

Podcast Intro: Welcome to Supe's On with Dr. Steven Cook, superintendent for Bend-La Pine schools. In every podcast, Dr. Cook is serving up the latest news about our schools. Tune in to stay informed about key topics and go behind the scenes to learn more about our great schools and community, find all the Supe's On podcast at bls.fyi/podcast. That's bls.fyi/podcast. And now, here's Dr. Cook.

Dr. Steven Cook: Welcome to the Supe's On podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Steven Cook, superintendent of Bend-La Pine Schools. On the Supe's On podcast, we talk about all things public education, specifically as they relate to our school district in the greater community. This week's topic is the RSSL guidelines that have been released by the Oregon Department of Education and they are giving us feedback on how to build a plan for the start of school, for the 21, 22 school year. I'm very excited today to have my guest, Julianne Repman. Hi, Julian.

Julianne Repman: Hey, thanks for having me.

Dr. Steven Cook: Okay. So first of all, this is our very first podcast of this series. I'm excited to be in the chair again doing podcasts. I want to thank Julianne for being my first guest. We're going to talk about a meaty, meaty topic today. The Oregon Department of Education released expectations for how schools across the state can be expected to open schools with relationship to the COVID-19 pandemic. You and I have had lots of conversations about this. But before we go into that and start sharing with our listeners, some of the things that we're unpacking, if you will, give us a little introduction to who you are, why this topic matters to you, and how we are going to benefit from your background and expertise.

Julianne Repman: Sure. Thanks, Steve. So, I'm Julianne Repman. I am your Director of Communication and Safety for Bend-La Pine Schools, and my work is primarily focused on ensuring that our students and staff have what they need to be successful in the classroom. So, when it comes to safety, as we all know, we want to be able to keep our schools open. We want to ensure that our students are in an environment where they feel safe, their mental health is being nurtured. And so with this new guidance that came out, we are really digging in to find out how we can continue to keep schools open for in-person instruction in the fall, while really minimizing the impacts that COVID has on the classroom. So, getting to the basics again with teaching and learning.

Dr. Steven Cook: Thank you for that, Julianne. And so, this is going to be an issue for you in your job for the entire year and helping us. Number one, just make that environment as safe as we possibly can while maximizing teaching and learning. But also, in your role as the Director of Communication, we've got an awful lot of information we're going to be pushing out both internally to our staff and our departments, and also externally to our families and our students.

Julianne Repman: And that's one of the things I think we can always improve upon. So, folks will remember if they were here last year, Oregon was on a bit of a roller coaster when it came to different rules and guidelines that had impacts on our classrooms. We need to continue to improve that communication. One of the ways we're going to do that is through podcasts like this. I thank you for bringing it to us. Additionally, Dr. Cook has brought some other really cool things if you haven't

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checked out our School Board's web page, you can take a look at the information that's coming out of every board meeting. So, we want to make sure that families, parents, and students know we're going to continue to communicate what we hope to be clear, concise, consistent information. But we will be asking for a little bit of grace, as we know that this pandemic has given us quite an ever-changing landscape. So always welcome you to engage with us, two-way conversation is great, we're available through email in person. And you can always see what's kind of happening on our website, social media pages, et cetera.

Dr. Steven Cook: So, let's get into this a little bit. In the podcast, you try not to time stamp anything because not everybody's going to be listening to this, that is interested in this at the same time. But I think it's really important for this topic that we put a little bit of context on the timing for this. If you recall, on June 25th, the Oregon Department of Education, ODE, released the first version of the 2021~2022 school years guidance on how districts are expected to open. Shortly thereafter on July 9th, the CDC updated their guidelines for healthy schools and how schools should function coming into this next school year, and there was some discrepancy between those two documents. On July 22nd, the RSSL guidelines from ODE were updated again. Subsequently, also, the Oregon health authority also pushed out some information that essentially doubled down on the CDC guidelines. So, let's start at this time as we're recording this on Friday, 23rd of July, the most up-to-date information we have at this point is, let's start with that kind of time and point in space. Let's start with the RSSL guidelines make very explicitly clear that we are being afforded local control to make decisions about our operational plan. Tell our listeners what that means.

