

## Learning

Continued from Page A1

in an attempt to give every one of the district's approximately 1,400 students access within walking distance of their home.

School parking lots now have free Wi-Fi, and after conducting a citywide survey about internet access, neighborhoods with the lowest number of households with internet access also have Wi-Fi hotspots set up. Sipe said they also purchased 90 devices students can take home for internet access, and are prioritizing seniors in high school who don't have a hotspot within walking distance of their home.

Students are also getting paper homework packets on a regular basis, which they can either take a picture of and email to their teacher, or send back with the people dropping off a new packet.

Last Wednesday, six school buses traveled through town, stopping at regular intervals to drop off bags containing breakfast, lunch and dinner for students as well as plastic packets containing homework, students' folders and notebooks from their desks, and school supplies donated by Walmart.

Donald Dugan, the district's high school and middle school music teacher, was trailing behind one of the buses with an SUV full of musical instruments and sheet music, which he was delivering to band students so that they could continue practicing. He said there are a lot of online options for music teachers he is experimenting with.

"I'm still trying to get the kids on Google hangouts so I can give them assignments and work with them," he said. "I have lots of ideas, but it's all kind of trial and error."

He said he hoped parents will encourage their students to stick with music, as it can



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

**Students, parents and volunteers crowd a bus dropping off school supplies to students of the Umatilla School District on Wednesday afternoon. The district distributed belongings that had been left at schools as well as educational materials, lunches, instruments and laptops to those in need of them.**

provide relief from stress.

At one stop in McNary, Liz Castillo brought her children to pick up their homework packets. She said so far they had different reactions to the idea of continuing school online.

"One's excited, one is not very thrilled," she said.

Crystal Marler, who brought her granddaughter, was worried about the lack of social distancing as kids crowded up to the bus when it stopped. But she did appreciate all the district was doing for its students.

"I just think Umatilla's done a wonderful job, with the food, with the tablets. They've got everything," she said.

Sophomores Isable Lewis and Anna Castillo were waiting in line with freshman Cassandra Castillo to pick up their packets at the stop. Lewis said she had just gotten off a video chat with one of her teachers, and she even though she worried about how COVID-19 was affecting her education, she felt like it would work out

alright in the end.

"This is going to mess some stuff up, but Umatilla seems capable of fixing everything," she said.

Sixth-grader Viviana Perez, who picked up items from a bus stop Wednesday, said she had been trying to fill out worksheets for the past couple of weeks, but up until the Chromebook deliveries that day, hadn't had an electronic device to access online supplements.

Diego Bernal, a sophomore who showed up in pajamas to grab some homework from a bus traveling South Hill, said he had been keeping in touch with teachers via email and video chat and "they're all worried about us and trying to keep us on track."

Despite being able to continue with class work, he said he was sad the baseball season had been canceled before he was able to play a single game.

### Hermiston School District

In Hermiston, students have been receiving paper

packets of supplemental work for grades K-5, and breakfast and lunch for all students, via bus routes during week days. On Monday, March 30 and again on Thursday, the district allowed families to check out one Chromebooks per household from the parking lot.

Superintendent Tricia Mooney said at some point the district may offer more than one Chromebook for families with multiple students, but it took time for the district's IT department staff to retrieve the devices from schools, sanitize them and ready them for checkout.

As for internet, she said the district would be putting out a request soon for businesses to consider offering free internet hotspots for students, as long as everyone was maintaining proper social distancing. Comcast recently announced that it has temporarily opened its Xfinity Wi-Fi Network for free nationally. People can look up hotspots in their area by typing in their zip-

code at <https://wifi.xfinity.com>.

"We're still working on trying to get hotspots, but obviously with everyone in the same boat, they are not easy to come by right now," Mooney said.

After the March 30 surprise announcement from the state, Mooney said teachers are working together across grade levels and professional learning communities to come up with distance learning that includes everything from homework packets to video chats to phone calls to interactive activities online. Some are already putting out "how-to" videos like the at-home workout video West Park Elementary PE teacher Bret Favorite put together.

"It's going to look a lot of different ways," she said.

Mooney said districts are still awaiting guidance from the state on graduation standards for seniors, but as soon as ODE finishes consulting with partners such as colleges and puts some-

thing together, the district will reach out to each of their 350 seniors individually to talk about how they are affected.

In accordance with the state's social distancing guidelines for essential workplaces, Mooney said teachers will be expected to come into the school at times, to coordinate with colleagues or access learning materials stored in their classrooms. But she said they will be encouraged to stay 6 feet apart and follow other health guidelines, and staff who are considered high risk, live with someone in a high risk category or don't have child care will be able to telecommute.

She said they are anxious to support students during this difficult time.

"I've been emphasizing they need to focus on connection and compassion with students over correction," she said.

### Stanfield School District

Stanfield School District Superintendent Beth Burton said last Wednesday the district sent out two buses to deliver meals and work packets to students, in addition to the take-out option set up at Bard Park. She said they plan to do the same drop-offs again this Wednesday.

"We anticipate once April 13 rolls around, we'll be doing something that's more teaching and learning, but for this week we're just doing supplemental packets," she said.

Burton said sixth through 12th graders in the district already have Chromebooks that they were assigned at the beginning of the school year, so they only need to worry about getting devices to the younger students.

She said the state's announcement sent districts into a "whirlwind," but she feels most badly for students who have had their year disrupted.

"Our fifth-graders are missing Outdoor School right now," she said.

# We're In This TOGETHER

Let's show our community spirit by supporting our local businesses and let our essential workers know how much we appreciate them.

This ad brought to you by:

**Columbia Development Authority**