregon Grain Growers Distillery, Pendleton. Both are quality vodkas, according to O'Dell.

Across the state, about 5,000 bottles of Russian-made liquor were for sale in 281 liquor stores, according to the OLCC. Those vodkas have since been removed from store shelves. Oregon liquor stores also are prohibited from fulfilling any customer "special order" requests for Russian manufactured liquor.

Vodkas with Russian sounding names such as Smirnoff and Stolichnaya that are produced outside of

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THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION

Grant County educators weigh in on state graduation requirements

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

A small group of Grant County educators and parents weighed in last week on how the state's high school graduation requirements have prepared students during a virtual listening session with the Oregon Department of Education.

The listening session came after Oregon lawmakers last year passed a law that suspended the basic-skills test in math, reading and writing required to graduate high school during the 2022-23 school year.

Under Senate Bill 744, Oregon is required to seek engagement with communities across the state while the essential skills test requirements are suspended.

Students in Oregon still must earn 24 credits in reading, writing, math and other subjects to receive a high school diploma. The only thing that changed with the law is that school districts cannot withhold a high school diploma should a student not pass an essential skills test.

Nonetheless, the law came under intense scrutiny at both the state and the national level. Commentators hurled criticism that Oregon had "dumbed down" its standards.

Making requirements equal

While the bill did not provide Oregon-specific data showing that standardized testing negatively impacts students of color, Oregon Department of Education spokesperson Peter Rudy said gaps in high school graduation rates reflect disparities.

Nationally, the average high school graduation rate for white students is 10% higher than for black students and 8% higher than for Latinos, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Asked how the state can make the requirements equitable, Monument School District Superintendent Laura Thomas said it should be about giving students multiple ways and opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge they learned to a proficient level.

While he did not attend the listening session, Prairie City School Superintendent Casey Hallgarth added that the questions surrounding how to craft requirements to make them equitable for all of Oregon's students are challenging.

"One size doesn't fit everyone," Hallgarth wrote in an

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GRANT COUNTY SCHOOLS BY THE NUMBERS

Grant School District

Grant School District
Students enrolled: 252
Four-year graduation rate: 87%

Five-year completion rate (students who earned a high school diploma or GED in five years): 93%
Heading to college (students enrolling in a two- or four-year college within 16 months of earning a high school diploma): 60%

Prairie City School District

Students enrolled: 183
Four-year graduation rate: 100%
On track to graduate: 95%

Monument School District

Students enrolled: 53
Four-year graduation rate: 100%
On track to graduate: 100%

All numbers are for 2020-21 school year. Enrollment numbers are for K-12 students.

Schools ready to drop mask rule

Face coverings will be optional starting Monday in Grant County districts

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Grant County students and faculty are preparing for a return to life without the mask.

The statewide mask mandate ends at one minute before midnight on Friday, March 11, bringing local control to schools regarding masking guidelines for students and faculty.

Like many others around the state, public schools in Grant County say they'll make face coverings optional starting Monday, March 14.

Statewide hospitalizations due to COVID-19 have fallen 48% from their peak in January, according to the Oregon Health Authority. New infections have also declined more than 80% statewide over the past month. The decline in cases and hospitalizations has allowed an accelerated timetable for ending the mandate, originally scheduled to be lifted on March 31.



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

From left, students Delaney Coombs, Isaiah Hagopian and Emily Finley wear masks in Andy Lusco's government/civics class at Grant Union High School on Wednesday, March 2, 2022.

Over the past two years, schools throughout Oregon have faced significant challenges in remaining open and conducting in-person classes at various times. Schools have also struggled to conduct classes following brief or extended closures due to COVID-19 outbreaks either within communities or in the schools themselves.

The lifting of the mandate

represents a return to some type of normal, and a hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us. Grant County superintendents say they are happy to have decisions regarding masks handled locally, but they also stress that COVID safety measures and protocols will still be followed.

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Eagle office set to reopen

Blue Mountain Eagle

With the end of Oregon's mask mandate, the Blue Mountain Eagle office at 195 S. Canyon Blvd. in John Day will reopen to the public on Monday, March 14.

We've been closed to public access since the start of the pandemic out of health concerns, and we want to thank our subscribers, advertisers and all other members of the community for bearing with us over these difficult last two years.

Frankly, we've missed you. We're planning to celebrate our reopening with cookies, and we invite you to come by on Monday and join us.



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