



Summary: Milton-Freewater Virtual Community Roundtable

Tuesday, August 18, 2020

Panelists

Aaron Duff, Superintendent Milton-Freewater Public Schools

Joseph P. Fiumara Jr., Public Health Director, Umatilla County Public Health

Tobie Sass, Child Development Director, Child Care Resource and Referral

John Shafer, Umatilla County Commissioner

Rosanna Lugo, Human Resources and Compliance, Seven Hills Vineyards

Micaela Cathey, Executive Director, Lifeways

Moderator

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

•••

Susan Kralman, Director of Blue Mountain Community College's, Milton-Freewater Center and member of 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.

Aaron Duff, *Superintendent Milton-Freewater Public Schools*

The Umatilla County Health Department has partnered with the Oregon Department of Education to provide guidelines on opening schools. A new matrix was released on August 11th, and Milton-Freewater's reopening plan was submitted to the Department of Education on August 17th. The plan, which lays out different stages for returning to school, is available on the district's website: www.miltfree.k12.or.us. Under the current matrix, Umatilla County is in "baseline," meaning all grades K-12 will utilize distance learning [update: on Friday, August 21st,

Umatilla County moved into Phase 1]. The guidelines state that once Umatilla County reaches Phase 3, students in Kindergarten through third grade will be able to return to school. For all grades to return to school, Umatilla County must have fewer than 10 cases within a seven day period, and maintain that for three consecutive weeks. Additionally, the County's positive test rate must be under 5% for seven days, for three consecutive weeks.

For now, the district will implement a distance learning program. For grades K-5, each live learning "session" will be offered at two different times, and all lessons will be recorded to increase student access. Grades 6-12 will be on a block schedule with certain classes on Monday/Wednesday, and alternate classes on Tuesday/Thursday. Per parents feedback, the district has worked to make the schedules function similarly across grade levels. Teachers will have virtual "office hours" every day, meaning that students and parents will have daily access to teachers, and the district is working to make tutors available until 7:00pm to support student learning.

The district recognizes that one model won't fit everybody, and some students will not be able to return to school until the virus is no longer a threat. The schools will support those students with a fully-online Virtual Learning Academy as long as necessary.

Each student will be loaned a Chromebook. Several local internet providers are providing reduced-priced internet services for qualifying families. Application forms are available in the school offices. If a student cannot get internet access at their home, the district will deliver flash drives daily. Teachers and administrators recognize that students should not be in front of a screen all day, every day, and therefore school work will not require day-long screen usage.

The Milton-Freewater School District is partnering with the YMCA to offer some childcare for students in grades k-5. More information on that program will be available soon.

The school has plenty of personal protective equipment (PPE) for when school is able to resume. This includes masks, hand sanitizer, and sanitizer fogging machines similar to the ones used in hospitals.

The district will continue to provide meals on school campuses and by bus delivery.

If parents have questions or concerns, they should reach out to the principal of their child's school.

Joseph P. Fiumara Jr., *Public Health Director, Umatilla County Public Health*

The goal of the Umatilla County Public Health Department is to get kids back to school. One silver lining to starting the year with distance learning is that students won't return to school, get into a routine, then be forced to go back to distance learning.

Alisha Southwick, Deputy Director at Umatilla County Public Health, has been and will continue working with the schools in an advisory capacity. There is the misconception that Public Health

“approves” or “denies” schools’ plans. That is not the case; rather, Public Health helps the schools create plans that adhere to guidelines from the State.

The main role of Public Health throughout the pandemic is case investigation, contract tracing, and follow-up. They are doing everything they can to get the virus under control so students can get back to school.

Tobie Sass, *Child Development Director, Child Care Resource and Referral*

In compliance with recent orders by the Governor, child care providers have been mandated to close and are only able to reopen if they are approved as Emergency Child Care (ECC). ECC providers are required to operate under conditions outlined in Governor Brown’s original order and an updated temporary order memo from Oregon’s Early Learning Division(ELD), which include:

- Prioritizing child care for individuals in the essential workforce
- Limiting the number of children to “stable” groups of 10 in a home or classroom
- Adhering to the health and safety guidelines developed in partnership with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA)

To date, the Office of Child Care has approved more than 2,000 Emergency Child Care applications with capacity to serve 32,000 children.

