



Summary: College Place – Walla Walla Virtual Community Roundtable Thursday, August 20, 2020

Panelists

Jim Fry, Superintendent College Place Public Schools
Wade Smith, Superintendent Walla Walla Public Schools
Kara Breymeyer, Walla Walla County Community Health
Suzanne Suyama, Child Care Aware
Mayor Norma Hernandez, City of College Place
Jennifer Beckmeyer, City of Walla Walla
Robert Hafen, Nelson Irrigation
Nikki Sharp, Walla Walla County Department of Community Health

Moderator

Jacqueline Lonning, Collective Impact Coordinator for the Educational Attainment Alliance and United Way of the Blue Mountains

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Kim Rolfe, Director for Career Development at Whitman College and volunteer with the Educational Attainment Alliance, welcomed community members to the Roundtable and introduced the conversation. She introduced Jacqueline Lonning, Collective Impact Coordinator for the Educational Attainment Alliance.

Jacqueline Lonning briefly described the Educational Attainment Alliance, which seeks to improve educational outcomes for everyone, from cradle to career. Educational Attainment Alliance leadership has been grappling with the uncertainties that this fall brings, and through these conversations aims to: share up-to-date information with community members, provide a space to ask questions and share concerns, and lay a foundation for collaborative action.

Jim Fry, Superintendent College Place Public Schools

College Place school will begin September 8th, and instruction will be fully remote. Students in grades 2-12 will each receive technology to use at home. K-1 students will receive some devices as well as packets. There will be live instruction daily from 9:00-12:00. Parents can expect students will be engaged with their classes and with their teachers. Attendance will be taken

every day in the elementary grades. At the secondary level, attendance will be taken every class period. In the afternoon, students will be re-engaged for extra support depending on their needs. School staff will be online for the full day.

There is also the option for students to learn in a fully remote structure for the whole school year. They will still have access to support from teachers.

CPPS will also be bringing some special populations (as designated by the Department of Health and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) on site for small group instruction.

Meal service will continue. There will be grab-and-go breakfast and lunch at Davis Elementary, Sager Middle School, and College Place High School. The school will also be delivering food to some key locations in the community for pick up.

Parents can expect a lot of communication. They will receive text message updates (available in English and Spanish) from the District if they are signed up for that service. The District is also working on creating some digital trainings for parents. During the fall, there will be digital parent nights held twice a month at each level (elementary, middle, and high school) during which parents can talk to teachers and staff and get any support they may need. Superintendent Fry recognizes the impact of distance learning on the community and is committed to partnering with parents to support students.

District staff are working on site. If parents have questions, they should call the schools or visit the website for up-to-date information: www.cpps.org

Wade Smith, *Superintendent Walla Walla Public Schools*

Like CPPS, Walla Walla Public Schools (WWPS) will begin fully remote. A limited number of students will be brought into schools for targeted support and classes that cannot be conducted online.

WWPS has two options for students. One option is Comprehensive Distance Learning 2.0, in which students will begin with distance learning then pivot to face-to-face instruction once it is safe to do so. The other option is Walla Walla Online—a fully digital option for the duration of the semester, or even the full school year. Over 400 students have registered for Walla Walla Online.

Walla Walla Public Schools is committed to learning from what went well and what did not go well last spring. Engagements with parents and students informed their adjustment for the fall. Key takeaways included:

- Students needed more real-time engagement
- Some students and families were overwhelmed by the amount of work; others needed more
- There is a need to increase support for some populations, including special education students, English language learners, and students enrolled in dual-language programs

- There is a general need for more structure and clarity

The District is working to understand the best way to do distance learning. Too much time on Zoom/screens creates fatigue, and hands-on work with practical applications provides a good break. Teacher-student engagement and student-student engagement is important, and therefore the fall schedule includes both synchronous learning and opportunities for independent work.

Sample daily schedules are available on the [WWPS website](#). The morning will involve synchronous learning, while the afternoon will involve extension opportunities, office hours, lab hours, independent and small group instruction, and other forms of student engagement. For middle and high school, students will take Periods 1, 2, and 3 in the morning one day, then Periods 4, 5, and 6 the next. WWPS recognizes that synchronous learning will be difficult, if not impossible, for some families due to schedules and supervision. Walla Walla Online is the more flexible option and provides an alternative to the synchronous learning schedule.

