

LINKING LOOP: Obstacle to School Re-Opening / K12 Platform Cost in Renegotiation / District Report Card

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By Anne Scheck

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO K-12 REOPENING?

The much-anticipated possibility that the governor will relax COVID-19 metrics – allowing schools to resume at least partial in-person attendance – was dealt a blow today. Oregon’s coronavirus cases crept up to 373 new cases and the death toll reached 646, according to the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). The OHA figures were released at a time when Gov. Kate Brown reportedly is considering revising indicators for K-12 public education.

The steady climb in cases also captured the attention of the Polk County Board of Commissioners Tuesday, prompting Commission Chair Mike Ainsworth to observe that, within the county, “we had a real spike this week.” Over the past few months, the commissioners have expressed hope that schools can be re-opened, even under limited circumstances.

“Are we ever going to be able to open up the schools?” asked Commissioner Ainsworth. Under the current distance-learning system, “how do you even get a kindergartner learning on a computer with mom and dad working?”

“It’s a big concern and I totally agree,” said Jacqui Umstead RN, the county’s public health administrator, during her weekly report to the commissioners.

In early September, the OHA’s Dean Sidelinger MD sounded a note of caution about schools in a period of rising covid. If closure again became necessary after a re-opening, “that disruption is often very difficult for families and students,” he pointed out during a webinar on this issue.

At Central High School, students in athletics and in theater arts are allowed some in-person attendance – by conducting practices outdoors. In a protocol announced at the last school board meeting, theatrical rehearsals are expected to be allowed inside and onstage once inclement weather sets in, by doubling the usual social distance between participants.

PRICE OF K12 PLATFORM NOW IN ‘RENEOGIATIONS’

Now that it’s been discontinued at Central High School (CHS), the \$1.4 million cost of “FuelK12,” now known simply as K12, has become a matter of “contract renegotiations” between Central District 13J and the online service provider. CHS currently is opting instead for more reliance on google classroom.

Though CHS is “moving away from K12,” the students and staff for kindergarten through eighth grade will continue to use the K12 learning platform, according to a statement from the district. When such contracts are renegotiated, they often involve a redoubling of effort to fix problems, and sometimes an offer of extra services or some form of refund, according to a county authority who was asked about possible outcomes.

DISTRICT REPORT CARD

A set of data points often referred to as “state report cards for schools” has been issued, but it contains very little information compared to past years – the result of the sudden switch to distance learning. For Central District 13J, what little news is available is mostly good: CHS, with an 81% graduation rate within four years, beat the state average of 80%. Also, with one notable exception, average teacher retention rate is above 90%, excluding Independence Elementary School (IES). At IES, the average teacher-retention rate is 78% compared with 91% at both Ash Creek and Monmouth elementary schools.

ECOLOGY PRESENTATION from the LUCKIAMUTE WATERSHED COUNCIL

Wednesday, Nov. 18, 6:30 - 8pm, by Zoom (link provided after registration) George Kral, forester & project developer for Ash Creek Forest Management and co-founder of Scholl's Valley Native Nursery, will describe how native plant nurseries provide the raw materials for large-scale restoration and forestry. More details and registration link at <https://www.luckiamutelwc.org/sips-and-science-plant-nurseries.html>