

ASHLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JACKSON COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT #5

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Superintendent

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To: ODE Director Colt Gill
CC: Governor Kate Brown

October 27, 2020

Dear Director Gill,

The Ashland School Board, at its meeting on October 26, 2020, discussed at length the complexities of both distance learning and in-person instruction during this pandemic. We have been keeping abreast of the latest data and information regarding Covid-19; its impact and spread among varying ages; and the weekly infection rates, both county-wide and here in Ashland.

We understand that eliminating risk entirely – whether for Covid, field trips, or chemistry labs – is an impossible task. In every case, we strive to mitigate risks and strike a balance for the overall well-being of students, staff, and our entire community. We also realize that every school district in Oregon is unique and that it is the local school board's responsibility to articulate the values and priorities of their communities into policy and governance.

For these reasons, we urge you to refine and revise the ODE metrics for in-person education to reflect the following:

First, finding a path to return our K-3 students to the classroom should be the priority for any future framework. Statistically, this age group is far less likely to become severely ill with Covid and far less likely than older kids to effectively transmit it to others. Again, we realize that "low-risk" is not "no-risk"; however, these are the students (and parents) who are most in need of in-person instruction. These are also the students who have the most to lose with months-upon-months of distance learning. Each week, more data emerges and reinforces what schools are seeing world-wide: *we can bring younger kids back to school with minimal risk to themselves, their teachers, or the community.*

Second, we urge you to allow a greater degree of local control in making these decisions. While the numbers in Jackson County as a whole are not promising, a closer look at the data reveals that Ashland in particular is faring far better than our neighbors. We would like the ability to work with our local health authorities to make decisions around Covid that reflect the reality of *our* community, rather than the arbitrary boundaries of Jackson County.

We understand that these decisions are not easy and seldom popular. However, we were elected by our community to advocate for students and to make hard decisions when necessary for their well-being. We urge you to include our ideas above in any revised ODE guidance and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Eva Skuratowicz, Chair, Ashland School Board
Victor Chang, Vice-chair, Ashland School Board
Jim Westrick, Director, Ashland School Board
Tomas Monter-Rangel, Director, Ashland School Board