

~ Letters to the Editor ~

The Heppner Gazette Times will print all letters to the Editor with the following criteria met: letters submitted to the newspaper will need to have the name of the sender along with a legible signature. We are also requesting that you provide your address and a phone number where you can be reached. The address and phone number will only be used for verification and will not be printed in the newspaper. Letters may not be libelous. The GT reserves the right to edit. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$10.

Stand up for freedom

To the editor,
The BLM mobs in Portland are a wakeup call to all Americans. We are not in this together as Governor Brown pretends. The truck driver ripped from his pickup was beaten nearly to death because he was white and attempting to help a transgender person. Our Governor is not only responsible for these mobs, she is encouraging them to destroy our Republic, demoralize our police force and turn Oregon into a fascist state controlled by her edicts. These mobs are predominantly young white Americans educated in our schools and universities to hate America, hate our heritage, hate our police, hate our Constitutional Republic.

Governor Brown must be recalled. Thank God for the volunteers manning the recall petition. She has stolen over 400 million federally allocated dollars dedicated to rural Oregon. She is destroying small businesses with her unconstitutional edicts. She is closing our schools, denying our youth the education, sports, music and social activities every other generation for three centuries has prospered from.

We are not in this to-

gether Governor Brown. The masks you force upon us are worthless. They have no health purpose except to cause us to fear and to conform to your edicts. 99.3 percent survive Covid-19. Most don't know they have it.

BLM racial hatred is coming to Pendleton August 29. One day they will come to Heppner. They have already filled our youth with hatred for our heritage and way of life and scared them to death with the climate change scam. We are not in this together with Governor Brown, with these phony masks, with these so-called "freedom of speech" BLM mob protests.

Take a stand my fellow Americans. Peacefully join the counter protest in Pendleton August 29 at 3:30 p.m. at Roy Raley Park. Throw off the mask. Demand our schools and universities teach and honor America and our way of life paid for with the courage, commitment to God and sacrifice of our forefathers. Pastors and church boards - open your churches. If BLM mobs have freedom of speech to protest, you must stand up for freedom of worship. Obey God not Caesar.

Stuart Dick, Irrigon

Students to be back in school for 'limited hours'

Complex new COVID-19 rules allow small school attendance starting Sept. 8

By David Sykes

Under a complex new set of state rules, students in Morrow County will be allowed back into classrooms starting September 8, but only for a limited amount of time and in small groups each week. How long this limited attendance will continue, and how many students will be allowed in the school at the same time will be governed by an ever-changing county-wide COVID-19 infection rate.

In a letter to parents posted on the district web site, School Superintendent Dirk Dirksen explained the rules allowing small student groups back in school starting on Sept 8. Because of school size the rules will differ between Heppner, Boardman and Irrigon. One rule is a student will not be able to spend more than two hours in school buildings on any given day. Dirksen said they should, at least in Heppner, be able to rotate all the students into the school at least once per week for one on one tutoring time with teachers.

At a meeting last week Dirksen and the Morrow County Commission held a long discussion on the new opening guidelines. One discussion asked why all schools in a diverse district like Morrow County are judged by just one county-wide infection rate. Since Heppner's COVID-19 infection is much lower than Boardman and Irrigon some questioned why Heppner should not be allowed more opening. It had been suggested to Governor Kate Brown's office that instead of using county-wide infection rates, zip codes instead be used to rate virus infection in each community. Using zip codes would allow smaller schools in more isolated communities with low infection rates like Heppner to have more liberal or lenient school opening guidelines for their students.

"Would be better if

we could go zip code by zip code," said Commissioner Don Russell. As an example he said, "If there was a pink eye in Heppner, we wouldn't shut down the schools in Boardman and Irrigon. Because we have large cases of COVID in the north end of the county and very small cases in the south end of the county it seems like we shouldn't penalize the area that's not sick, and that's not the call the governor is making," Russell pointed out.

Dirksen said they were trying to make sure Heppner was not treated differently than other small schools in the state located in low infection rate communities. "Morrow County is one of the more unique school districts because of the different communities," he said. "I want to make sure Heppner should not be treated differently (than other smaller schools in the state) just because we happen to be made up of a county wide district."

Apparently, there are already reports of some students wanting to transfer from larger schools like Pendleton to the smaller less restrictive school district's such as Helix. This prompted Umatilla and Morrow School districts to sign an agreement blocking student transfers between the two districts to stop these attempted student transfers.