Julianne Repman: Sure. So, if folks weren't aware, over the course of the past year, we had quite a few mandates that were delivered to us through the Oregon Department of Education. So, we we're consistently following their requirements and then referring to recommendations with a lens that really looked at how does that play into our school system here in Bend, La Pine and Sunriver areas. So, now the change here is we have the ability to make decisions that are both steeped in the best data available, guidance from the local health authority as a partner. And then these tools that are coming from the state, as you mentioned, OHA, Department of Education, and CDC which is national, really giving us a framework for where to go. So right now, what we're able to do is to bring all of that information together and start making decisions that really are best for the teaching and learning environments we have here in our schools, rather than following a set of rules, let's say.

Dr. Steven Cook: So, let's start by what are some of the key takeaways right away that maybe raised our eyebrows as far as some changes for some pretty substantial differences in the RSSL guidelines and in CDC guidelines that are going to govern, or at least guide. I will note that while we have local control to make these decisions, those decisions likely will be made at the board meeting level by the board. Our administrative team in the district office would make recommendations to the board. The board would typically ask us a lot of questions and potentially approve that plan, which we would then later submit to the state. But let that process, we can talk about that more later. Right now, what I'd like to make sure of is that we kind of highlight

some of those major changes, and so, I want you to go through at least a few of those.

Julianne Repman: Sure. I think the one that stands out the most is around the importance of vaccines. It appears that this new guidance from those three expert agencies is showing us that perhaps the vaccine is really our number one mitigation strategy that we can use to ensure that our students stay in the classroom at school in-person. So, specifically, this new guidance aligns to the CDC guidance, which states that people who are fully vaccinated and do not—this is key—our nursing team would want to make sure you hear this. If you do not have COVID-like symptoms, you won't need to quarantine or get tested after exposure to someone with COVID-19. So again, if you are fully vaccinated and you're not symptomatic, you won't need to quarantine. So, this is a big deal for those of you who had a student who may have been quarantined last year and there's debate about how close were they, did they really interact with the students. If your student is vaccinated, no need to quarantine if they're well. Another piece that I think is really interesting and impactful is there is a mask-to-mask element to this as well where if your student is wearing a mask and there with another student with a mask, they also would not need to quarantine in that situation, the caveat to every one of these is if you're not symptomatic.

Dr. Steven Cook: Can I clarify one question on that, Julianne? So, you're talking about if somebody is positive for COVID, but they're wearing a mask and they expose another individual who is also wearing a mask. Then they're not expected -- the person that is exposed would not be expected to quarantine. Is that correct?

Julianne Repman: That's correct. So that's now in alignment with the CDC. So that's a big change. So again, just letting parents know that we've got some real tools here that can help keep our students in the classroom. Some other things, though, as we're talking about masking and vaccinations is there is still an expectation and this is a CDC guidance that there is the mandatory use of face coverings for passengers and drivers on our school buses. So, you could have a student who might not need to wear a mask to school because of their age, then they would still be asked to go ahead and put that mask on to ride our transportation to and from school or to and from activities.

Dr. Steven Cook: So, you're actually-- you're kind of referencing two things there. The first one are the federal guidelines now that are no longer even up for negotiation. If you're going to be on a bus, or have any kind of public transport which includes public school buses or private school buses, you will be required to wear a mask as a driver or as a passenger, correct?

Julianne Repman: That is correct, yes.

Dr. Steven Cook: Then the second thing is this idea that potentially, folks who are vaccinated might not be required to mask. Or if they are vaccinated and they're exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID, they wouldn't necessarily be a quarantine risk?

Julianne Repman: Correct.

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Dr. Steven Cook: Let's kind of come back out of that for a second. There are a couple of things I want to talk about is the authority of these agencies, and how do we have to respond? In other words, if we do something the CDC says or don't do something the CDC says or Oregon Health Authority or ODE, is that an issue? Do we have to do what's advised? How do we take local control upon this and how do those two things mix?

Julianne Repman: So, this is not like speeding and earning yourself a ticket, right? So, we have consequences. But the consequences for us are more around the public health and the safety and our responsibility for the care of your students and your family members who work in our schools. So, what we want to do is apply this in a manner that is fair. It is equitable and that we're protecting our staff to the degree that we can. Sometimes as you know, that could be depending on where you work, or if you are part of a place of worship, there might be someone who's sick and you quarantine if you were exposed to them, it's very similar. So again, these are decisions that we will be able to make here based on the climate and the culture of our communities and what we believe will help allow us to continue that excellent educational opportunity for students.