Across Eastern OR, only 41% of childcare providers have opened back up. New safety guidelines are released frequently. These guidelines apply to the following groups:

- All licensed programs, including certified center, certified family, and registered family
- All child care and preschool provided in public school settings regardless of who runs the program
- All recorded programs
- Oregon Pre-kindergarten (pre-natal to kindergarten), Preschool Promise, and Baby Promise
- Oregon Relief Nurseries
- Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) provided in a child care or early education setting

Guidelines do not apply to Family, Friend, and Neighbor care, which are unlicensed.

If you need help finding child care:

- Dial: 211
 - Text: children to 898211
 - Email: children@211info.org
- 211 representatives are available Mon-Fri 7am-11pm, Sat/Sun 8am-8pm
- Search independently for a list of child care options online:
<http://triwou.org/projects/fcco>

Child Care Resource and Referral staff is working to help providers reopen, including those in Milton-Freewater, and increase the number of licensed options.

Families who are struggling to pay for child care may qualify for Employment Related Day Care (ERDC)—a child care subsidy for working families. All ERDC copays are waived through the end of the Governor-declared state of emergency. Oregon has recently increased the amount a family can make and qualify for ERDC subsidy. More information can be found here:

<https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/assistance/child-care/pages/parents.aspx>

Child Care Resource and Referral Contact: jhook@umchs.org (541) 314-5870

More information on child care licensing under COVID-19: www.oregonearlylearning.com

John Shafer, Umatilla County Commissioner

Commissioner Shafer recognizes that child care is a huge challenge. The County is a big employer; many of their employees have children and are trying to figure out how to balance work and supporting their kids with distance learning. The Commissioner also acknowledges that broadband internet access is a huge issue across Umatilla County. The biggest challenge Commissioner Shafer sees is “moving targets” – guidelines and regulations change so frequently that it can be hard to keep up. This is not just for schools, but for the County, as well. The Commissioner talks weekly with State legislators to keep them abreast of local issues and concerns.

Commissioner Shafer is concerned about children who are out of school, as school serves as a safe respite for many students with difficult home lives. Food insecurity and mental health are two additional concerns. Reports of mental health concerns are on the rise across the County.

Rosanna Lugo, HR and Compliance Specialist, Seven Hills Vineyards

Vineyard management is trying to make sure employees are fully supported, which has been difficult with schools and many child care providers closed. They hope to be able to build in flexibility for their workforce, most of whom have school-aged children or kids in child care.

Safety guidelines change frequently. Seven Hills is focused on how to sustain employees through harvest and crush, which is fast approaching. Ultimately, Rosanna says employees need to be supported by employers by having flexibility and time built in to support their children. Employers need to be okay with employees taking time off, and employees should not have to be concerned about losing their jobs.

Some vineyards in the region are not going to have employees pick this year; instead, they are going to bring in machines, which may ultimately displace workers. Seven Hills wants their employees to have jobs, and be able to take care of a loved one or go to a meeting at their children’s school.

On the job, Seven Hills’ number one priority is keeping employees safe and healthy so they can go home and be with their families and come back the next day. When a Seven Hills employee

became sick, seven additional workers had to self-quarantine. Fortunately, they tested negative, but they still had to be away from work, which meant a loss of income. There have been local efforts to raise funds to compensate workers who need to stay home in quarantine or because of COVID symptoms.

Rosanna shared some ways Seven Hills has been working to support employee safety. With help from the Oregon Farm Bureau, for instance, they have been able to provide masks to employees, and insurance has subsidized the cost of increased sanitation protocols. Rosanna recommends that employers provide employees as much information as possible. She calls and texts her employees regularly to make sure they know everything they need to know and has worked to help employees who have tested positive get support through the CARES act. She recommends businesses have someone on site whose job it is to stay up to date on regulations and who monitors employee safety.

Rosanna would like to see more educational information—in English and in Spanish—about COVID-19 posted in public spaces, particularly about how masks can help save lives.

Micaela Cathey, *Executive Director, Lifeways*

Behavioral health is complex, and the pandemic makes it even more complex. During this time, people are impacted by many different things: financial stress, challenges around education and childcare, employment concerns, et cetera.

