

# Schools learn lessons from COVID

By ALEX WITTWER  
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — More than two years have passed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Oregon, which saw businesses and schools close down repeatedly.

Schools were forced to make sweeping changes to continue operations. Some of those changes are here to stay.

“One of the things that will be sticking around for us here at Pendleton High School is that all of the teachers have become familiar with the Google platforms, especially Google Classroom,” said Principal Patrick Dutcher. “Now it’s been two years of running their lesson plans and assignments there. That helps with retention if kids are absent. I mean, obviously the state’s going back to more of an accountability when it comes to recording absences, but that has allowed families to get online to see what they’ve missed because the teachers do a really good job of updating the Google classrooms, especially for the daily assignments.”

Pendleton had already planned to add an online teaching component to their curriculum, but the pandemic accelerated that need. State and federal grants also allowed the school to enact a one-to-one plan, which gives every student a Chromebook to be used for school.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

La Grande Middle School student Zackary Simonis works on a Chromebook during class on Thursday, April 7, 2022.

“If you’re a student at Pendleton High School, you have a Chromebook assigned to you at the start,” Dutcher said. “A lot of teachers were incorporating that technology into their lesson plans as it is, knowing each kid has access to a Chromebook.”

But while schools now have the ability to do remote learning in the case of emergencies, snow days will still be in place due to the chaos of switching to a remote learning environment on short notice.

“Snow days are what they are.

I think it’s hard to get people organized on the fly,” Dutcher said. “You know, there’s something about being a kid and the Americana of having a snow day. But, as of right now, I don’t think there’s a plan in Pendleton School District to get rid of snow days. That’s not saying that it’s not off the table, but there is no plan to get rid of them on our end.”

The ability to integrate online learning has created more flexibility for school districts, according to La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Uriah Gatliff, a student at La Grande Middle School, works on an assignment during class on Thursday, April 7, 2022.

“I definitely think that choices and options, whether it’s home school and homelink programs, or whether it’s online schools and whether it’s brick and mortar — it’s here to stay,” he said. “And being flexible at home, online learning and hybrid approaches are here to stay. So anything that has to do with technology that enhances online as well as in-person learning is something we’re going to keep having to do, and we will. We’re happy to do that.”

Mendoza said that the school district had been pivoting toward integrating technology like Google Classroom and Canvas into its curriculum and toolkit, but the pandemic

had accelerated that effort.

“We were already working on doing more with Google Classroom, posting lessons and activities and offering feedback and information and creating engagement through that, but (the pandemic) definitely made it something we had to get better at and do better at,” he said. “Having the ability for teachers to be able to create a classroom in person as well as a classroom online — to me, that’s part of the future and part of what has to remain for the future.”

Mendoza cautioned that online learning should also emphasize online citizenship and building healthy relationships online with classmates.

“We got good kids, but everybody needs to be better about how they interact on social media, and how they interact in digital messaging,” he said. “That’s part of the future, I think, and not only just good character education, but I think we need to make sure that we help kids have good relationships electronically.”

Part of that education future could include online classes taken at universities through partnerships with the school district.

“Any time you can create more options for kids or opportunities for kids, that’s part of the future,” Mendoza said. “Future kids and families want options more than ever, and we need to make sure we’re trying to create that opportunity.”

# Baker courts international students

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

BAKER CITY — The Baker School District has bought one historic home in Baker City and plans to buy a second soon as housing for students from other countries who will be attending Baker High School starting this fall.

The Baker School District started the Oregon International School about four years ago.

But the pandemic, as well as a delay in the district’s application for a student visa program under which the state will pay the district the standard per-student rate for visiting students, put the project in limbo over the past two years, Superintendent Mark Witty said.

The idea, Witty said, is to bring up to 40 international students to the district each school year, and, with revenue from the International School, to forge relationships with other countries and schools that makes it easier, and less expensive, for Baker students to visit and study abroad.

He expects 22 to 25 foreign students will attend BHS when the 2022-23 school year starts this fall.

Andrew Bryan, a member of the Baker School Board, said he believes the International School will benefit district students as well as the community.

Students will have a chance to sit side by side in BHS classrooms with teenagers from around the world, Bryan said.

Moreover, he believes that the program will bolster the district’s budget and allow the district to offer scholarships to Baker students that makes it possible for those who are



Bryan

Witty

interested to travel abroad and expand their perspectives both academically and socially.

“It’s a fully global endeavor,” Bryan said.

Although Witty said the district hopes to place some visiting students with host families, the traditional system through foreign exchange student programs such as Rotary and AFS, he said it’s clear to district officials that there won’t be enough host families to accommodate all the visiting students.

“That’s why we’re making the investment” in the two homes, he said.

Each home will have space for at least six students, as well as local families who will live in each home, Witty said.

He said several current district employees have expressed interested in living in the homes and helping to oversee the international students. Those employees will likely work under a personal services contract with the district.

Bryan said it’s possible that some visiting students will live part of the school year with a local host family, and the rest of the time in one of the homes.

### District projects financial surplus

The district’s financial projections for the Oregon International School, which is a charter school, show the pro-

gram generating a surplus for each of its first three years.

Witty said some of that money would be used to repay the district, with interest, for the money used to buy the two homes.

The revenue also would be used for scholarships to help defray tuition for Baker students who attend school outside the U.S., he said.