Dr. Steven Cook: So, one of the things you just hit upon, I think is crucial for our listeners to hear. I think that we make it extremely clear that the number one goal in any plan that we develop, any operational plan that we develop this year implement and then used to determine strategies for how we're going to function for, not just the start of school, but the entire school year. Our number one goal is to keep kids safe, of course. But our number one A goal is to make sure that every kid in school is in-person for the entire year, every day. And so, if we can do this well this year, it would be a win for us or what we would feel like a success if we didn't have to quarantine a single kid, or if we didn't have to isolate a single kid, student for that matter, I think it's probably a better way to put that. That's going to be tough. We're not out of the woods yet. You know, vaccinations appear to be moving to the kind of highest priority as our feedback from the federal government. And the state government are kind of elevating for us. So not all of our community has had the opportunity to be vaccinated. So maybe we can talk about that just a little bit.

Julianne Repman: Sure. So, our students right now and our adults who are aged 12 and older have had an opportunity to be vaccinated. We know Deschutes County specifically was a real leader in the State of Oregon. The opportunity there has been really great for vaccines and for helping to create that herd immunity that we're looking for this in this pandemic environment. That said our youngest learners have not yet had an opportunity for that vaccine. There is a talk on the hillsides of the vaccine becoming available as soon as late fall, let's say. So, we do have an entire population of students. We have about 1,100 students in each grade. So maybe about 6,000 students who have not yet had the opportunity to be vaccinated. So, we do need to be thinking about mitigation, layering, as families will recall from last year if you were with us last year. If you're new this year, welcome, you're going to love it. But we have this layered approach to mitigation where it's air quality and ventilation, hand, sanitation, distancing. We're going to be able to look a little bit more like a traditional classroom, this year with three feet between desks instead of six. So just continuing to layer on those mitigation strategies is going to be a huge piece, because not all of our students have been vaccinated and also, I want to honor

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families who have chosen not to vaccinate. So, we want to know that we do hear you and our staff. So, the more students who can be vaccinated, the better protected, even your families can be.

Dr. Steven Cook: So, you kind of went into my next question. Will we require vaccines of those students that are eligible to be vaccinated?

Julianne Repman: We will not require vaccines. That is not a strategy that we're going to take on, we believe in. Just like we believe in parent choice of where you like to educate your students, we believe in parent choice around the vaccine. That's not to say that we're going to minimize what we believe, and our partners at the health authority and CDC in order to part of education, say, around the importance of vaccines. But absolutely not planning to have any kind of requirement for that.

Dr. Steven Cook: There's some pretty explicit guidelines. So I want to wait before I moved on to this next thing. I think what you just said is really, really important. I kind of emphasize that we aren't interested in requiring vaccines. But there is some information that is recently come out that might be incentivizing vaccines because of what it does with regards to quarantining. There is a completely different conversation to be had on whether or not a student is going to have to quarantine based on whether or not they're vaccinated. So that's yet to be discussed at a further level. So thank you for sharing that with us. I think there's something I want to go back to with ODE's guidance. They're not asking us to do this by ourselves, are they? What's their expectation and how are they pointing us? So that we're making decisions not in isolation or in a silo?

Julianne Repman: So, they're continuing to build upon our partnerships with the local health authority. So, for us, that's Deschutes County Public Health, an incredible team of medical practitioners that are on that team, prevention folks, epidemiologists, just a really dynamic team. We have had the opportunity to sit down and speak with them. We work with Dr. George Conway. So that team is continuing to be very active. We are the experts when it comes to education and delivery of education. They are the experts when it comes to public health. We really want to sow that together and have this be one big piece of fabric. We also have medical professionals that we listen to. We've heard from some parents and families, staff, students. So, it really is a community conversation to that degree. But really, we want to be in concert with our local health authority. So that they've been at the table we're going to continue to need to have them at the table as we go on.

