

Graduation

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email to the newspaper. “I think there is a way to figure this out, but I think it needs to be a collaborative effort at each school district.”

Robert Waltenburg, superintendent of the Grant County Education Service District, said asking how to make essential skills requirements tests more equitable is a “loaded question.”

Essential skills, Waltenburg said, demand a different level of commitment from every student.

Waltenburg said the conversation “skirted around” the level of commitment necessary for students when it comes to how well they test. But, he said, regardless of the graduation requirements, barriers to education need to be part of the discussion.

Waltenburg rattled off several common barriers such as food insecurity, lack of access to broadband internet service and limited access to preschool.

For those reasons, Waltenburg said, asking how to make requirements more equitable for all students can lead the conversation down a “rabbit hole.”

“The challenge for the Legislature and ODE is to find that sweet spot of where we can say (essential skills requirements) fit 90% of our kids,” Waltenburg said. “And oh, by the way, the other 10%? This is how we’re going to address you.”



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant Union High School teacher Andy Lusco walks his students through the judicial branch of the U.S. government on Wednesday, March 2, 2022.

Measuring proficiency

Waltenburg said whatever avenue works best for the student is how schools could get better at making sure students can read, write and do math.

“Some kids perform well on tests where others are able to show knowledge and skills in other, less traditional ways,” Waltenburg said.

With the differences among students in the Monument district, Thomas said, educators are expected to — and need to — teach in a variety of ways to meet varying needs.

“Those students need to have the same opportunities to show us what they’ve learned in varying ways,” Thomas said.

Chris Carlin, a parent of students in the Monument School District, said one student might struggle to turn in home-

work assignments and might not participate in class very much, but then turn around and pass a standardized test. However, another student that “aces everything” in the classroom could freeze up when put in front of the same assessment.

“You have different personalities,” he said. “And you can’t judge everybody on a one-and-done test and call it good,” Carlin said.

What skills are essential?

The group homed in on what skills a student should have on board in order to be a productive member of society.

In recent years, “service learning” has become part of the curriculum in Oregon schools, and academic studies seem to support its value.

Researchers from the University of

Texas’ Population Research Center, for instance, warn about the social cost that comes with a collective lack of civic engagement in a study on the decline in civic groups.

“There is a lot of evidence that our democracy is based on having citizens connected with one another,” said Pamela Paxton, a sociology professor with the university. “When we connect with one another in associations we learn that our self interest is actually connected to the interests of others. That gives us a conception of the public good, common identity, and sense of common responsibility as a nation and as citizens. Any decline in that scholars see as potentially detrimental to democracy.”

But not everyone agrees what role schools should play in addressing that issue.

For his part, Waltenburg expressed some concern about a shift away from a basic “in-the-box” education about what it means to be a good and productive member of a community.

While students must do a senior project or perform community service activities to earn credits toward a diploma, he said, the data does not bear out that graduates are using those skills out in the world. For instance, he noted, membership in service organizations such as the Elks and Kiwanis clubs is down nationally.

“The statistics don’t support that what we’re doing translates into a life-long service attitude,” Waltenburg said.

While he said he could not pinpoint why that was the case, he said it was important to focus on basic academic skills, including reading, writing and math, along with an emphasis on civics centered around teaching students how to be a contributing, productive member of society.

Like Hallgarth, Grant School District Superintendent Bret Uptmor did not take part in the listening session but spoke to the Eagle in an interview. He said getting kids in situations where they are out in the community working with others to gain experiences that would likely occur in a workplace is critical to their overall success in the real world.

“Just because you have the aptitude for reading, writing and math and so forth does not mean that when you get out on the job you have the personal skills to work with people in the community.”

Uptmor said that those learning opportunities are a critical piece of a student’s education.

For Hallgarth, educators need to first build relationships with their students. The relationship, he continued, teaches the students that teachers, school staff and the community want them to succeed.

“I know school is to teach them about reading, writing and arithmetic, but the school offers so much more for the students to learn, i.e., perseverance, how to deal with winning and losing, manners, and what a productive citizen looks like.”

Masks

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Grant School District Superintendent Bret Uptmor says standard mitigation practices will remain in place despite the mask requirement being lifted.

“Temperature checks, maintaining distance, air purifiers in classrooms and sanitation practices are among the mitigation practices that will remain,” he said.

Uptmor also says the school will test kids who show indications of having contracting COVID, with the permission of a parent.

“The Grant School District is still encouraging parents to keep their children home if they are sick,” Uptmor added.

