



January 21, 2021

Dear PHSD Family, Staff, and Community,

Yesterday, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) announced some changes that impact our ability to bring back students for in-person instruction. We wanted to share the very latest information with you.

What did ODE change?

The State has changed the advisory health metrics. Under the previous health metrics, positive COVID-19 cases in Lane County had to drop below 100 per 100,000 residents (during the previous two-week period) to begin in-person instruction. Now, ODE will use new advisory metrics, based on Harvard Global Health Institute guidelines:

- If over 350 cases per 100,000 (during the previous two-week period): No in-person instruction
- If 200 - 350 cases per 100,000 (during the previous two-week period): Focus on elementary in-person instruction
- If 50 - 199 cases per 100,000 (during the previous two-week period): Expand in-person instruction beyond elementary
- If under 50 cases per 100,000 (during the previous two-week period): All in-person instruction

As of this writing, the [current case count](#) in Lane County is 292 and the previous week 284.

What did ODE not change?

- ODE did NOT change the mandatory social distancing requirement as described in the [Ready School Safe Learners](#) guidance. That means that each student still must have a “space bubble” of 35 square feet.
- ODE did NOT change the mandatory cohort requirement. That means that a student may not have contact with more than 100 people per week. This requirement is one of our biggest barriers to resuming in-person instruction for our middle and high school students. However, it’s important to note that PHSD is actively lobbying ODE, OHA and Lane Co. Health Department to revise the cohort number to allow our secondary schools more flexibility while still ensuring safety.

What else do we know?

- The Governor has announced that educators will begin to receive the vaccine, starting on January 25. The District is collaborating with the Lane Educational Service District, Lane Co. Health Department and local health providers on how to roll out those vaccines to our employees as quickly and efficiently as possible. Admittedly, this situation is very fluid.

Addressing some misconceptions

- Understandably, some parents are frustrated when they see other school districts around the country open to in-person instruction when it appears that PHSD is not. The fact of the matter is we have been offering on-site education for K-3 under the exception clause and LIPI for grades 4-12. The other

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Commitment, Excellence, Community

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districts are now just catching up to where we have been since September. It's important to recognize that Oregon has more stringent **mandatory** safety protocols in place than do other states. It's not an apples-to-apples comparison.

- One issue that has been underreported centers around liability concerns. If a school district elects to begin in-person instruction without meeting the advisory health metrics, the district will no longer have the liability protection that was recently extended by the Oregon Legislature. If anyone were to become sick (or worse) from COVID-19, a district could face expensive lawsuits. Most districts, including ours, cannot afford to take on that level of risk. Any legal settlements would directly impact future funding for students.

Some good news

- Under the new metrics we have the flexibility to have grade 4-5 on-site for learning as we have had for grades K-3. The elementary staff is working to develop a schedule to bring more students back starting sometime in February.
- PHSD has had zero positive cases on campus to date. We will continue to lobby ODE/OHA and the Lane Co. Health Department to allow grades 6-12 more on-site leaning opportunities beyond the current LIPI format. Our intention would be to bring more students back starting sometime in February.

District leadership just learned of these changes (and many others) within the last few days. Please allow our teams an opportunity to thoughtfully consider the latest guidance from ODE. We hope to have more information and timelines for you in the coming days.

For additional information regarding these updates, ODE Director Colt Gill has prepared a [video](#) explaining the Ready Schools, Safe Learners updates as of January 19, 2021.

Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully:

Scott Linenberger

Superintendent

Pleasant Hill School District