Dr. Steven Cook: We continue to generate lots and lots of questions, that as we build this operational plan for them to lean in on. They've been excellent partners for us with us in the generation of that. So what's next? We've got some-- actually, before we go into what's next, I might remind our listeners that as of the time that we're pushing this podcast out, we're seeing just around the corner the beginning of summer school. As we go towards that, I think we have about a week before summer school hits. Can we remind our listeners we had to propose to our board, the guidelines for how we intended to operate summer school? Actually, we did that before we had all of the input that we recently got from ODE, OHA, and CDC. So, can you share with our listeners the kind of parameters that we're going to use for summer school?

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Julianne Repman: Sure. So, summer school will have all of those layers that we talked about around mitigation, the healthy environments for students' good ventilation. One of the big pieces, I think people really want to know right now is well, number one, obviously, we're not requiring vaccines. So, thank you for that. The other one is around masking. So, let's talk about masking. So, for summer school we are strongly advising our students in Grade 6 through 12, to wear masks indoors. So that is very consistent with what we did last year. What we will not be asking them to do is mask up outside. If you're outside, no problem, you don't need to be wearing a mask. Now when you go to grades kindergarten through 5th Grade, we are going to continue to maintain the requirement for masking indoors. So very much like our students are used to doing also what they're doing at many camps if they're indoor, if not all. Again, outside no requirement for those masks. That is based on the science and information we're getting from the CDC. The other thing is you'll notice our staff. We're going to strongly advise that they wear masks when they're indoors, but that's not going to be a requirement for us.

Dr. Steven Cook: So I want to clarify that one more time. So when we say strongly advising, that also means not required?

Julianne Repman: Absolutely.

Dr. Steven Cook: When we say required, that means required?

Julianne Repman: Yes. Required is a hard and fast rule line in the sand. Strongly advised is we're going to let you make the decision for your family and what's best for you. If you have someone at home, perhaps that is compromised. You want your child to wear a mask at school, that's terrific. At summer school, they can do that if they're in Grade 6 through 12. But we're just going to strongly recommend it.

Dr. Steven Cook: So at this point, we've only made that decision for summer school. We're going to continue to dialogue with our local health officials. We will present an operational plan to our board. Let's talk about that timeline.

Julianne Repman: Sure, August 10th. That's going to be a board meeting that folks are going to want to tune into. If you can't watch the whole thing, be sure to watch the recap that Dr. Cook does – Steve. It's pretty phenomenal. But on August 10th, we will have a plan in place that will really help to inform the families for the fall. So it will answer these questions around distancing and cleaning protocols and masking. So even maybe a family might want to know is my student going to eat lunch in the classroom this year? Or will they be in the cafeteria? So, we'll be able to bring some of that to you. Then on August 23rd, we will deliver this entire plan to the Department of Education. We'll have it online on the 23rd, if not sooner. And that will all be available for families and we'll keep communicating with families through this podcast and then also some more direct communication as soon as this information becomes available as well.

Dr. Steven Cook: So is August 10th – is that the public unveiling of this? When it's being presented to the board? Does the board have any authority over this plan? What is their role in this whole process?

Julianne Repman: The board is a partner in this absolutely. They represent you our community members. We're going to present this to the board. The board will have time to really digest that. If they see something that could be a fatal flaw, they will certainly share that with us. But you can anticipate that on the 10th or perhaps right after if there's some tweaking to do. We'll have a plan that will really inform what it's going to look like in the fall.

Dr. Steven Cook: So is that the only day that the board could hear from the public on this stuff, or is there anything else going on that that our community might need to be reminded of?

Julianne Repman: I love that question, Dr. Cook. If you are a fisherman, I would have just taken the bait. So that is great transition. We want to invite the community. The board is doing something pretty cool. Our board leadership called listening sessions. I would encourage you, this is your chance. Let us know from what you've heard from this podcast. Are there opportunity areas? Is there something you want us to hear about masking about vaccines, about air quality in the schools? Let us know. We love, love to hear about teaching and learning as well. Of course, that's our mission. But we know that this is something that's really on the minds of many parents as they're preparing to bring their students back to school. So we have a listening session coming up on the 29th and that is going to be a Silver Rail Elementary School, centrally located. If you want to participate in that, you can jump on our website on the school board page at 5 o'clock. It's 5 o'clock at Silver Rail Elementary School. You can jump online to sign up to speak. We'd love to have you there to listen. If you like to listen, the next opportunity to hear what the board is working on is going to be at our next business meeting. But that's a business meeting, so that's a working meeting of the board. That is later in the August at Bend High School

Dr. Steven Cook: One clarification, the school board leadership listening session, the doors will open at 5:00. Comments will actually start at 5:30. So our mistake on that. I was cueing Julianne.

