

Students say goodbye, for now



Port Townsend High School seniors Naenae Darrington (front) and Briana Martin hug as school was getting out Monday afternoon. Schools plan to re-open in six weeks but the closure could be extended depending on how much COVID-19 has been hampered by state-wide restrictions.

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Carmen Jaramillo
cjaramillo@ptleader.com

Port Townsend High School senior Wes Blue left school Monday afternoon not knowing when he would be back to finish out his last year before being thrust into adulthood.

“Right now it’s six weeks; it could end up being eight or more,” he said. “What if we don’t come back before school is out?”

He worries he’s missing out on his last chance at the high school experience, the last chance to just be a kid. This is not the way he wanted it to go, but at the same time, he understands people’s health comes first.

Blue is one of many Jefferson County K-12 students wondering what the future holds after Gov. Jay Inslee announced last week that schools would close statewide for a minimum of six weeks to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the coronavirus. The closure will remain through at least April 24, but could be extended.

Naenae Darrington, also a PTHS senior, said she is concerned about how students are going to finish their culminating projects, a Port Townsend School District requirement for graduation.

Part of each project is recoring a certain of hours spent working on it; this usually requires some sort of volunteering, event-hosting or meeting with community members. Social distancing makes some of those hard to complete.

How local schools will address all these concerns once back in session has yet to be determined, as many are still planning how to implement programs to continue nutritional, education and childcare access while kids are not at school.

Inslee had originally stated that schools in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties would be closed. On Friday last week, he expanded the closures to all K-12 public and private schools in every district across the state.

“Critical services schools provide our students will need to continue during closures,” he said.

“That includes nutrition assistance for any student who needs it, as well as child care, particularly for healthcare workers, emergency personnel and low-income families.”

Port Townsend

Port Townsend School District will offer free breakfast and lunch for any students ages 18 and under who need it, said Sarah Rubenstein, director of communications at Port Townsend Schools.

These meals will be available every day from 9 to 11 a.m. at four locations: Salish Coast Elementary, Port Townsend High School, the Jefferson County International Airport and the Cape George Fire Hall.

Any families who cannot get to these locations can work with the school to determine delivery of meals to students.

Port Townsend schools will also offer child care for parents who need to continue working, but don’t have a safe space for supervision of their kids.

Families of first responders and medical workers who have already filled out applications for childcare were contacted this week by PTSD and the YMCA, which is the lead organization for providing emergency childcare in the city, Rubenstein said in a press release.

Other families who have completed an emergency childcare form are also being contacted and will be served as space is available. Families already enrolled in after-school YMCA care should contact the YMCA directly to see if continued care can be provided.

As for continuing their education, the governor’s order does not require schools to provide online education. Port Townsend School District will provide educational resources for families, but there will not be online schooling, Rubenstein said.

“We are dedicated to providing support for our 12th-grade students to ensure they graduate on time,” she added.

Rubenstein said the school district appreciates the guidance given by state and county health officials, as well as the governor.

“We’re dedicated to keeping our kids safe,” she said. “And everyone here at the schools is dedicated to doing everything we can to support our families.”

Teachers will still report to work. During the closure they will providing family support, educational resources, childcare and use the time for teacher training, Rubenstein said.

School is still scheduled to end on June 19 and districts will be expected to use any available ‘make-up days’ to complete the year, Rubenstein said.

Quilcene

Quilcene School Superintendent Frank Redmon and his staff are communicating with the district’s families to determine the best ways forward.

“We know this raises all kinds of questions and implications, including childcare needs for our staff and families, school meals, graduation and much more,” Redmon said in a March 13 statement. “We are working on plans to address a range of impacts, and we will be in constant communication as we work through these issues.”

Breakfast and lunch will be offered to all children 18 years old or younger at designated pick-up locations. They do not have to be students of the Quilcene School District, and no forms of identification will be required, but the child must be present.

Education resources for subjects such as typing, reading, writing, grammar, languages, coding, math, fitness and history are available on the Quilcene K-12 school website.

Chimacum

Chimacum School District released an alert on its website March 16 on the last day of school detailing the “plan so far” for closure.

“We know this is a stressful time, and that having this kind of a change in routine will take some getting used to and will take the commitment and cooperation of the whole community,” Superintendent Rick Thompson said in the post.

- Athletics, clubs and activities are canceled.
- Chimacum schools will not rent facilities to third parties.
- Education options for students are being explored.
- Seniors scheduled to graduate will have the highest priority for communication.
- A food program for breakfast and lunch will be announced by the end of the week. Students 18 and under can receive free meals without any documentation.
- The school offices will be open until Friday to allow students and parents to pick up belongings left at the school.
- The district office will remain open on normal hours and the school board meeting on Wednesday, March 25 will be held as scheduled.

Brinnon

A March 13 announcement on the Brinnon School District’s website from Superintendent Patricia Beathard said the district is working on plans to provide the following services:

- Childcare during school hours for families who work in critical community roles such as healthcare providers and first responders.
- Childcare during school hours for parents who would otherwise be unable to go to work during this time.
- Meals for children – more information to come.
- Educational resources with support for at-home learning.

“We recognize this closure creates many challenges, and our goal is to provide basic services to continue supporting our families and our community,” Beathard wrote in a press release. “We will provide updated information over the next several days.”