

Schools await guidance on graduation requirements

By ANTONIO SIERRA
STAFF WRITER

If Oregon's K-12 students return to school April 29, they will have lost a month and a half's worth of instruction time. Those lost hours are especially critical to high school seniors, who need enough credits to graduate on time.

That fact wasn't lost on the region's superintendents, and according to InterMountain Education Service District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill, some administrators wanted to bring seniors back to school early so they could make up the credits they missed.

The state won't let schools unlock their doors for seniors, but the Oregon Department of Education plans to address the issue. The department had stated it would issue guidance the week of March 23, but failed to do so by the end of the week.

In an interview March 24, Mulvihill said school officials have focused on the closure's impact



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

The Hermiston High School parking lot stands empty on Monday as students remain out of school.

on seniors from the start of the shutdown, which Gov. Kate Brown initiated on March 16 to slow the spread of COVID-19.

"That's the top priority we have, amongst all of this unknown," he said.

Mulvihill said Colt Gill, the state superintendent of public instruction,

is working toward a plan that would allow the class of 2020 to graduate this summer.

Mulvihill anticipates that the credit requirement will be lowered and some of the subject requirements like English and math may also be changed to match a truncated

school year.

Depending on future events, he said superintendents will have plans for either schools returning in April or the cancellation of the rest of the school year, a step the Oregon Department of Education said Monday may happen.

"It's crossing our minds how compromised the 2019-20 school year will be, and we need to make sure we don't compromise any aspect of 2021," he said.

As a mother of a senior herself, Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney said she understands the questions and concerns parents have about seniors graduating on time.

"We're getting them ready to leave the nest," she said.

But she also wants to encourage Hermiston parents and students not to panic while the district waits for guidance from the state.

Mooney said the high school is asking seniors to put their college ambitions on pause right now, adding that colleges are also dealing with the fallout from the coronavirus and may not have the staff or the resources to process all the applications and queries they usually receive each spring.

On Monday the state

announced it would allow districts to move forward with educating students online, a step it had previously not allowed out of concerns that students without internet access would be left behind. Hermiston School District checked out more than 500 Chromebooks to district families on Monday, however, and is working on coming up with a solution to internet access.

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe said in an email the district will be "unlikely to have our ceremony as originally planned in May; however, we're committed to holding some type of ceremony (possibly an online event with a follow-up ceremony after this all clears) later on."

She said she has been working "many hours" with the Oregon Department of Education to help the state finalize a plan to allow seniors to still graduate, and the district will work with students to help them complete the new requirements.

EO Media Group announces layoffs in light of virus fallout

HERMISTON HERALD

EO Media Group, the parent company of the *Hermiston Herald* and 12 other newspapers across Oregon, announced March 25 that it is reducing its workforce by 47 employees, according to a press release.

Eight jobs are affected in the *Hermiston Herald*/*East Oregonian* newsrooms in Hermiston and Pendleton, and the others are spread across the rest of the newspaper chain. Overall, the company is reducing its workforce by 18%.

"It's been an extraordinary few weeks as the COVID-19 pandemic has taken over our daily lives and business operations," said *Bend Bulletin* Publisher and EOMG Chief Operating Officer Heidi Wright on March 25. "The revenue losses due to the closing of commercial businesses to prevent the spread of the virus has cre-

ated a ripple effect across the nation, forcing layoffs in many industries.

"As you can imagine, the revenue pullback across the company has been dramatic, with many businesses closing their doors and events being canceled throughout the region. Many of the big box stores have canceled their advertising, until further notice. We are taking action now in order to stabilize our operations and keep our staff intact as much as possible, during this time of crisis.

"We believe that this is the best course, but do not take this action lightly. While this is painful, it could be short-lived if, by some miracle, the economy bounces back after the coronavirus runs its course and we see local retailers reopen and begin advertising again," Wright said. "But there are no promises. This economic downturn could be with us for a long

time."

EO Media CEO Steve Forrester said, "Our company is in a survival mode. While none of us have seen a pandemic and its economic effects, our company has weathered economic challenges, such as the Great Depression, the Astoria Fire of 1923 and, within our lifetimes, the Great Recession of 2008."

"Throughout these existential moments, our mission has not changed. And it will not change during this calamity," Forrester said. "Our newspapers and our digital sites are beacons within our communities and regions. We are leaders in gathering information and analysis, and we offer businesses audiences for their messaging."

The *Herald* was founded in 1906 and the *EO* was founded in 1875. They have a combined operations of about about 43 full- and part-time employees.

Sen. Hansell hospitalized with blood clots

HERMISTON HERALD

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, was hospitalized over the weekend for multiple blood clots in both lungs.

Hansell said he began to develop "left lung chest pains" while breathing and a slight fever on Saturday morning.

Hansell said by Sunday evening, his breathing had worsened, prompting a trip to the emergency room at St. Mary's Hospital in Walla Walla, Washington. Hansell said blood work and CAT scan of his chest revealed the clots.

"That CAT scan was the first time I had any idea there were pulmonary

embolisms in both of my lungs," Hansell said.

He said on Saturday he initially visited an urgent care clinic in Walla Walla where an electrocardiogram or EKG was done on his heart and a chest X-ray was taken but nothing was found, so he was sent home.

"My breath got progressively shorter before I would trigger one of those pain responses. So (Saturday) evening, I'm getting real shallow in breathing and I'm thinking, 'I don't want to have a crisis in the middle of the night.' So, (Hansell's wife) Margaret drove me back to Walla Walla."

Hansell said by Tuesday

afternoon he was feeling better and was optimistic on being discharged from the hospital.

"I feel fine. I still have some pain breathing," he said.

During the Saturday visit to the urgent care clinic, Hansell said he was tested for COVID-19. The test came back negative Tuesday morning.

"Of course with all of the lung-related pneumonia and COVID-19, which certainly has the medical world's focus right now, it never even dawned on me that it may be pulmonary embolisms," he said. "So now I can start treating it and get on the road to recovery."

Farm Bureau extends deadline for flood relief

HERMISTON HERALD

The deadline for Umatilla County farmers and ranchers to apply for the Farm Bureau Flood Relief Fund has been extended until May 1.

Applicants are available at OregonFB.org/flood. For more information, contact Umatilla-Morrow County Farm Bureau Vice President Phillip Whitmore, pwhitmore53@gmail.com.

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PET OF THE WEEK

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