



Knappa School District No. 4
William Fritz Superintendent

August 18, 2021

Kate Brown, Governor, State of Oregon
Patrick Allen, Director, Oregon Health Authority
Colt Gill, Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Oregon

Dear Governor Brown, Director Allen, and Deputy Superintendent Gill:

As the collective School Board of the Knappa School District, we respectfully request that 2021-22 protocols for safety in statewide schools be returned to local decision making.

Our school district is located in Clatsop County, along the Columbia River, about 12 miles from Astoria, Oregon. Like all districts in the state, we have unique needs and conditions that make *one size fits all* safety protocols inappropriate. As an example, last year, we were one of the few districts in the State of Oregon that opened the 2020-21 school year with in-person instruction for students in grades kindergarten through third grade. We were able to conduct school safely all year, without any examples of COVID spread within our schools. However, state mandates caused a pause in school for these youngest students in October when there was a COVID outbreak in a seafood plant 20 miles from our school district. To our knowledge, no workers at the plant live in the Knappa area and there was no direct risk of infection in our community due to the outbreak, yet the requirements at that point in time caused us to close school, nonetheless. Another example of state mandates that did not make sense at the local level was the way the "rural schools" requirements were set up. The school size condition included our students who were fully in our online school, even though they never were present on our campus. This caused us to operate for several months with students in-person in our elementary and high school, while our fourth through eighth grade students were limited to instruction for two hours per day. Our School Board and Superintendent had a difficult time justifying why our youngest and oldest students could be present for a lengthy day and the students in the middle grades couldn't. There was no explainable health reason for these requirements. The state didn't consider how the rules that made sense in Salem would impact local students. These are examples of why statewide rules don't work for all districts, and justify a need for local decision making.

While we understand that COVID cases are increasing once again with the Delta variant, we know that case counts and safety needs will vary greatly in Oregon. Case counts, classroom loads, class sizes, availability of quality ventilation, means of access and egress from classrooms, and community vaccination levels are different from community


to community and decisions about safety can best be made by those who know all of these conditions best - the local district.

The decision to provide local control for all COVID-related safety elements was made in June and then revoked in August. When the ability was granted to have local choice, our superintendent, staff, and community embarked on a journey to ensure safety in our schools while offering the best possible education. The shift to remove local control was confusing to many in the community we represent, and fuels anger in those who already are skeptical of public education.


As a School Board and Superintendent, we respectfully request that the Oregon Health Authority, Governor, and Department of Education restore local decision making regarding all safety protocols at the earliest possible juncture. If this is not possible at this time, which we understand based on the case counts, we suggest at the very least, that a set of metrics be determined and communicated to provide hope for communities that this will come at some point in the future.

Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times, your willingness to read this communication and considering our requests.

Sincerely,



Ed Johnson, Chair


Cullen Bangs, Vice-Chair


Michelle Finn, Director


Christa Jasper, Director


Will Isom, Director


William Fritz, Ph.D., Superintendent

Board of Directors and Superintendent for Knappa School District #4
Astoria, Oregon