All these factors can lead to a huge increase in stress, which can have numerous effects, including:

- Fear and worry
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Difficulty concentrating
- Challenging interpersonal relationship dynamics
- Chronic health challenges may be worsened
- Pre-existing mental health conditions may be worsened
- Increased tobacco/alcohol/substance abuse

There is a significant increase in mental health and substance abuse needs right now, and support is available. Currently, Lifeways is primarily offering telehealth visits with providers, and there are many confidential resources to help individuals access care that way. Lifeways is doing in-person services when it is clinically appropriate. There are protocols in place (including symptom and temperature checks, increased sanitation, and a closed lobby) to help keep that option available. There are also increasingly flexible appointment times, which will continue after the pandemic.

Other resources and supports include:

- Umatilla County Human Services 541-278-6330
- David Romprey Warmline 800-698-2392

- National Suicide Hotline 800-273-8255
- OR YouthLine 877-968-8491
- text teen2teen to 839863
- Lifeways 541-240-8030
- Lifeways Adult Abuse Reporting 541-823-9028
- Child Abuse Reporting (DHS) 855-503-SAFE (7233)
- Domestic Violence Services 800-833-1161

•••

Q&A

Q: *Commissioner Shafer, what is being done to increase broadband access in Umatilla County?*

Shafer: The county is looking at how to use CARES money in that regard and is also working with Oregon Senators Merkley and Ryden as well as Representative Walden. Our national representatives agree that broadband access is a priority.

Q: *Is there any possibility of opening schools by zip code instead of by County so that in zip codes where case levels are lower students can return to school?*

Duff: That has been suggested. However, it's not uncommon for students to live in one zip code and attend school in another. It is not possible to open Hermiston schools right now because of high case counts; meanwhile Stanfield has zero cases. However, 10% of Stanfield students might live in Hermiston. In Umatilla County, Ukiah is probably the only district unaffected by this issue, and there may be some waivers developed for schools that are truly out by themselves like that. Otherwise, schools will reopen only once the county's numbers are low enough.

Q: *Superintendent Duff, can you tell parents more about the availability of adult tutors?*

Duff: This is something we're building as we go in response to parent feedback. Unfortunately, there will be no in-person tutoring. Tutoring will happen over a digital platform like Google or Seesaw, or by phone. We'll see how it goes and how much staff it takes and try to make it as easy as possible. We'll adjust as we go to do the best we can do.

The school district is also a large employer and needs to take care of its employees, some of whom will be more able to work in the evening. This is part of how the district will make tutoring available after the traditional school day ends.

Q: *Superintendent Duff, what would you ask of community partners in terms of support for the schools, students, and families?*

Duff: A little bit of grace. All of us want to do the best we can do. Milton-Freewater needs help just like its neighboring cities like Pendleton and Walla Walla. Sometimes Milton-Freewater gets forgotten a bit. Milton-Freewater is the third largest school district in Umatilla County, and it

needs help from partners and agencies at the County and State level. Milton-Freewater has a large population and a lot of need. People in Milton-Freewater are hardworking folks. They're not asking for a handout. They're working. And they have limited options for what to do with their kids while they're at work. I'm in that boat myself; I've got three kids, and I have to work. So if Hermiston and Pendleton are getting support, especially to expand childcare, please send that help to Milton-Freewater, too. We exist. We're here.

Q: *What additional details can be shared about the YMCA program?*

Duff: Again, we're building the program as we go. There are rules as to how many students can be in "pods." The program won't be big enough for every k-5 student, but we're working hard to make sure it's a low-cost option and accessible to Milton-Freewater families. One big challenge will be finding staff. We've got a good space for the program, but we need staff. I know many folks are wondering why we can have a child care program when we can't open schools.

Sass: I can give the State's answer to that question. Oregon has deemed safe and quality child care and early education fundamental to the state's recovery efforts and to the short- and long-term wellbeing of children and families. Children have to go somewhere, and we need programs that can support them. No more than 250 children can be served in one school-age program. Children must be kept in cohorts of 10, with two possible alternate children.

Q: *Is there any information yet about the cost of the YMCA program? Who will be eligible to attend?*

Duff: We do not know what the exact cost will be yet, but we are seeking grant funding to keep the cost as low as possible.

Update: Only children who attend Milton-Freewater Public Schools will be eligible to attend.

Q: *What resources exist for students who are learning English and special education students?*

Duff: Each school has interpreters available to assist Spanish-speaking parents, and a number of the tutors are bilingual. Special education support and intervention times are built into the schedule. This might include extra tutoring, additional curriculum supports, or support from special education teachers. In Milton-Freewater every student in grades k-5 goes to an intervention to provide extra support in areas where they need to build up their skills.