The Oregon Health Authority recommends that unvaccinated and high-risk individuals continue to wear masks, but local school districts aren’t suggesting any actions for unvaccinated staff and faculty, again stressing that COVID checks and precautions would remain in place.

Prairie City School District Superintendent Casey Hallgarth said he is glad to have decisions regarding masking in schools made at the local level.

“Masks are optional, and nobody is going to be shamed for wearing or not wearing their mask,” Hallgarth stated.

Like Uptmor, Hallgarth says the same COVID precautions that existed before the end of the mandate will still apply.

“All of the little things we do (to combat COVID) make a big difference,” said Hallgarth.

Like schools in the Grant district, Prairie City schools will work with local health authorities in the event of COVID spikes or outbreaks to determine the best course of action in those scenarios.

“They’re the experts,” Hallgarth noted.

Long Creek School District School Board Chair Marsie Watson echoed what Grant County superintendents have said, saying the Long Creek district will follow the guidance of local health authorities regarding masking and COVID protocols.

Monument School District Superin-

tendent Laura Thomas says she received the Oregon Department of Education’s updated guidance, which leaves masking up to local officials and health professionals.

“I will continue to work with the Grant County Health Department to do what is best for our students, staff, families and community,” Thomas said.

The lifting of the mask mandate has also sparked discussion about contingency plans in the event of a spike in cases.

“A spike in cases will trigger conversations between health experts and schools regarding mitigation efforts,” Uptmor said. Those efforts could include temporarily requiring masks again and closing buildings if need be.

As of Wednesday, March 2, there were 424 people hospitalized with COVID in Oregon, with 71 of those in intensive care, and two Grant County residents were hospitalized due to COVID. COVID-19 has claimed more than 6,000 lives in Oregon, including 18 in Grant County, since the start of the pandemic in early 2020.

Vodka

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Russia and aren’t subject to the ban, according to the OLCC press release. Stoli Group, the distillery that makes Stolichnaya in Latvia, offered up a statement on its website that said “Stoli Group has had a long history of fighting oppression from the Russian regime,” and condemned the Russian military actions in Ukraine. Stoli is produced in Latvia, while Smirnoff is produced in Illinois.

The move to ban Russian vodkas can be seen as largely symbolic as very few Russian vodkas are imported to the United States. A small number of bars have gone viral online for pouring out Stoli brand vodkas, despite the vodka being produced in Latvia, a NATO member country.

A list of the vodka brands that have been pulled from the shelves can be found on the OLCC website.

But even if the OLCC didn’t outright ban the sale of Russian vodka, O’Dell said it would be something he personally would have liked to see pulled from store shelves.

“I would be advocating to do it,” O’Dell said. “Me, the person, would be advocating to do it.”

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Hello Grant County,
 Well, Sunday we set our clocks forward one hour. Spring is on the way! I’m ready for it, how about you?
 There are some fun and exciting things happening around Grant County in the next few weeks.
 The Snowmobile race scheduled for Sumpter this coming Saturday, March 12th has been moved to Bear Valley at the Haberly Ranch. Follow Hwy 395 out of John Day south and look for the signs. For more information contact Bill Sproul. This will be a Saturday race only.
 The Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site and the Ranch and Rodeo Museum will be open for Spring Break Monday – Friday, March 21-25. They will open for the main season May 1st along with the Grant County Historical Museum! It’s wonderful to have our museums opening again. They are some of our most precious treasures!
 The John Day Spring Fling will be held on Friday, March 25th in John Day. This will be a street fair with vendors. For more information contact Zach Denney, the Oregon Rain Venture Catalyst – 541-589-5565.
 The annual Spring Genealogy Workshop will be Thursday, March 31st at the OSU Grant County Extension Conference Room. Call 541-575-1431 or 541-620-4053 for more information.
 The Lake Creek Camp Gala will be held at the Grant County Fairgrounds on April 2nd.
 The Seventh Annual Bunny Hop 5K will be held April 16th in Dayville.
 Plans are coming together nicely for the Grape & Grain event we are planning for May 13th. We plan to have craft beer and wine vendors as well as some food, art and specialty items. We will also have entertainment so, save the date! It will be a fun evening!
 It’s hard to believe that some people say there is nothing to do here!
 The March meeting of the Chamber Board of Directors will be Thursday, March 17th at 10:30 am at the Chamber office.

Take care and stay well!
Jammy Bremner
 Executive Director

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