In Dirksen's letter on school opening guidelines he said September's opening was being allowed if there were "no confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the school staff or students in the past 14 days." As an example of the complexity of the new rules, groups, or as they are called "cohorts", of students will be limited to no more than 10 students to a cohort. Also, students cannot be part of more than two cohorts (including transportation) in any given week. In addition, the rules say, "any one staff member cannot interact with more than three cohorts in a given day and five in a week."

Students can only be in a school building on a given day for two consecutive hours with each building being limited to 250 students within a given week. With Heppner High School attendance at 140 students and the elementary at 180, Dirksen said he did not see a problem getting all the students into the school building at least once a week for in-person tutoring with teachers. However, Riverside, Sam Boardman and Irrigon High School are "going to have a problem" because, as an example, Riverside High School

enrolment is at 485. "It's going to take two weeks to get everybody in for tutoring services," he explained. Dirksen also said there have been lots of sanitizing procedures implemented to keep the schools clean and masks will be used.

Bus transportation to and from school will also have a set of rules said Dirksen. As an example, each driver will have a transportation log recording how long each student is on the bus. If a child appears sick when the bus arrives the driver is instructed to isolate the child on the bus and transport them to the school where they will also be isolated for evaluation. "If a kid is obviously sick when they get on the bus, there will be an isolation seat, then the kid will come to the school and be making contact. We can't leave a kid at a bus stop when there is no parent present," he said.

County Health Nurse Diane Kilkenny was also in attendance at the meeting. "Our numbers are steadily averaging 8-10 per day," she said of infections in the county. She said her department is working hard to get the numbers down so all the kids can get back full time into school. Kilkenny said health workers are going to be working in the schools with student contact tracing or finding who they contacted if they do get infected. "The main thing in the schools is going to be contact tracing, and they are going to have logs so it will be easy if someone comes in with a positive COVID to isolate someone quickly," she said. "That's the whole point of the logs, so you contain the infection and it doesn't shut down the whole school. But it's really based on the numbers of our county. That's the important piece and that falls to all of us to take a hand in," she said.

With the need to still have distance learning in the schools in the coming year, a discussion was held on the disparities in high speed internet service at various locations around the school district. "A lack of broadband is going to be easier to solve in the north

end of the county than in the south end," Russell said. "You have much larger distances between family units geographically (in the south end)," he pointed out. "It's expensive (to put in high speed internet), and even if the money were available today and somebody dropped down \$30 million go ahead and hook up everybody in Morrow County, because of shortages of material, equipment and people it would take time to install high speed internet to families in south county," Russell said. Slow internet affects the ability of the school district to provide decent distance learning to students in the south county.

On an optimistic note, Dirksen said the current plan at least gets the district going in a positive direction, getting kids back in school. He said hopefully opening the schools, even on a limited basis, will "show that bringing kids back will not impact the community (with increased virus infections)." Dirksen said if kids are back in school and new infections remain stable or drop, that will give the school district leverage in convincing the state to increase the number of kids able to physically go back to school. He said in-person learning at the school buildings was particularly important in south county because of the spotty or poor highspeed internet to many of the students' homes.

According to Dirksen's letter, which can be read in its entirety on the district web site, students are not required to attend in-person instruction in the schools. "Schools cannot require students to come to school for in-person instruction and it is a family choice whether they want their child to participate in this opportunity," he said. He added that the district will be sending out a survey for families to give their opinions on students attending school in person. Once the district has the survey information, they will work out details on schedules for transportation and meal delivery for families. A link to the survey is also included in Dirksen's letter.

Correction

Last week's front-page article mentioned the Heppner Chamber of Commerce would be matching a \$25,000 grant with money of their own. This is incorrect. Business Oregon will be matching \$25,000 with the \$25,000 the City of Heppner is giving toward the Small Business Support Fund for South Morrow County.

The Heppner Chamber of Commerce will manage

this grant and will soon be mailing questionnaires to businesses who were unable to secure funding through the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) or the Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL). If you would like to be considered for grant money through the Small Business Support Fund for South Morrow County, please e-mail the chamber at heppnerchamber@gmail.com.



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Due to Governor Brown requiring Morrow County to return to Phase 1, Wheatland Insurance offices in Ione and Heppner are open for business but will be closed to the public until further notice.

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Wishing you a Happy Retirement Dr. Rolen!



Dr. Dave Drotzmann and Dr. Kollan Arritt would like to congratulate Dr. Rob Rolen for over 35 years of service to his profession. May all the years ahead bring you great joy and relaxation with family and friends.

For Dr Rolen's current and past patients, Lifetime Vision Source has your files. They'd like to build on the quality care you've come to expect from Dr Rolen for over 35 years-



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