



Summary: Touchet Virtual Community Roundtable Wednesday, August 19, 2020

Panelists

Robert Elizondo, Superintendent Touchet Public Schools

Kara Breymeyer, Walla Walla County Department of Public Health

Suzanne Suyama, Community Minded Enterprises

Lisa Franklin, School Counselor and Special Education Director, Touchet Public Schools

Ynez Vargas, Spanish Interpreter

Moderator

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

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Touchet resident Sandra Bradley welcomed community members to the Roundtable and introduced the topic.

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.

Robert Elizondo, *Superintendent Touchet Public Schools*

The Touchet School District has prepared three different plans (Plan A: all in, Plan B: split shift, Plan C: distance learning 2.0), which depend on COVID activity and state guidelines. Because Walla Walla County COVID activity is high, the Touchet School District will start with distance learning on September 8. According to the distance learning 2.0 model, K - 2 students will come to school in small cohorts over the course of the first week for about an hour each day. For example, if there are 20 kindergartners, 5 of them will come to school each day, Monday

through Thursday. Teachers will assess those student's needs (such as internet access), and bring those with the highest needs to campus on Friday. The district will assess how that went, and if possible, will then bring older students, 3-5 and possibly 6, on campus the following week. For middle and high school students, those with the highest needs (such as lack of internet access, with an incomplete from last spring, or with an Individual Education Plan) will come to campus first. The district will communicate with parents soon in this regard, and information will be posted on the district's web site: <https://www.touchet.k12.wa.us/>.

All teachers will teach from school beginning on Sept. 8, and public health guidelines, such as masks or face shields and hygiene protocols, will be followed. Students will attend their classes via zoom, and attendance will be taken at each zoom class. The district will offer chromebooks to every student. If families don't have good internet access, or know of other households who don't have access and have not received school messages, the district asks for help in getting those folks in touch with them. The district is working with internet providers to help get access to those who need it.

The district's Learning Management System is Google classroom, for all students, K -12. This is not new, and most parents should already be familiar with that. Within that platform, teachers will use other online learning tools, which students will be accessed through Google classroom. The district will also use Edgenuity, like many other districts in Washington state, and grades 6-12 will be using APEX for online courses.

For students who are not able to come to school, they will be able to access the Touchet Virtual Academy program, which is like a home school model where teachers will guide students. Within this model, students will have about 45 minutes of contact time with a teacher each week. Though everything will take place on-line, students are still part of the Touchet School District.

Childcare is an issue throughout our community and this is an opportunity to work together to address the issues that arise. Elizondo hopes that by the end of September or early October COVID activity will decrease and students can return to school.

Kara Breymeyer, Walla Walla County Department of Public 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. Nationwide, children make up 22% of the US population, but only 7.3% of cases nationwide. In our county, children make up a higher percentage of cases than we see at the national level. It is unclear right now how this will be impacted by the return to school. COVID rates among youth have been increasing nationally.

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, such as barbecues and baby showers, which 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 by 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

The Walla Walla County Department of Community Health provides updated data to school districts regularly. The department also facilitates a Reopening Work group, to consider how to safely reopen businesses. There is a health line that people can call to talk to a nurse or health worker, also available in Spanish. To help stop the spread of COVID, the Walla Walla County Department of Community Health asks that residents wear masks and consider community members.

Suzanne Suyama, *Community Minded Enterprises*

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 early learning programs and families to help create access to quality childcare. Parents can call: 1-800-446-1114 to get a list of licensed providers in their area, tailored to their particular circumstances and needs. Child Care Aware also provides training for providers, and mental health support for children.

Child Care Aware recognizes that there is a great need for childcare in Touchet, and they are looking at ways to increase the number of licensed providers. Currently, there are no licensed child care providers in Touchet. Parents can go to Walla Walla, Burbank, and Tricities for childcare, which may be an option for those who work in those locations. Another option is “family, friends, and neighbor” providers, which are unlicensed care providers. There is an ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program) at Touchet elementary school.

Child Care Aware is currently offering support to people who are interested in operating as a licensed child care provider. Being a licensed provider opens up opportunities for grant funding through the state, coaching and training opportunities, and curriculum support; only licensed

providers are able to accept state subsidies for families who qualify. In its effort to support early learning, the Early Learning Coalition is trying to determine financial need among families, and how many families do not qualify for state subsidy, but cannot afford full-priced child care. Families can visit: washingtonconnection.org to determine if they qualify for a state subsidy for childcare. Parents can call the family support center: 1-800-446-1114.

Lisa Franklin, *Touchet Public School District*

Franklin reported that mental health providers are seeing an increase in depression, anxiety, substance abuse, domestic violence, calls to suicide hotlines across the state. She said that the same trends exist for kids and teens. She also noted that depression and anxiety combined with unmet basic needs (lack of food, shelter, safety, sense of belonging) causes stress. When there is stress, our brains cannot function in a higher mental state, and instead we go into fight, flight, or freeze mode. This is especially relevant to students because when brains are in that stressed state, it is difficult to learn. To lessen stress, Franklin advises:

- Take care of yourself: go outside, get sleep, be productive
- Take care of each other. Sometimes on social media we see the opposite of this: a lack of openness to others. We need to model empathy to our kids, and need to be aware of modeling blame and anger, which can cause more stress to our kids. Franklin suggested it is important to model a positive attitude, even if we don't feel it, because kids pick up on negativity and it adds to their stress.
- Monitor and keep track of kids' social media. Right now there are many messages coming in that are hard to navigate. It is important to have conversations about being critical thinkers.
- Make sure that you have a routine for your family: when you'll log in for school, when you'll take a break for exercise. Everyone functions better when they have a routine.

