

# LINKING LOOP: Outreach for Students Who Lack Internet / District Focus on CHS Seniors / Police & Fire Provide Fun

4/10/2020

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by Anne Scheck

## **LACK of INTERNET ACCESS FOR SOME STUDENTS: MINET'S ROLE**

As local students collect district-issued Chromebooks for distance learning, elected officials and school administrators agree that it's time to provide internet access to every child who lacks it. The coronavirus pandemic has brought this need into stark relief, according to concerns expressed Monday at the meeting of the Central District 13J School Board.

As the district makes sure the technology is available for new options after the loss of classroom teaching, "we want to be able to be sure to engage children," said Superintendent Jennifer Kubista EdD. Facebook postings and school websites are helping to get messages out quickly, noted Steve Love, who chairs the school board. However, that requires internet access.

Out of luck are families that depend on the Independence Library to sign on to WIFI – it's now closed with no opening date in sight; And, on the rural outskirts of town, those who once seized spotty connections now seem shortchanged in the shift to online learning. The issue also was raised at a town forum held last night by Rep. Paul Evans, whose district includes Independence.

Mr. Evans said he's aware of the pressing need, and explained that this was one reason MINET was built by the cities of Independence and Monmouth more than a decade ago. One answer may be "cellular-on-wheels" technology, he said, which are mobile cell stations transported on trucks to outlying areas. Ruth Miles, director of the corporation division for the Oregon Secretary of State, suggested 5G might be one rescue strategy – it's the latest generation of wireless technology.

However, MINET – in partnership with Central School District and the cities of Independence and Monmouth – has "authorized, engaged and is driving professional engineering studies" to answer this need, according to Don Patten, MINET's general manager. "These fast-tracked studies will determine realistic and effective proposals, based upon MINET's suite of technologies, to aid the school district with their described needs to reach many of the unfortunate 'data have-nots' among its student body," he said.

At a news conference this past week, the lack of internet access to some student populations was cited as a significant problem by both Gov. Kate Brown and Colt Gill, director of the Oregon Department of Education. There are "wide swaths" of the state without the technology, Mr. Gill said. The need is expected to be addressed at a future legislative session, according to Gov. Brown.

## **CHS SENIORS TO GET SPECIAL ATTENTION**

Even before the director of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) announced this week that struggling seniors "not on track" for graduation should be a focal point for local educators during school closure, Central School District 13J was gearing up to make these students a priority.

At a news conference where the governor confirmed that schools would not reopen this spring, ODE Director Colt Gill called for “circling around every student who’s failing one of the required courses” needed to clinch a diploma. In fact, those students already were a point of discussion at the last school board meeting – a concern emphasized in a follow-up news release. “For those who do not have a passing grade as of mid-March, the district will focus its efforts to get these seniors any extra attention they need to get them across the finish line,” said Superintendent Jennifer Kubista EdD in the prepared statement.

The counseling team at Central High School (CHS) is planning to call seniors and their families to talk to them “after we have had an opportunity to review transcripts under the new guidance from ODE,” which was recently released, added CHS Principal Donna Servignat.

“Teachers want to connect with their students in order to help them with all of the uncertainty and further their learning as best as we can,” said Adrienne Gault, president of the Central Education Association and a teacher at Talmadge Middle School.

At the school board meeting Monday, Dr. Kubista noted that seniors will miss springtime milestones important to every CHS graduate, but none more so than the walk across a stage in a cap and gown. She wants to try to make that happen, she said, perhaps in a “virtual” way that would share the event via computer technology or by prolonging the date far enough into the future to allow a traditional ceremony. Meanwhile, CHS stadium lights are scheduled to be turned on nightly to honor the 2020 senior class.

“I hope the plan to graduate our seniors, and our continued commitment to learning, removes some of the stress of uncertainty for our students and our families,” said Gov. Kate Brown, in a joint address this week with ODE.

## **A FINAL NOTE**

Polk County Fire District No. 1 and the Independence Police Department are partnering to provide programs aimed at stay-at-home students missing their usual school routine. Children celebrating birthdays can sign up to have a “flashing light” visit from a fire truck and police car on their special day, by logging on to the fire district’s website and registering. A “Funtastic” mini-parade is held every Friday, in which a trailer with favorite story characters winds through neighborhoods – today it was Elsa and Olaf from “Frozen.” In addition, the fire district is posting weekly videos that deliver a variety of safety messages for kids.