

January 7, 2021

Families,

I begin this letter wishing each of you and your families a happy new year. While each year brings its joys and challenges, it is my sincere hope that in 2021 you experience more of the former and less of the latter.

As I shared over the break, on December 23 Governor Brown sent a letter to ODE and OHA directing them to prepare Oregon schools to return to in-person instruction, to the extent possible, by February 15 and changed school districts' re-opening metrics from **mandatory** to **advisory**. Below is a portion of the letter:

*“From the beginning of this pandemic, Oregon has been guided by data and science and taken a cautious approach. We’ve looked to our health experts and the experience of other states to guide our actions. It has become clear that when community spread is reduced and schools follow required health and safety protocols, there is low risk of transmission and illness when students resume in-person instruction. The experience of Oregon schools that have operated in person over the last many months while adhering to the [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#) (RSSL) guidance has demonstrated this fact — in addition to communities across the country that have returned children to the classroom. **The long-term benefits of both heading off an emerging mental health crisis for our children and youth, and addressing the academic challenges that are becoming prevalent for far too many students in the absence of in-person learning, now far outweigh the short-term risk (emphasis added).**” – Governor Kate Brown*

Over the last week, district leaders have met with our school board leaders, certified, classified and confidential associations, administrators, supervisors, and Deschutes County Public Health staff. We have also heard from hundreds of families.

Our goal has been to implement a phased-in schedule, designed for the safe return to in-person instruction for all students by the start of second semester, February 8. By that date, K-3 students will be in-person daily and students in grades 4-12 will be in-person two days each week on a hybrid schedule, which is the maximum we can accommodate based on physical distancing and capacity constraints set by the state.

[Please click HERE to download the Return to In-Person Instruction Phase-In Plan for K-12](#)

This plan to reopen schools is based on current state and public health guidance and levels of COVID-19 within our community. While we have developed a phased-in plan for all students K-12 to return to in-person learning, we are prepared to delay the return of older students, if necessary. We need the support of our entire community as changes, including increased community spread, would mean a need to reassess and potentially change our plans.

Application of, and adherence to, the [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#) (RSSL) requirements has been and will remain a district priority as we move forward. We are committed to do all that we can to mitigate risk for both students and staff, while acknowledging the need to return students to our classrooms and schools. We agree with Oregon’s Deputy Superintendent Colt Gill’s assessment: “It is critical that this shift is not confused with any release from other requirements of schools and districts in RSSL guidance. The health and safety protocols, expectations for maintaining an operational blueprint, and all other guidance remains active and is required.”

We will continue to work with our local and state public health authorities and the Bend-La Pine Schools’ health advisory team to ensure we have the data we need to operate safely and meet the state’s *Ready Schools Safe Learners* guidance. Additionally, we will discuss our plan in greater detail, in public session, during our Tuesday Board meeting. You can watch it on the board’s [YouTube channel](#).

We have been preparing for your students' return to in-person learning for months and are eager for students to return to our classrooms. To learn about your school's safety plan and gain a broad understanding of the protocols in place, school-by-school, please check out our [School Safety Checklists](#).

For families with students who are not yet ready to return to the classroom, we encourage enrollment in Bend-La Pine Schools Online (BLPO). This program, established more than ten years ago, provides self-guided online learning for free for any student in the district. [Click here](#) for more information about Bend-La Pine Schools Online or call 541-355-1052. Families who wish to enroll students in Bend-La Pine Schools Online should do so by **Jan. 15 (for grades K-5) and Feb. 8 (for grades 6-12)**. If families enroll in Bend-La Pine Schools Online, they may be able to transition back to a brick-and-mortar school where space is available in the future.

Current Bend-La Pine Schools Online families will receive an additional follow up communication to gather their plans for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year. Bend-La Pine Schools Online families are welcome to transition to their neighborhood schools as the district rolls out in-person learning. K-5 families will be asked to share their intentions by January 15.

It is critical that every family does their part to keep our students and staff safe and keep our schools open. Masks are a critical part of the safety plan, so please take a moment to practice with your children so they understand how to wear a mask correctly and consistently before heading to school. Please join our staff and make a commitment to wear masks, wash and sanitize hands often, maintain physical distancing with anyone outside of your household and follow guidelines regarding gathering. Thank you for helping to minimize spread, protect our students and staff, and keep our schools open.

We appreciate your continued support as we navigate these ever-changing times. I am looking forward to bringing our students and staff back to the classroom and continuing to celebrate your perseverance and commitment to education.

Sincerely,

Lora Nordquist, Interim Superintendent

NOTE: I am sure that many of you have questions from potential impacts from post-holiday case spikes to testing and contact tracing plans to options for those who want to continue to learn at home. We will try to answer some of these below, and will continue to add others on our [FAQ section](#) on the district website.

RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION FAQs

Will families be able to continue with CDL if they don't want to return for in-person instruction?