The Touch School District website will add a "counselor's corner" with links to resources for COVID mental health issues, such as a hotline for people experiencing stress and resources for improving social and emotional health. The resources are available to all community members, not just those who have kids in the district. There will also be resources for seniors as they prepare for college applications, financial aid, and tests. One site that is especially valuable is [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#). The site provides information on symptoms/behaviors by age level, and strategies to talk with kids.

The Touchet School District will conduct a student survey to see if students want to participate in small groups around concerns or interests. Teachers will have resources to support social and emotional learning. Franklin will be working with ASB officers to develop activities and

celebrations that can be offered on-line. Suicide prevention month is September and Bullying prevention month is October; the district will sponsor relevant activities. School staff will also facilitate silly competitions or dress up days so that students stay engaged and have fun.

Franklin shared the following resources:

Walla Walla mental health crisis line: (509) 524-2999

Text option: HEAL to 741741

WA Listens (State Program) to talk about your concerns: walistens.org or 1-833-681-0211

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Q & A:

Q: A lot of parents with questions about communication, what can parents expect in terms of communication with the district, schools, teachers? How often and in what format?

Elizondo: We will communicate in multiple ways. We have robo calls and text messages. We have a new website and will post information there. If parents have questions they can call or send an email: (509) 394-2352

Q: Touchet's numbers seem low, relatively speaking. Since COVID survival rates are high, why can't we come back if we are masked and socially distanced?

Breymeyer: It's best to take a very cautious approach to return to school slowly. A phased-in approach is appropriate at this time. There are many things that we don't know about this virus, and the flu season will come into play, so there will be some rough patches to figure out if kids have the flu or COVID. Kids can bring that home to parents, who can then take it to the workplace. We don't know a lot about transmission among children, and we don't know how that will impact them. We also know that children want to hug and play and it will be hard to keep them distanced and masked. Taking a slow approach is what our state leaders have said we need to do. It's easier to do a slow approach than to go all in and then completely pull out - that would be traumatic.

Q: What is the structure of the online program? What can parents expect from teachers in terms of communication?

Elizondo: For grades 6-12, students will be on an A/B schedule where they will report to zoom classes in the morning. On Monday they will do periods 1, 2, 3 and on Tuesday, 4, 5, 6. In the afternoons they will come back, and teachers will be able to reach out to them. Morning will be very structured, afternoons will be more flexible so teachers can provide resources individually

or in groups. We will make sure students are attending - we'll take attendance, there will be a regular grading system. Teachers will make sure grades are updated weekly. Parents can check grades and attendance on Skyward. For elementary, we will phase them in so we'll do a lot more communication with parents regularly.

Q: *What will happen with assessments, including state assessments?*

Elizondo: Yes, will have assessments, including Smarter Balanced Assessment. The SAT, PSAT, ACT will be scheduled; will share that info in October.

Q: *Will meals be provided? Can households register for meals, instead of individually, and can they be picked up early?*

Elizondo: We are going to have a grab-and-go available from 11-11:30. We didn't want kids to have to come in and grab a meal when they are working on school work. We can see if we can make a 7:30AM pick up work. We need families to fill out free and reduced forms, which allows them to pick up the lunches. We are trying to figure out the best way to manage that system. We hope to have that info online on the district website soon.

Q: *It's been recommended that parents stay home if they feel ill. Where can they get tested, and what resources exist if they have to stay home and miss wages?*

Breymeyer: There is some food assistance to help people who are not able to be at work. Some of those resources are on our website: https://www.co.walla-walla.wa.us/government/health_department/index.php

There are several places to get tested: Providence St. Mary's has drive in testing from 8 to noon on its southgate campus. That is available to anyone who is mildly symptomatic. People can also call their primary care provider, who can do testing. Rite Aid on Issacs is also providing testing for people who are asymptomatic, which requires a phone call or an online appointment. If someone is very ill, they need to go to the ER. Test turnaround time varies from 2 - 5 days.

Q: *How can parents help keep their students engaged, encouraged, and motivated?*

Franklin: It's important to model a positive attitude. It will help having daily contact with teachers. Part of every teachers' job is going to be daily check in and encouragement, and working on students' social and emotional wellbeing. They may do things like yoga, and relaxation. We don't want kids sitting and staring at a computer all day long. Kids need brain breaks, and if they can't pay attention they can't learn.

Q: *Can you tell us more about what the afternoon will look like?*

Franklin: Teachers will be running small groups, having open office hours for students to ask questions, and will be available; it will be like office hours for each class. We have built in an extension time, from 2:00 - 2:40 each day when clubs like FFA meet. Each student will also have an advisory period where they can work on what they need to do, or just have someone to talk to. Teachers will still provide instruction in the afternoon.

Q: *What happens on Fridays?*

Elizondo: Fridays will be rotating A or B, every other week. There will be a calendar that we will share so people will know their responsibilities for each day.

Q: *Will there be a computer for each child?*

Elizondo: Our plan is to issue a chromebook to every student. We'll work with families to make sure they have enough bandwidth to support several children if needed.

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