

Area schools seeking a year of normalcy

All hope to be free of COVID-19 distractions

By Echo Journal Staff

Lakes area schools will open their doors to welcome students for the first day of school Tuesday, Sept. 7, with high hopes for a more normal school year not sidetracked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Only the Brainerd School District - which includes Nisswa Elementary School - will start the school year with a mask mandate in schools. Whether other area schools eventually require masks, or whether Brainerd schools even-

tually drop the mandate, depends entirely on how COVID-19 cases spike or don't spike in the area.

Masks will be required for all students riding school buses because that's a federal law for public transportation. And anyone who wants to mask up where it's not required is encouraged to do so.

Following is a rundown of what to expect at area schools as the 2021-2022 school year begins.

Pequot Lakes School District

The Pequot Lakes School District has 10 new teachers and a new interim superintendent in Kurt Stumpf, but students and staff can expect some sort of return to normality, at least at the start of the school year.

"I'm just excited about getting our students back to five-days-a-week, in-person learning," Stumpf said.

NORMALCY: Page A16



Travis Grimler / Echo Journal

Erica Norman prepares her students for their last day of Kinder Camp last Thursday before starting their first year at Pine River-Backus Elementary School.

Student numbers rising

Pequot Lakes School Board closes open enrollment

By Dan Determan
Echo Journal

An increase of roughly 50 students in just a few weeks led to the Pequot Lakes School Board calling a special meeting Monday, Aug. 30, to close open enrollment in the district and establish grade level capacities.

The decision comes after a mask mandate implemented by the Brainerd School District left several parents threatening to send their children to different schools.

"I think when we talked in mid-August, I said we were about 15 to 20 students down (from enrollment projections) and as of today, we are about 32 students over," interim Superintendent Kurt Stumpf told the school board Monday. "That had started before some of their school districts made some decisions that have impacted us ... but it is a huge stressor when we are

SCHOOL: Page A16



Contributed photos / Marika Olivier

World War II veteran Wes Cline, of Hackensack, had his big day Aug. 17, when he was a passenger in a Boeing-Stearman open cockpit biplane through the Dream Flights program.

LOCAL HEROES SOAR



Harley Kaiser, of Backus, may not have originally been in on the plan to take an open cockpit flight out of the Pine River Regional Airport, but Dream Flights pilot Mike Sommars welcomed this World War II veteran to join in on the day's event Aug. 17.

World War II vets take to the skies from Pine River Airport

By Travis Grimler
Echo Journal

Wes Cline is a 95-year-old World War II veteran from Hackensack who was a Naval Air Corps bombardier during the war. So when his family learned a group was offering veterans flights

in Boeing-Stearman open cockpit biplanes, they quickly reached out and arranged a trip at the Pine River Regional Airport.

The nonprofit organization Dream Flights has been providing flights to residents of nursing homes since 2011

(under the name ACES Aviation Dream Flights), retirement villages and the like, but this is special. Not only did they want to get back on the right foot after COVID-19 grounded their usual operations, but there was an important anniversary.

"Normally we go about 11 months of the year, but this year we cut it down to just

HEROES: Page A6

What does the drought mean for municipal water use?

By Nancy Vogt
Echo Journal

In response to persisting drought conditions, Pequot Lakes residents who use the city's water system were asked to reduce their nonessential outdoor water use.

Even though the area finally received several inches of rain in the past week and a half, it remains in a moderate fire

risk, with no outdoor burning or campfires allowed as of Tuesday, Aug. 31. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources continued to list all of Cass County and a majority of Crow Wing County in "extreme drought" as of Tuesday.

"Under current conditions, it will take at least five to nine inches of precipitation

spread over a period of about one month to significantly alleviate the drought. Soils are more efficiently replenished by multiple rainfall events than by any single heavy rainfall event," the DNR website says.

Thus, the DNR issued requests for reduced use of public water systems.

Responding to that request, and in following the city's well-

head protection plan, Pequot Lakes directed residents and businesses on the city's public drinking water system to reduce all nonessential outdoor water use - such as watering lawns, gardens and trees - to one time per week. They're also asked to refrain from car washing, power washing buildings and filling pools.

DROUGHT: Page A6

Get the newspaper format you love EVERY DAY.



Open your phone or tablet's camera and point it at this code any time after 6 a.m. each day to access that day's print replica.



Available even on days your print paper is not delivered!



Happy Labor Day!

ALL FIRST NATIONAL BANK BRANCHES WILL BE CLOSED LABOR DAY - SEPT 6

WALKER • AKELEY • BACKUS • BAXTER • CROSSLAKE
HACKENSACK • LONGVILLE • PEQUOT LAKES • REMER

MEMBER FDIC
WWW.FNBORTH.COM