

Dear House Education Committee and Representative Leon,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on Parent, Student, and Educator Response to Distance Learning. My name is Jim Hanson and I am the school psychologist at Lincoln High School in Portland Public Schools. I am a member of the Portland Association of Teachers and the Oregon and National Association of School Psychologists. I've been asked to share with you some of my observations, concerns, and recommendations regarding distance learning in education.

Distance learning affects issues of equity, learning, and emotion. John Kelly, our former National Association of School Psychologists president, was recently interviewed by Anderson Cooper. Dr. Kelly reminded us that most students adapt to the changes in education caused by COVID-19. However, many students will find the shift to online learning very stressful, and there will be some students who are profoundly affected. In a recent survey, the US Census Bureau estimated that about one-third of the adults in the USA are currently experiencing stressors severe enough to warrant diagnoses of an anxiety disorder or depression, or both. Studies of school-age students and their responses are underway. Parents, teachers, and school specialists are working diligently to maintain the important relationships they have with students in order to mitigate effects. Through schools' Multi-Tiered System of Supports, or MTSS, schools provide assistance to all students, more targeted assistance to some students, and significant supports to those students who are profoundly affected. For example, after school closures, Lincoln High School continued its Acceptance and Commitment Therapy skills classes and our Comprehensive School-Based Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (CSB-DBT) program. Lincoln went virtual with appropriate telehealth contracts provided by Portland Public Schools. Gathered just yesterday, our DBT data results should give this Committee and all Oregonians hope. Students in our CSB-DBT program made statistically significant decreases in their levels of anxiety and depression. These significant decreases occurred during the pandemic. In their written reflections, students described the skills they learned online that helped them cope with the thoughts, feelings, and urges they felt in response to Coronavirus and the school closures. I would urge this committee to advocate and provide for continued education funding for mental health services. These services are best provided by school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses. As John Kelly says, anything we can do now will help to mitigate damaging effects later on.

As far as our second issue, equity in access to online learning has not been established, this despite the heroic efforts of Portland Public Schools and other school districts. In addition to providing families with food and other tangibles to meet their physical needs, school districts distribute iPads, Chromebooks and other hardware necessary for students to participate online. School districts have made arrangements with internet providers to enable students to join their online classes. These efforts must continue to be supported by the Oregon Legislature and our business community. Despite these herculean efforts, major issues remain in addressing equity and insuring quality learning opportunities for all students.

Another equity issue concerns students with disabilities. Portland Public Schools has followed ODE guidance in assuring continued assessment and intervention for students with disabilities. For example, special education teams review students Individualized Education Programs or IEPs to determine if adjustments need to be made for distance learning. PPS has attempted to make sure that assessments and reassessments for special education eligibility occur. Discussions are happening in how to monitor younger students' who are at risk for dyslexia and other educational disabilities. Specialists are researching how to provide valid assessments online or with minimal contact risk. After students are assessed, Speech & Language Pathologists, School Psychologists, and other specialists do their best to

provide services online. Nevertheless, some of our most educationally vulnerable students are not receiving the screening, assessment or services they need to make adequate academic progress. Budget cuts for special education could make further disproportionate impacts on our most vulnerable students.

Finally, despite teachers' dedication and creativity in quickly transitioning to online learning, the quality and quantity of teaching is simply not the same. Many of the evidence-based classroom teaching skills in which teachers are trained are simply not translatable. Teachers are learning new pedagogical skills to enhance virtual learning, yet we are learning to pilot as we are flying the plane. We are affected, and we need your support. Our major concern is our students. Many students are struggling. Students report experiencing "Zoom fatigue," or the mental and physical challenge of staying alert and focused when all they have in front of them is a screen for many hours. It's estimated that about one-fifth to one-tenth of students may not make sufficient progress to pass virtual classes, despite the sacrificed academic content, Pass/Fail grading, and lowered production demand. We need your assistance in helping school districts train us in best practices for online learning.

Despite these challenges, school districts and school personnel continue to selflessly serve the needs of our students and families. In the end, it is the safety of our teachers and our students that must remain the top priority of this Legislature and the Department of Education. At a recent Oregon Association of Education and ODE virtual summit, our teacher voices resounded with a dedication to serving our students, and an acknowledgement that like physicians, our first duty is to do no harm. The dangers of COVID-19 transmission at school cannot be underestimated, and we cannot teach children if they are sick and dying. We cannot teach children if we are sick and dying. In addition to providing the funding and training necessary to continue and improve virtual learning, and despite the drawbacks of an online educational system, I would urge the Committee to put the health and safety of our students first, and not move precipitously or without caution to re-open schools prematurely.

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