Superintendent Smith recognizes that child care is an incredible challenge for families and WWPS is working with partner organizations to develop solutions. Last spring the District was able to provide child care on site to essential workers, which they are no longer able to do. Under current guidelines, the District is unable to provide child care.

WWPS has hosted seven digital webinars, available in English and Spanish on the district's website, regarding all aspects of remote learning. If parents cannot find the information they're looking for on the website, Superintendent Smith encourages them to call the schools or the District office: 509-527-3000.

Kara Breymeyer, Walla Walla County Community Health

Breymeyer shared data on coronavirus activity in Walla Walla County since March, 2020:

- Confirmed cases: 672
- Total recovered: 509
- Active cases: 159 (113 in the community, 46 at the Department of Corrections, 4 in the hospital)
- Deaths: 4

She also provided activity data as of August 1, 2020:

- Confirmed cases: 257 (154 in the community, 103 at the Department of Corrections)
- Average number of new cases per day: 10-12

She provided a breakdown of cases by age:

- Under 17 years old: 17 cases, or 11% of the total
- 18-63 years old: 211 cases, or 82% of the total (includes people at that penitentiary)

Breymeyer noted that we are seeing the number of new cases plateau, which is a good sign. People might wonder why County Health is so interested in disease activity versus survival rate.

Breymeyer explained that if COVID activity is high, patient needs could overwhelm our local health care system, and our economy would be negatively impacted if many people had to stay home from work.

Breymeyer showed a graph of positive COVID cases in Walla Walla County from July to Aug 18, which shows lower rates through July and increases in August. There is a very recent trend downward. Breymeyer reported that most transmission is among household members, which means that a parent might have exposure at a workplace that is then spread to household members. The County Health Department emphasizes the importance of limiting transmission within the household. In Walla Walla County, exposures have also happened at social gatherings that are not in compliance with Phase 2 guidelines. She also noted that there is some transmission happening in workplaces because people are working when they are symptomatic, or are infected but don't have symptoms.

The Walla Walla County Department of Community Health has been working closely with schools since March to share data and consult about activity levels. Breymeyer shared local coronavirus activity levels, and how that impacts education models per DOH (Department of Health) and OSPI (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) guidelines. The table below shows the total population by location, and the number of cases above which it is not safe for all students to attend school in person full time, and the number of cases over the past two weeks. As the table shows, coronavirus activity level in Walla Walla County is high.

Location	Total Population	Case Cutoff	Cases 8/2-8/15
Walla Walla County	60,760	46	214
Walla Walla City	32,900	25	180
College Place	9,317	7	21
Waitsburg	1,230	1	0
Prescott	330	0	2
Touchet	407	0	3
Burbank	3,378	3	8
Dixie	495	0	0

Suzanne Suyama, *Child Care Aware*

Suyama is the Program Director for Child Care Aware, which is located in Pasco and serves Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, Benton and Franklin counties. Child Care Aware works with providers, families, and communities to help create access to quality childcare. Child Care Aware also provides training for providers, and mental health support for children.

Suyama has been meeting with providers in the Walla Walla area with the goal of expanding child care options to meet community needs during and after the pandemic. Families seeking child care can call the Child Care Aware Family Response Center (1-800-446-1114) to get a list of licensed providers in their area, tailored to their particular circumstances and needs. Every week, Suyama's office gets a report detailing calls to the Family Response Center, which helps pinpoint where the need for expanded child care is most acute.

Suyama recognizes that child care presents a financial challenge for families, many of whom may not have needed child care before. There are State child care subsidies for working families; to determine eligibility, visit Washingtonconnection.org. For families that do not qualify for subsidies but are still concerned about affording child care, Suyama recommends they discuss this directly with child care programs as this is something the Early Learning Coalition is working on in this region.

Mayor Norma Hernandez, *City of College Place*

The City of College Place has been working to supplement child care and youth recreation programs. The City hopes to engage community partners to provide opportunities.

A main concern is how we are going to keep children from being unsupervised, which has happened throughout the summer. College Place has a new library, and the City is working to determine whether that space could be used to provide engagement for local youth.