We're always working to up the game in supporting our English language learners. And at some point we're hoping case numbers will be good enough that we can bring in small groups of students. These students, as well as students without great internet connection, would be first. That's where the most need is, so that's where we'll focus first.

Q: *Where can parents go to learn more about what's expected from them and how best to support their kids?*

Duff: They can go to the district website: www.miltfree.k12.or.us Daily schedules are listed there, along with messages from principals. Teachers will soon be contacting parents to talk about

expectations, how things will work, communication flows, etc. The district is also putting together some “how-to” videos to help families.

At Chromebook checkout, there will be tents families can drive through and ask questions. In the first week of September, each school will have a virtual meeting where parents can ask questions and run through situations

As we progress through the fall, please email your student’s teachers and principals, and make sure you get your answers. If we’ve got them, we’ll give them to you. If we don’t, I’ll tell you that, too.

Q: *How will attendance be recorded? What happens if a student isn’t attending?*

Duff: Attendance does not mean that students are present “in” class lessons. Attendance means you did the day’s assignment. This is proficiency-based attendance and why we’re recording lessons. We know that many older students are looking after younger siblings and may even be working. We’re trying to be flexible with them.

If a student doesn’t log in or attend, we’ll contact students and parents and work through those processes. This is not a hammer coming down. As educators, we get concerned when we don’t hear from kids.

However, this fall will be different than last spring. In the spring, classes were pass/no pass. This year, Oregon Department of Education has said we need to give grades. This ups the ante in terms of attendance.

Q: *What’s being done to educate the community about COVID-19 and to stop the spread in Umatilla County?*

Fiumara: We’re doing everything we can think of to do. The majority of cases are on the west side of the County, so a lot of time and effort has been focused there to target where we’re seeing the biggest problem. We’ve put out a lot of information about workplace exposure because that’s where we’ve seen a lot of transmission. With schools being closed, we haven’t had to worry about transmissions there. We’re working with stakeholders and community partners to get signage up. Some new billboards will be going up soon. The County is also pulling together a coalition of partners to focus on messaging. If people do not choose to follow the guidelines, we won’t make progress. If everybody does a little to move us in the right direction, we can get the schools open. If people choose not to follow guidelines, we’ll be doing distance learning longer than we’d like to.

Q: *Can Public Health help people access masks and sanitizer?*

Fiumara: The County has supplies, but most of them are dedicated to response—their dispersal is triggered by positive cases. But we can connect you with community partners who have supplies.

Pendleton office: (541) 278-5432

Hermiston office: (541) 567-3113

Q: *What are some warning signs of a decline in mental health? What suggestions do you have to reduce stress?*

Cathey: Changes in eating, sleeping, mood. Withdrawal. In general, way too much or too little of something or any regression can be warning signs. In younger kids, you might see more clinginess, even a regression in potty training in really young kids. In adolescents, you might see more attention given to screen time, connecting only through video games and chat. This isn't great for eye health, brain health, or social skills. It also can open teens up to potentially dangerous situations. For instance, the FBI has put out warnings about sexual exploitation on online platforms.

To reduce stress, it's recommended to engage in physical activity. Go outside. Walk. Maintain healthy eating habits. A screen time diet is a good idea. Take time away from social media and the news, which can be really overwhelming with everything that's going on. Have conversations with your kids and family about healthy ways to manage stress and how to connect as well as age-appropriate conversations about what the reality is.

If you've done the things that normally make you feel better, like reading a book, engaging in activities you enjoy, playing games, doing art, meditating, et cetera, and you're still not feeling better, reach out for support.

Q: *How can distance learning build in non-screen activities? What about PE, art, career and technical education (CTE) classes?*

Duff: I was a CTE teacher for over eight years. It will be hard to teach those classes online, but Milton-Freewater has a great CTE department. They will be able to offer some virtual opportunities, but we're looking forward to being able to bring small groups into the schools.

PE and art are built into the schedule. Our staff recognizes it's not all math and reading. Younger grades will have daily community meeting times. This is an opportunity for students to share things and a way to support and monitor mental health.

Parents, please talk to your students. Kids pick up on what you're feeling. I've had to tell myself, "it's going to be okay. You're going to be okay. We're going to be okay." There's a lot of power in that.

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