

January 19, 2022

Dear Knappa Community:

I come to you this week with a heavy heart. On Sunday, we learned of the loss of Doug Graham Sr.'s life. Doug is loved by many in the Knappa Community, specifically employees Lisa Graham (teacher) and Jackie Whitten (bus driver and program assistant), his wife and step-daughter, respectively. Our hearts and prayers go out to their family in this time of loss.

In the wake of the Dr. Martin Luther King Holiday (which I hope you enjoyed), I have been reflecting on some of the tensions that exist within our Knappa community right now. Some people are tired of mandates. Others are tired of people who are tired of mandates, and remain concerned about the safety of our children, employees, and neighbors. As a school district, we serve all students, and try to remain respectful of all opinions to the best of our ability. Sometimes, however, we miss and for the most part we do pretty well at this. What concerns me is the level of anger I am seeing from some community members when they disagree with something. This is sometimes exhibited toward our teachers, our administrators, our support personnel, and our neighbors. Please know that Knappa School District employees (all of them) care deeply about the students and the community where we serve. We got into this work to make a difference and we want what is best for children. Currently, we remain under state orders to follow safety protocols. Some people might not like those. Our employees feel stuck between an obligation to follow the law and those who disagree with the law. This is not a comfortable position to be in, and we ask that you encourage your students to show cooperation with their teachers, and we remind you that if you do not like something going on, we love to hear it, but please communicate with kindness. Additionally, I advise that people address concerns (or kudos) with people who can make changes. Knappa School District doesn't make mask rules; those come from the state. If you like or dislike mandates like this, please feel free to contact those at the Oregon Department of Education or Oregon Health

Authority. Oddly, there seems to be a trend toward local advocacy at a time when local officials have no decision making authority. I respectfully request that our community communicates with respect, and in a way that models positive civil discourse like that the Dr. King demonstrated in an earlier era.

Please also know that when concerns arise, the District needs to be deliberate in the way they are handled. As a public agency, there are many steps that need to be taken to ensure a fair investigation, including review of details of the situation, Board policy, working with Employee Associations, and considering legal matters. This takes time and reflection to ensure that actions are fair and appropriate. Additionally, if adverse employment action is considered, it is not a matter of public record in Oregon. Employees have a right to privacy around those matters.

As you likely know, we have a limited number of bus drivers and if one is out we have to be flexible. Yesterday morning was an example of this. We had to delay one route to get the students to school. We ask you to recognize that we are doing everything we can to keep students in school. We also ask you to be understanding in this time of short staffing. Districts around us have had to shut down school on occasion to address staffing shortages, St. Helen's last Friday being the most recent example. We are doing everything we can to keep things running.

The COVID case for the county doubled again this week with a record high 1,579.01 cases per 100,000 (compared with 892.15 last week). We have five students and one staff member out right now testing positive and none in quarantine.

We thank you for your ongoing support for our community's children and for caring about our schools.

Warm regards,

Bill Fritz, Ph.D.

Superintendent

Knappa School District #4