Mayor Hernandez recognizes that students learning online need a stable connection. The City has also been working with the Port of Walla Walla to increase broadband internet. College Place does not have the bandwidth Walla Walla does and is seeking grant money from the state to increase capacity.

The City's main goal has been working at the legislative level on how to lessen restrictions safely and still meet parent needs. City administrators hope to secure more money for student programs and the school district.

The City is concerned about children's social skills and mental health. The College Place Police Department (CPPD) has seen an increase in calls related to mental and behavioral health over the summer. CPPD is working to train officers about how best to deal with mental health issues in both children and adults.

There are ongoing efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through regular Facebook posts and a City newsletter. The City has masks and hand sanitizer available every Thursday at the Farmer's Market in Lion's Park. If you need either of these supplies, you can also contact the City. Mayor Hernandez hopes people will wear their masks appropriately and avoid social gatherings. For more information, visit the [City's website](#), and click on the COVID-19 Emergency banner.

Jennifer Beckmeyer, *City of Walla Walla*

Beckmeyer works for the City of Walla Walla as the Community Development Block Grant Coordinator. The City of Walla Walla has been working to support child care businesses through grant funds.

The City of Walla Walla also has a Neighborhood Engagement Program, which works to connect neighbors. The Neighborhood Engagement Program can help connect parents who are looking for ways to support one another by forming co-ops or providing Family, Friend, and Neighbor child care. Family, Friend and Neighbor care is state authorized, but not licensed. The Neighborhood Engagement Program can help connect individuals with resources to navigate providing care: <https://www.wallawallawa.gov/our-city/neighborhood-engagement-program>

To support employees, Beckmeyer recommends employers begin by looking at workplace policies and how to make them more family friendly. The City is partnering with the Walla Walla Downtown Foundation and the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce to provide virtual Townhall events for businesses. They hope to have a townhall event focused on child care in the near future, most likely in September; notification will be posted on the Chamber's FaceBook page, and via the City's social media sites.

Ultimately, the City of Walla Walla wants to help connect residents with services that can meet their needs. Beckmeyer encourages residents to use the OWWL app to search for assistance and services. They can also call the City's main line for Support Services: 527-4540, and can visit the City's website: www.wallawallawa.gov.

Robert Hafen, *Nelson Irrigation*

Nelson Irrigation manufactures irrigation equipment locally and employees about 200 people. Because irrigation equipment is used for agriculture, Nelson Irrigation was determined essential in March, and they have stayed open throughout the pandemic.

The company has worked closely with the Health Department and their internal legal team to comply with guidelines. This has included everything from redesigning work spaces and assembly lines, to sourcing personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies for workers, to helping some employees transition to working from home. Challenges have included concerns about employee safety, transportation restrictions, and supply chain stability.

Nelson operates three shifts a day. When schools closed, they had to get creative with scheduling to support families who also had to manage children learning at home. The only way for Nelson to stay in business is to continue manufacturing products, so they have had to continue adapting.

The pandemic has had a noticeable impact on employees emotionally, mentally, physically, and financially, and the company is working hard to provide support. They have increased paid administrative leave. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) also allows employees up to two weeks of fully-paid sick leave if needing to quarantine or experiencing COVID-19

symptoms. Employees are also eligible to receive partial compensation to take care of a family member, or to take care of children if their schools have closed. More information on the FFCRA here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employer-paid-leave>

Nelson also looked at the CARES act and how to make money available through employees' retirement funds. More information on the CARES act and retirement funds here: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/coronavirus-related-relief-for-retirement-plans-and-iras-questions-and-answers>

Nelson has worked with employee health plans to increase telehealth options and to make counseling services more available.

Nikki Sharp, Walla Walla County Community Health

Mental health is whole person health, and concerns are similar for youth and adults. Providers have seen an increase in anxiety and depression. People are struggling to manage daily responsibilities with huge changes to the structure of their lives.

There was a lot of need for mental health services pre-pandemic, and the pandemic has only increased that need. We've been living with the pandemic for almost six months. Data suggests that needs will continue to increase significantly in the next six months.

Sharp shared that young people need communication and connectivity as well as opportunities to get bored. They need time to detox from screen time, which takes a toll on adults and children alike. She encourages people to seek balance by taking time away from screens.