We understand some families' desire to maintain their connections with their home schools, even if their students don't plan to return for in-person instruction. However, we have concerns about the instructional burden placed on teachers and/or the lack of quality instruction provided if we simply placed a WebEx camera in a live classroom. That is why the district is offering [Bend-La Pine Schools Online](#) as the option for families who don't want their students to return. It is a well-established program designed for online instruction, with support from local teachers.

In addition to the 27 teaching positions the district has added this year to support small K-3 classes and Bend-La Pine Schools Online, we are prepared to add staffing to Bend-La Pine Schools Online, if necessary, to accommodate new demand based on the return to in-person instruction.

Will families enrolled in Bend-La Pine Schools Online be allowed to transition to in-person instruction?

Students who are currently enrolled in Bend-La Pine Schools Online may opt to return to their neighborhood/home school. Families of students in grades K-5 must let their neighborhood school know about their intention to return by **January 15, 2021** by [completing this form](#) (this is because of neighborhood schools' possible capacity limits.)

We have previously seen post-holiday spikes in case rates. Is the time right to transition back to more in-person learning?

This is why we're waiting until January 19 to begin transitioning to in-person instruction and why we are beginning with our youngest learners (grades K-3). Our middle and high school students won't start attending in-person hybrid until February 8.

Bend-La Pine Schools has successfully hosted limited in-person instruction since October, serving approximately 1,800 students, about 10% of our total student population.

Sisters School District and Crook County School District, both within 30 minutes of our district boundaries, have successfully hosted in-person instruction since September.

Once schools open, what if they have to shut down because of an outbreak or quarantine?

There is potential this will occur at some schools or in some classrooms. Affected cohorts will be contacted by phone or email with instructions. Sample messages can be found in the [COVID-19 Communications document](#).

In some cases, staff and students may be sent home, or stay home, while contact-tracing takes place. This can take place with little notice and is case dependent.

Families will need to remain flexible about child care, should a school, cohort, or classroom be required to temporarily close and families should have a back-up plan in case their student(s) are unable to attend in person as planned.

All our students have iPads to support short-term distance learning, if necessary.

What about testing and contact tracing?

Bend-La Pine Schools employs 21 Registered Nurses who help oversee contact tracing, training and other COVID-19 interventions and responses.

The district's nursing team has completed hundreds of case investigations and has been successfully contact tracing for several months. This experience has helped to develop systems that we believe can slow the transmission of COVID-19 at our worksites.

We are hiring five health aides to assist nurses with tasks associated with COVID-19 safety in schools.

Symptomatic students and staff will continue to follow the protocols for quarantine and other measures, per the [Bend-La Pine Schools COVID-19 Communications Guide](#).

How are schools preparing for students to return?

A return to in-person instruction in our school buildings means implementing new procedures and protocols to keep our students, staff and visitors as healthy and safe as possible.

Masks: All students and staff will be required to wear masks while on school properties with few exceptions.

Hand-Washing: Handwashing or use of hand sanitizer upon entry to the building is required for all. Hand washing is also required: after restroom use, prior to/after eating, when hands are soiled, after recess, before and after touching shared equipment, etc. Handwashing lessons will be provided at the elementary level.

Classrooms: Classrooms will be at approximately 50% capacity to allow for physical distancing. There will be 35 square feet of space per person (including the teacher) when determining room capacity.

Transitions: We will stagger classes of students in hallways to limit numbers in hallways at any time; we will create one-way traffic patterns in hallways as allowable to the extent possible.

Meals: Appropriate physical distancing in cafeterias and use of alternative spaces at secondary level. Tables and surfaces will be sanitized between use according to facilities sanitization guidelines. Grab and go meals will be available for all students.

Recess: Schools will stagger recess to limit the number of students together outside. Schools will designate playground and shared equipment solely for the use of one cohort at a time. School staff will design recess activities that allow for physical distancing and maintenance of stable cohorts. All outdoor equipment will be cleaned between cohorts.

Restrooms: Each school will assign restrooms, classrooms, or other activity areas for the exclusive use of one or a small number of stable cohorts rather than the entire on-campus population.

Transportation: We have adjusted routes and school start times in order to reduce the number of students on each bus.

Cleaning/Sanitizing/Disinfecting: Surfaces frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles, desks, phones, light switches, computers and faucets will be cleaned and disinfected at least daily. Our custodial and facilities staff will be using a combination of cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting to keep our schools clean and safe. All staff will perform regular cleaning of their spaces (using approved district cleaning agents) between multiple student or staff uses of their space.

Ventilation: Buildings will maximize fresh outdoor air and minimize indoor air recirculation. Allowing fresh air into a room dilutes and displaces airborne particles, which may decrease virus transmission. Bend-La Pine Schools will operate ventilation systems properly and/or increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, and through other methods.