

Classes:

Continued from Page A1

students will be spread out in smaller groups in common areas and outdoor spaces to make lunchtime work. Students who don't bring lunch from home will be given a sack lunch to take to their designated area, and breakfast for the next morning will be sent home with students rather than eaten in the classroom.

She said the other key change in the Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance, updated March 15, changed rules for "cohorts" designed to limit the spread of outbreaks by limiting the number of people students and staff came into contact with in the building. Removing a rule that students must come into contact with no more than 100 different people per week allows high school students to move from class to class for different subjects as they would in a normal year.

Parents face competing considerations

While teachers have been given the option to be vaccinated against COVID-19, it is not required by the district, and there is no vaccine available for children under age 16 right now. As students in Umatilla County have returned to extracurricular activities, some groups — including the Hermiston football team and Pendleton boys soccer team — have already had to quarantine



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Social distancing markings adorn tables in Renae Bartley's sixth grade classroom at Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston on Thursday, March 25, 2021.

after someone affiliated with the activity tested positive.

Families that are concerned about the potential for their child being exposed to COVID-19 in the classroom will be able to participate in the virtual academy Hermiston Online! instead.

But there are other families that are thrilled to see their children return to learning in person. Misty Grabeel has been one of the parents pushing Hermiston School District to return students to the classroom full time, five days a week. She described herself as "ecstatic" about the news they would be able to do just that.

"It's been incredibly hard for our family to maintain structure, without me being the mean mom all the

time," she said. "Children need structure. They need routine."

She is happy to see her 12-year-old and 14-year-old return to the classroom full time, but said beyond that, she has been fighting for students who don't have a stable, supportive home life. Grabeel said she grew up in a troubled home where drugs were present, and knows how difficult it would have been in her circumstances to be asked to stay at home all day every day. School was her escape, she said, where she knew she would get fed two meals a day and be around adults who were focused on her success.

She said she feels it will also be extremely helpful



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Sandstone Middle School teacher Lucas Eivins leads a lesson on Caesar and Pompey during class on Thursday, March 25, 2021.

for students' mental health to get back into the classroom now, instead of going into summer break with no idea whether they will face another year of virtual learning in the fall.

Staff prepare to help students catch up

Mooney said district staff are generally looking forward to seeing students in person full time.

"When the announcement went out, there was a lot of excitement," she said. "I was getting messages saying, 'I'm crying.'"

She said she has a hard-working, talented staff who she has confidence

will do what they need to in order to help students recover from less than ideal learning circumstances over the past year.

"The learning loss is not unique to Hermiston, and we're going to be dealing with that and working to get kids back on track," she said.

Like many schools in the state, the district has asked the state for a waiver for the lengthy state testing process this spring in order to preserve that time for instruction.

Mooney said she was more concerned about the mental health of students, and dealing with the fall-

out of the sense of isolation that came from not being in the classroom. The district had already hired a social worker before the current school year began, and she said school counselors have worked hard to reach out to students and families and make connections from the time students were online only. She said she thinks that will pay off.

When asked what graduation might look like this year, Mooney said the district's former location — the Toyota Center in Kennewick — will not be available for graduation this year, so they are working on another plan, to be announced.

Vaccine:

Continued from Page A1

get enough vaccines and set up (opportunities) for the farmworkers to get vaccinated," Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said.

The efforts come in response to an announcement from Gov. Kate Brown, saying the state would speed up its vaccination timeline to meet the Biden administration's goal of having all adults in the country eligible for a vaccine by May 1. Other categories of essential workers, such as grocery store workers, as well as people under age 45 with underlying conditions, will become eligible for the vaccine on Monday, April 5.

Vaccines for the vulnerable

The change in Morrow and Umatilla counties is especially geared toward a community of frontline workers that have borne the brunt of the pandemic — Hispanic and Latino agricultural workers.

In Umatilla County, Hispanic residents accounted for more than 40% of the county's total COVID-19 cases in 2020, according to data from the county health department. They made up the highest number of cases in the county from April to September 2020, when the health department reported cases were being driven mostly by workplace outbreaks. The population also tested positive at a rate over three times higher than non-Hispanics and were hospitalized at a higher rate,



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Jorge Tapia Madrigal looks away as he receives his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a mass vaccination event for farmworkers at the Sage Center in Boardman on Wednesday, March 24, 2021.

the data shows.

And in Morrow County, Hispanic residents have accounted for approximately 57% of the county's total COVID-19 cases, according to data provided by county officials as of March 12.