Julianne Repman: He was trying to give me a signal.

Dr. Steven Cook: Then on August 10th. Now that meeting is not at the board meeting site, typically downtown on Wall Street. That's actually going to be held where>

Julianne Repman: Bend High School. So again, the community, we appreciate the volume of interest in our public meetings. Now that we're out of COVID, and we can actually have eyeball to eyeball conversations, our board of directors thought that it was truly a great idea to move to a bigger location so that we can accommodate everyone. So thank you to those of you who sweated it out with us that didn't make it upstairs that watched our meeting from our lobby this month in July. We look forward to seeing you in a comfortable chair at Bend High School in August.

Dr. Steven Cook: Yes. I think it's important for people to know it's exciting that we're re-engaging our community in this manner. It was a high-energy meeting, with lots and lots of passion, lots of energy around this conversation. There are so many

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people that have such powerful viewpoints. A board meeting is expected to be doing the work of the board, which is how do we best run the schools. We want to do that in a public venue. We want to make sure that it's available to the public. But it's also important to remember that a board meeting isn't a public listening session. It is a meeting of the board. So what we're excited about is expanding opportunities for our board to engage in the public with this listening session. I think this first one we're doing on the 29th, we kind of had a lot of discussion with board leadership. Those two Marcus and Melissa are going to be glad to host that and we'll have other board members there as well. I will be there. The superintendent will be there. I think it's important to note. This isn't really-- we're not going to be doing a lot of dialogue. This is about the community's opportunity to give feedback to the board. We'll do this as often as we warrant that it's necessary because we're trying to hear the voice of our community. So we'll see how this goes. I think there's a lot of interest from this board to hear from the public. I think there's a lot of excitement to be back in person, back listening to people, giving them an opportunity for public comment for that conversation to happen. Additionally, separate from the board meetings, I'm also very much looking forward to my role as superintendent going out into the public and just doing conversations with our constituents, whether it's listening sessions or just fireside chats. Whatever you want to call them, but just getting engaged with the community. So that feedback loop is available and being accessed often by our community.

Julianne Repman: Steven, I just want to piggyback that. I think that's a big thing that you're bringing to this role, and I thank you. You're in week three I believe right now? So I really want to commend you for that and thank you. Thank you for engaging the community. Can you tell people if they have a group that they might want you to speak out too? How they might ask for your time?

Dr. Steven Cook: Absolutely. I've got a little bit of a roadshow. I'm glad to go anywhere in our district and do that. So all you have to do is reach out to my executive assistant Marta Broberg Let's see if I do this number after three weeks, do I have a number of memorized 541-355-1001. Call her or email her directly. We will get something set up. I'm excited to integrate into this community and get to know folks and to try to just have that access point for both myself, as I learn more and more about Bend-La Pine Schools, about all of our community, about the Sunriver area, about La Pine, about all of it. It's a large, diverse community with lots and lots of things that we need to attend to. I'm excited about those opportunities as we get prepared to start thinking about the beginning of the school year again.

Dr. Steven Cook: All right, folks, I think that's it for today. I want to thank my guest, Julianne Repman for providing just excellent insight on the new guidelines as they've come from the Oregon Department of Education. Remember, this is a new podcast in Bend-La Pine Schools. If you're pleased with the work we're doing on these podcasts, please remember to share them on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Next week, we'll be bringing in our local health expert. We're excited to have Tammy Pike on the show. She's our lead nurse. She's going to help us know and understand some of the roles of what we are going to have to deal with as we transition out of last year's kind of world as the COVID pandemic shook the country into how do we start thinking about what's next? So she's going to have a lot of conversations to share with us. I'm excited to have that with her. Also, if there are other topics you like

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us to tackle, please send us a note, please let us know your thoughts were open to the feedback. Thanks for listening to the Supe's On podcast. Please remember to always support public education.

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