Schools

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it placed on parents and other caregivers.

"To all the moms and dads, I can't imagine what you're up against, balancing parenting during this very scary crisis while I know many of you have either lost a job, or are a first responder, or are trying to work from home with your kids there, all the time worried about education and figuring out homeschooling," she said.

Brown also announced long-awaited guidelines on what the development will mean for high school seniors, just months away from graduation.

Seniors who were on track to graduate as of March 13 will automatically receive a passing grade on this semester's classes. The state is leaving it up to individual districts to address with seniors whether they will continue their studies despite already passing.

For seniors who still needed to make up credits or were failing their classes as of March, Brown asked school districts to focus their efforts on finding "creative" ways to help get those students "across the finish line" by Aug. 31.

She said Oregon's public universities are committed to considering all incoming freshmen "fairly" in light of the disruption to their education, and also said that none of those universities would take students' acceptance away, as long as the students graduated.

The state's "Distance Learning for All" guidelines provide further instructions regarding questions about dual credit classes, individualized education plans and other concerns. Districts are being urged to create "alternate" plans for graduation ceremonies, such as holding an event online.

Hermiston School District released a statement Wednesday letting students and parents know that district staff are reviewing each senior's classes and will be reaching out to them individually to discuss their status.

"As the situation continues to evolve and the district has guidance regarding students in grades 9-11, the district will communicate further at that time," the document stated.

The district will continue to provide breakfast and lunch to students via its bus routes, and has checked out Chromebooks to families in need of a device for their student to continue coursework online. Students without internet access can find free Wi-Fi hotspots around town by visiting https://wifi.xfinity.com and searching for their ZIP code.

Details such as when students will be able to collect their personal items from their lockers and desks are still being worked out, and the district will communicate those decisions with parents and students in the future.

"Thank you to the Hermiston community for its continued support and understanding through this unprecedented public health crisis," Superintendent Tricia Mooney said in a statement. "It is during trying times such as this that we see the true strength of a community."

She said in-person classes are expected to resume on Aug. 24 for the 2020-21 school year.

At the statewide press conference, Brown thanked all Oregonians for complying with social distancing orders, which have reduced the spread of COVID-19 in the state.

"I know how hard this is on every single Oregonian and I thank you for your sacrifice," she said. I also know that the measures we have put into place are necessary actions right now to save lives. I wish I could make it easier for everyone and I wish I could eliminate the frustration that so many of us are feeling right now."

Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A sign at Simply Divine Salon & Day Spa in Hermiston advises drivers to stay home and stay healthy. Gov. Kate Brown announced her framework for reopening Oregon during a press conference on Tuesday morning. Brown refused to say when it might happen, but said that "it will not be easy."

Economy

Continued from Page A1

Kelly McPhee, vice president of communications for Banner Bank, said its branches have received 11,482 inquiries from businesses about getting one of the loans.

She said Banner Bank is one of the top lenders for the Small Business Administration in Oregon, and usually processes 250 applications in a year. In the first four days of the PPP, they did 443.

She said banks started processing things a little slower than they do for some types of loans because they had to create a brand-new process basically overnight, while social distancing, and it is crucial that everything be filled out correctly so that businesses can get most or all of the loan forgiven after eight weeks.

"We definitely don't want to misstep," she said.

Banks have rules about how much money they can lend out in comparison to their balance sheets, and McPhee said while Banner Bank is not in that position yet, some other banks in the area have already exhausted their ability to extend PPP loans to customers.

Businesses impacted by COVID-19 can also apply for a low-interest Economic Injury Disaster Loan directly from the Small Business Administration.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative has set up a new resource for businesses interested in applying for both federal programs.

"WE ALL WANT TO GET BACK TO WORK AND RETURN TO LIFE AS NORMAL AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, BUT THE TRUTH IS THE BEST PATH FORWARD IS A CAUTIOUS ONE — A PATH THAT PROCEEDS GRADUALLY, INCREMENTALLY AND CAREFULLY. A PATH THAT RELIES ON SCIENCE AND FACTS TO DETERMINE EACH STEP FORWARD."

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

The Umatilla Electric Cooperative Business Resource Center opened Thursday at 1475 N. First St. in Hermiston.

Staff include Emily Cecil as the lead business advisor and Ashley Garcia Sandoval as the business intake counselor. They will be available to provide free assistance to area business owners in applying for federal grants and low-interest loans available to businesses experiencing negative effects from COVID-19.

CEO Robert Echenrode said in a statement that UEC was pleased to announce the resource for local businesses during "this period of uncertainty." Board member Bryan Wolfe stated while the cooperative cannot change what is happening globally, they can work on improving the economic viability of the community.

Gregory Smith & Company manages UEC's revolving loan fund for economic development. Smith, the new business center's executive advisor, said UEC was able to put together the new resource in less than a week after the idea was hatched. The center is open to anyone needing help, but UEC will also be reaching out to all of its business accounts to inform them of the opportunity.

For more information, call the center at 541-289-3000. Staff are available to advise businesses by phone, video conferencing or at the office from behind a glass divider to protect from germs. Office hours are Monday-Friday from 8-5 p.m., with a closure for lunch from 1-2 p.m.

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