The school district paid \$295,000 last month for the home at 1706 Washington Ave. Known as the Moomaw house, it’s a Queen Anne/Eastlake-style cottage build around 1900. It’s named for original owner David L. Moomaw.

Witty said the Baker School Board will meet on April 12 to discuss buying a second home. That’s the Kolb-White House, also known as the Langrell House, at 1503 Second St. The asking price is \$490,000.

The money for the home purchases is from the district’s regular budget, Witty said. The money is not part of the \$4 million the district will collect from the levy that voters approved in May 2021. That money can only be spent on earmarked projects, including the construction of a cafeteria and multipurpose building at Baker Middle School, and new heating/cooling/ventilation systems at all district schools.

Witty said he understands that the district could have used the money that will go to the two homes for other projects.

“It always comes down to a choice,” he said.

But he believes the investment in the two homes will benefit local students and, ultimately, the district’s bottom line.

Bryan agreed. He contends the Baker School District is in better financial shape than any other district in the state.

Bryan believes that the International School will benefit both the district’s students and the district’s financial situation.

Witty cited the district’s projections that the International School program will repay the district for the homes in less than 15 years, and that the program’s overall revenue will exceed its expenses.

That’s possible in part because the district has qualified to host international students under the J-1 visa program, Witty said.

Under that designation, the state would pay the district the same annual rate — about \$8,700 — that the district receives for local students.

“This generates revenue for sure,” Witty said.

He said only about six school districts across the country have qualified for that J-1 visa.

The International School also has a contract in Taiwan

to offer online classes, with dual high school and college credits, for students there. The projected budget forecasts net revenue of \$46,000 from that contract the first year.

### International School staffing

Lindsey McDowell, public information and communications coordinator for the Baker School District, said the International School will have four employees, three of whom will work half-time or less for the program.

All are current district employees.

Witty, who is retiring as superintendent, will serve as executive director, at 0.3 full-time equivalent.

Thomas Joseph, the current principal for the Eagle Cap Innovative High School, an alternative program in the district, will be the sole full-time employee, serving as principal and instructor. The district is recruiting his replacement at Eagle Cap.

Jamie Barton, the vice principal at Brooklyn and South Baker schools, will

work half-time as vice principal and marketing director for the International School.

McDowell and Jason Todd will serve as support staff, a total of 0.15 FTE.

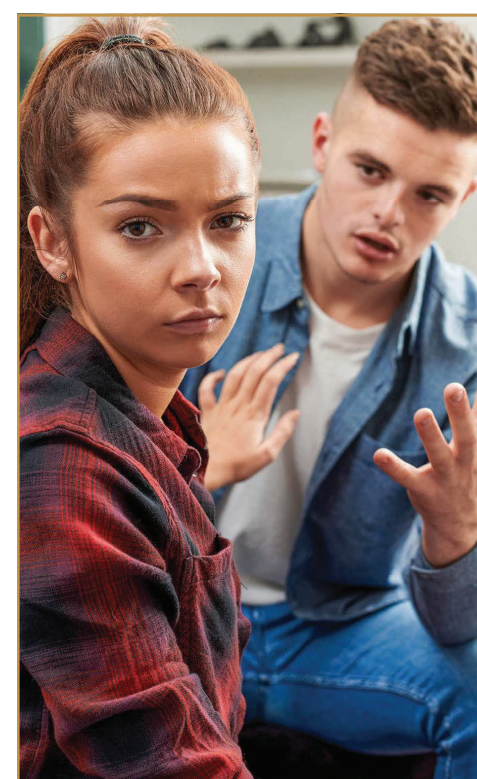
Witty said the Baker School District has talked with officials from multiple European countries, including Germany, Austria, France, Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as Thailand, Cambodia and China.

The goal is to expand the program to South America and other parts of the world, he said.

In the shorter term, Witty said three officials from a school on the Isle of Jersey, part of the United Kingdom and the largest island in the English Channel between England and France, are scheduled to visit Baker City from April 25-28 and to sign an agreement for student and staff exchanges later this year.

He said the plan is to have 10 Baker students spend four weeks on the island in September, while 10 Jersey students visit Baker City.

## NATIONAL Sexual Assault AWARENESS & PREVENTION MONTH



### START BY BELIEVING

**What to Say:**  
“I believe you.”  
“I’m sorry this happened.”  
“I am here for you.”

### BE SUPPORTIVE

**What to Say:**  
“You can tell me as much, or as little as you want.”  
“It’s not your fault.”  
“I’m glad you told me. I’m so proud of you.”

### ASK HOW YOU CAN HELP

**What to Say:**  
“What can I do to support you?”  
“I can stay with you tonight. Would that help?”  
“Do you want me to go with you to the hospital or police station?”

### AVOID “WHY QUESTIONS

**What to Say:**  
Even with the best of intentions “why” questions can sound accusatory and make survivors blame themselves.

Help is available for victims of sexual assault in Grant County. If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, please call:

Heart of Grant County  
**541-620-1342**

Grant County Victim Assistance Program  
**541-575-4026**

This project was supported by Grant No. 2019-WR-AX-0027 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# Scott Knepper

**FOR**

## GRANT COUNTY COMMISSIONER

**Come see what Scott has to say.**

### SPEECH & QUESTIONS

Friday, April 15th • Prairie City Senior Center • 7 pm  
Tuesday, April 19th • John Day Senior Center • 7 pm

Paid for by Scott Knepper