To support young people, we need to create a space for them to safely share and experience their emotions. Parents can ask simple, open-ended questions like, "How do you feel about online learning?" Kids need to feel connected; they need the eye contact that they are not getting in other places right now. Sharp recommends finding time to just sit down together and talk through emotions while remembering that this is a "funky first time" for everyone.

Sharp has similar recommendations for parents: she acknowledges that adults' work and home lives have been turned upside down and that this can lead to anger and frustration. Many adults may feel that they're just not doing a good enough job balancing work and supporting children. She recommends adults allow themselves to feel the difficult emotions that arise. She reminds people that it benefits children to see the adults in their lives be vulnerable.

Sharp expressed concern for people who are "quiet" and may be holding everything in. These are the people you don't hear from, she says. She encourages the community to stay interested in each other and work together.

Resources for accessing support:

www.mentalhealthww.com

www.reachoutww.org

Local crisis line: (509) 524-2999

Washington Listens: 1-833-681-0211, www.walistens.org.

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Q&A

Q: Many families have expressed concern about the start of school because the adults need to go to work, and there is no one to be with their children. What should they do?

Smith: Reach out to your children's schools and/or the District office. It may be that Walla Walla Online is the best solution if meeting some of the structured learning times will be difficult.

Fry: Please reach out to the schools and/or the district—we're here and are flexible in helping families find solutions. College Place, like Walla Walla, has a fully-remote learning option that may be best for some families.

Suyama: Call the Family Response Center, then get in touch with the providers they suggest. Explain your needs to the providers.

Q: What roles could local colleges, universities, community partners play?

Fry: The complexity of public health guidelines and protocols for online programs make this difficult, but we definitely want to get creative.

Smith: Yes, we want to be thoughtful and creative in connecting students. This will be an all-hands-on-deck effort that requires thinking outside-the-box.

Q: How should community members share their outside-the-box ideas?

Smith: Contact your school district. We need to have more conversations like this, more conversations in the community. Please, share your unique ideas. School districts want to rally behind good ideas and figure out how to make them work.

Q: What can individuals do to contribute to decline in case numbers?

Breymeyer: Continue with precautionary measures. Keep face coverings on when out and about. Keep up physical distancing (maintain at least 6-10 feet of distance) when interacting with people outside your home. Maintain good hand hygiene by sanitizing and washing your hands and keeping your hands away from your face. Keep interactions with people outside your home short and infrequent. If you are not feeling great, stay home and get tested. Walla Walla has good test capacity. If you get tested, stay home until you get your results.

Information on testing sites here: https://www.co.walla-walla.wa.us/government/health_department/index.php

Sharp: Give kids opportunities to practice good precautionary measures like masking and social distancing. Make it fun. Include young people in the charge to be responsible and help stop the spread of the virus.

Q: What resources exist to help those who are worried about lost income as a result of staying home after being tested?

Hernandez: Educate yourself about your rights. You have the right to take time off if you're sick or if you're caring for a family member. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) makes this clear. The Blue Mountain Action Council (BMAC) has grant funds to help support families who might be short on rent, utilities, and mortgages. Eligibility is not determined by BMAC's typical guidelines, so if you think you will not qualify, call anyway. Cities are not shutting off power or water, and we're waiving fees. If you're choosing between feeding your kids and keeping your power on, don't worry, the City is not going to shut the power off. Reach out and let the City know what's going on and what you need.

Beckmeyer: Yes, communicate with the City. Additionally, there is an eviction moratorium until October 15.

Q: How are childcare providers preparing to support school-age children with learning?

Suyama: This is a great question to ask any provider you're considering. Walla Walla Public Schools are planning to support child care programs with enough school-age children by providing paraeducators to help students manage distance learning.

Q: Would cities consider subsidizing child care costs?

Hernandez: If we were able to acquire the funds. These would have to be grant funds; we couldn't use taxpayer dollars. I will have our City administrator look for grants that might help. Protecting our children during this time is the City's biggest concern.

Beckmeyer: The City of Walla Walla is in the preliminary stages of that conversation. We are interested in piloting a program like that, perhaps by subsidizing providers directly. This would require feasibility studies, so this is all very preliminary, but we know the need is urgent. We are looking for short-term solutions as we also look for medium- and long-term solutions.

A project of the Educational Attainment Alliance, facilitated by United Way of the Blue Mountains and Community Council.