Local schools navigate dismissal of classes

By SAVANNAH PACCE
staff writer

The digital learning and homeschool hybrid initiated last month will continue through the end of the school year, as in-person classes at Utah public schools have been dismissed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

On Tuesday, during Gov. Gary Herbert's daily COVID-19 press briefing, Herbert said students will finish the year doing at home. "We are giving them until May 1 to let us know, and it looks like many are going to wait and see if anything changes by then."

A lot could depend on the fate of two popular summer entertainment programs: The Utah Festival Opera and Lyric Repertory Theatre, which have both announced they will not be performing this summer.

"That's disruptive and it impacts our learning environment," said Tim Smith, superintendent of Logan City School District. "We are most concerned about our seniors. We want to help them make this thing a positive experience as they finish up with us."

Smith said they hope to have some kind of celebratory event that senior students will remember, "like a car parade." But that's up to stay there.

The playground at Mountainside Elementary School in Mendon sits empty on Tuesday afternoon.

The Lyric Repertory Theatre, another big attraction for summer seniors, is calling off its 2020 season. But at last notice, the opera was still hoping to go forward this summer, according to Utah Festival Opera General Manager Tilisa Lapuaho. "We are giving notice, the opera was still hoping to go forward this summer, but it's not looking good right now."

"This is not an easy decision to make," Herbert said. "We are most concerned about our seniors. We want to help them make this thing a positive experience as they finish up with us."

"In order for us to continue to slow the spread and to get back on our feet socially and economically, this is not the time to have our schools back open," Herbert said. "This is not an easy decision to make. It is disruptive and it impacts our children, parents and families."

Both Cache County and Logan City school districts are navigating what this announcement means for teachers, students and especially the graduating seniors.

"I don't think this was a surprise to any of us. We have been preparing for this eventuality for the last few weeks as we have transitioned to an online, remote learning environment," said Tim Smith, the chief information officer of Cache County School District. "We are most concerned about our seniors. We want to help them make this thing a positive experience as they finish up with us."

Smith said they hope to have some kind of celebration at the end of the school year which is May 29. They just don't know exactly how that is going to look yet.

Frank Schofield, the superintendent of Logan City School District, said he is meeting with the high school administration later this week to discuss celebration details.

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During the virtual Cache County Council meeting on Tuesday evening, County Executive Craig Buttars said he expects that the Bear River Health Department will announce guidelines for the reopening of some local restaurants in the coming weeks.

Buttars also shared what he is looking for in the upcoming special session of the legislature.

"We're in a good place right now with our current health order; we're starting to reopen our local businesses gradually," Buttars said over Zoom to the council members, citing the most recent update from Bear River Health District that allowed gyms and fitness centers to reopen with some adjustments to regular protocols.

"The next order will probably come out in the next week or two," Buttars said after sharing that he has been working closely with BRHD and officials from neighboring counties.

"That order will address restaurants, setting guidelines for when they can open and under what conditions they can invite the public in."

Statewide guidelines for restaurants have already been adjusted slightly to allow people to enter the buildings to place take-out orders.

Buttars said he is concerned about the different areas of the state where communications between elected officials and their directing authorities has been weaker and how that might impact the state as a whole.

County execs talk legislative session, reopening restaurants

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BY STEVE KENT

The confirmed cases of COVID-19 climb in the Bear River Health District, one column has remained a steady zero. Rich County. Even though Bear is looking good on paper, however, some worry that the area may be uniquely vulnerable.

Both Rich County and Bear Lake County across the border are still reporting zero confirmed cases, however, some worry that people heading to their cabins from viral hotspots could carry COVID-19 into the community and strain local infrastructure.

"We get calls continually saying, 'These people need to be marched out of Logan.' But you know, they don't belong here, they've brought the virus in," said Rich County Commissioner Bill Cox. "It's pretty hard to say to somebody, 'Well, I know you're a second-home owner and I know you pay a lot more taxes than a primary resident, but you can't come and stay in your second home.' It's a hard thing, really."

"We are concerned. The commissioners in both counties have fielded concerns from residents worried that people heading to their cabins from viral hotspots could carry COVID-19 into the community and strain local infrastructure."

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Michael Gentry, the executive director of Utah Festival Opera said he is looking for in the upcoming special session of the legislature to have our schools back open, "We're in a good place right now with our current health order; we're starting to reopen our local businesses gradually," Buttars said over Zoom to the council members, citing the most recent update from Bear River Health District that allowed gyms and fitness centers to reopen with some adjustments to regular protocols.

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Local summer citizens visit with community members and business representatives during a May 2019 welcome to the Taggart Student Center at Utah State University.

No easy decisions