Officials from both counties have pointed to workplace exposures in food processing and agricultural facilities as having contributed to the disproportionately high rates of infection, which echoes both state and national trends.

"Our farmworkers were disproportionately impacted by COVID," Murdock said. "We had some very high numbers, and it was people who had

no choice. If they want to support their families, they had to work. They have to be out in the fields and in the processing plants. And while efforts are made to try and protect them, it's very difficult. So, consequently, they become very, very vulnerable."

Just in time

The state's approval comes just in time for spring planting and harvest, which brings an influx of agricultural workers to the region annually, officials from both counties said. In Umatilla County, harvest season brings with it more than 10,000 additional jobs, officials say. Morrow County also sees a surge.

"That's exactly why we immediately raised our hand" when the state said counties could expand vaccinations," Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay said. She added that the county's essential workforce is one of the largest in the state and is predominantly comprised of Hispanic and Latino workers.

Lindsay said she hopes the new timeline will bring with it a surge of vaccinations as the county begins to see more and more people hesitant to get a shot.

Morrow County officials will be making further efforts to communicate and educate regional farmworkers about the importance of getting vaccinated as har-

VACCINATION LOCATIONS

Good Shepherd Medical Center

Clinics held each Thursday from 7-11 a.m. and noon to 4 p.m. on campus. No appointment needed.

Mirasol Family Health Clinic

Contact 541-567-1717 or mirasol@yfwc.org to request an appointment.

Safeway

Visit [safeway.com/pharmacy/covid-19.html](https://www.safeway.com/pharmacy/covid-19.html) to make an appointment at the pharmacy.

BiMart

Visit [bimart.com/pharmacy/covid-19-vaccine](https://www.bimart.com/pharmacy/covid-19-vaccine) to make an appointment at the pharmacy.

Walmart

Visit www.walmart.com/covidvaccine to make an appointment at the pharmacy.

Family Health Associates

Call 541-567-6434 to schedule a vaccine appointment at the Hermiston or Umatilla offices, or visit the clinic's vaccination event on Friday, April 2 at Umatilla High School from 3-7 p.m.

Umatilla County Public Health

Visit ucohealth.net/covid-events-new/hermiston or like the Umatilla County Public Health Facebook page to stay up on new vaccine clinic information.

Vaccines are free and are available at these locations to those who meet Oregon Health Authority's eligibility requirements. For a full list of eligibility, visit govstatus.egov.com/OR-OHA-COVID-19.

vest season continues, Lindsay said.

Umatilla County Public Health Director Joe Fiumara said he's also concerned that the vaccine turnout among agricultural workers will be slim, since many employees cannot simply leave work to get a shot.

So, the county has contacted employers at agriculture and food processing facilities to bring the vaccines to them. Murdock said the health department has "talked to virtually all employers of both processing plants and farmers to try to figure out strategies for conducting vaccines where they are."

The county has already held vaccine clinics at two food processing facilities in Weston, Fiumara said a week ago, and more were planned for later in the week.

"Our hope is that by reducing some barriers for these (food processing) and migrant workers," he said, "they don't have to necessarily leave work, go to our drive-thru on a Thursday or Friday, maybe sit for a half-hour in line, and then go back to work and potentially miss out on three or four hours of pay to get their shot when we can, in many cases, get to them and reduce that time."

District awards bid for construction of elementary school

HERMISTON HERALD

Kirby Nagelhout Construction will build both of Hermiston's new elementary school buildings.

The Hermiston School District previously announced the contractor had been awarded the bid to build the new, larger Rocky Heights Elementary School, and this week also awarded the bid for construction of Loma Vista Elementary School, which is planned for East Theater Lane.

According to the news release, Kirby Nagelhout, which is headquartered in Bend and has offices in Pendleton, was the apparent low bid on the Loma Vista project, at \$22,579,000. The new elementary school will be 73,500 square feet and serve about 600 students.

Groundbreaking events for both elementary school projects will take place on April 13.

Construction is expected to conclude in summer 2022.

eOMEDIA group
The most valuable and respected source of local news, advertising and information for our communities.
www.eomediagroup.com

ALLELUIA!

Come celebrate Easter with us at
ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Holy Eucharist & Easter Liturgy
- 9:00 AM • April 4, 2021 -

We are resuming in-person worship with County Covid Guidelines in place.
665 E. Gladys Avenue, Hermiston

Worship with us this Easter Sunday.
#WORSHIPWITHUSONLINE

Sunday, April 4th 9:00am
go to
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org>
Click on Easter General Conference