

Below is my testimony for the state board. There are some recommended "to do" items that go beyond ODE.

As it will be essential to continue distance learning next year, we need to make sure that parents are able to stay at home with children and that they can receive unemployment benefits to support this.

Over the summer, we need a huge effort to get digital devices into the hands of all students and provide connectivity.

Years ago, when the Internet was just coming into schools, Governor Goldschmidt spoke at a summit in Portland about this new technology. He offered the opportunity for questions. I was the first. I asked. "Governor, we have established a network connection for every tavern in this state to the lottery, how can we establish a network connection for every school?" There was thunderous applause. For some time I was known as "the woman who asked the question."

The state's top technology guru said at his next staff meeting that this was their charge. This resulted in rebidding their telecom contract to combine the connection costs to serve the lottery with connections also for schools.

Oregon can do this. We can provide connectivity for every student - in their home!!! This has to be done.

We have to tackle the homeless families and homeless teens situation. This should have been done before. It is imperative now. These youth will be totally blocked from effective learning unless their lives are more secure. What will it take? Often this will require first, last, and security. How can this be provided? Support in getting on unemployment and/or a job must be provided? Services must be available to support underlying mental health concerns.

Absolutely there must be an order from the Governor requiring masks to be worn in every school. This should not be a battle that principals need to take on with parents or students.

National reports indicate that about 1 in 4 students were AWOL from learning. I know that some of the decisions that Oregon schools and teachers made contributed to this.

Most significantly, a national report indicated that teachers favorite instruction approach was live lectures over a digital gathering technology like Zoom.

This approach is discriminatory. It presumes all students have access and can attend at a specific point in time. This approach falls well behind ODEs supposed commitment to equity.

The students who were left out because of these discriminatory instruction practices will be the hardest ones to regain a connection with their schools. They were deserted at a time when they needed the school community the most. They know that their peers were able to retain connections and have fun in these digital groups and that they were not considered important. It was okay to have left them out.

I begged ODE and COSA to ban live digital gatherings because of this profoundly discriminatory and hurtful outcome. I don't think they listened to me. Some very significant remediation efforts will have to occur to address the concerns of these students.

A thorough analysis of instructional approaches taken by Oregon teachers with a true “equity lens” must be taken.

ODEs Distance Learning plan required that districts/schools figure out how they were going to achieve academic outcomes. There was already ample evidence that the impact of trauma on students abilities to achieve such outcomes was going to be a significant concern. While the guidelines suggested the importance of emotional concerns, there was no requirement for a plan.

The evidence of the concerns of trauma has only increased. It is IMPERATIVE that schools and districts place the highest priority on addressing the emotional concerns of students and their families. These plans must be developed in partnership with local community mental health, as well as organizations like FACT and the Oregon Family Support Network.

It is also important to assess the degree to which cyberbullying is occurring. This may be somewhat difficult to do. The vast majority of students who are being cyberbullied (or bullied) do not ask for help.

Oregon has resisted efforts to require schools to be truly responsive to the concerns of cyberbullying since 2007 when the legislature enacted a stupid cyberbullying provision that only applies in the school environment. So Oregon principals may think that they can simply avoid any reports of cyberbullying that are occurring in other platforms. If they understood the actual legal standards they would know that they do have authority over these situations.

We need to get kids reading - throughout the summer. This is the best thing we could do to keep them on track academically. Also math worksheets.

Please look at the pandemic education article I wrote that US News and World Report published: <https://www.usnews.com/topics/author/nancy-willard>

An Oregon Reads program could be quickly put together and launched right after Memorial Day. Get books of their choosing into the hands of students. Talk to Goodwill and St. Vincent and Salvation Army to provide huge discounts or books for free. Perhaps also other used book stores. The governor and every member of the legislature should jump on board. Get the mayors and county commissioners involved. Have free book drop-offs at public libraries. Create some public service announcements and ask the news stations to use them. Use a social media strategy. Develop a way where young people can read aloud to seniors in nursing facilities via digital media. Create a weekly contest where young people can send pictures of them reading in fun ways - reading in a tent, reading in a cardboard fort, reading to a cat, reading via FaceTime to grandma.

If you will just listen to me on this (as compared to many other times you do not - bullying) this 20-30 minute reading approach could yield huge rewards.

We need to provide better financial support for schools and all community services. Now is the time for a wealth tax. There are people with significant financial means who have not been harmed by Covid. They have the ability to support the rest of Oregon residents who have been greatly harmed.

I hope these thoughts are helpful.

Blessings,

Nancy

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Nancy Willard

Date: May 20, 2020 at 6:42:50 PM PDT

To: StateBoard Email, Colt Gill, Craig Hawkins, Jim Green, John Larson

Subject: Moving forward with Covid education - public testimony

My computer has been malfunctioning for several weeks. I was going to have this written in an article. This is not happening. So this is lengthy public testimony written on my smartphone. Assuming my thumbs hold out.

I do not think it at all appropriate to plan for any significant level of opening of schools next fall. This essentially would be a death sentence for some staff and for family members.

The facts

There is no evidence yet of leveling of infections. Medical professionals are expressing concerns about relaxing social distancing. They also think there will be an increased wave next fall - in addition to the flu.

While young people may not have as many symptoms, there is clearly an emerging health concern for them. Those most at risk are school staff and family members of students who become infected and are not showing symptoms.

There are recognized hotspots. Nursing homes, prisons, and meat processing. If you consider the nature of these locations, it is clear that schools have an even higher potential of becoming a hot spot and contributing to significant community spread.

CDC guidelines

The CDCs watered down guidelines contain several huge "stop signs" for schools.

The guidelines ask: Are you able to screen all students and staff?

This is not possible. Young people with Covid generally do not have symptoms. Temperature checks will do no good in determining whether a student is infected. Students will not be able to effectively answer questions about conditions at home.

The CDC guidance goes on to say "Encourage social distancing through increased spacing, small groups, and limited mixing between groups, of feasible." There should be significant concerns about the use of terms such as "Encourage" and "if feasible" in this situation of risk of death.

This recommendation appears to presume that schools have an excellent ability to “encourage” responsible student behavior close to 100% of the time.

The reality is that 100% of Oregon school staff will report that this is flat impossible.

How many times in any school day do teachers have to respond to disruptive students who are attacking staff or students? How could they respond and still socially distance?

What is there to prevent these students from spitting on staff or other students? There have been reports of bus driver who died 2 weeks after a passenger spit on her. Realize that due to the traumatic distress the potential for student triggering is increased.

Bullying is a continuing concern in schools. There would certainly be incidents of Covid bullying. Hurtful students coughing or spitting on other students or staff to cause distress.

Some adults are now protesting social distancing. Some are parents whose children with being these ideas to school. How will teachers “encourage” these students to distance themselves? Will schools be able to suspend students who are not willing to socially distance? How will angry parents, who are now showing up armed in protests or shooting security personnel who ask them to wear a mask, respond if their child is disciplined for not maintaining social distance?

Social distancing on school busses would be impossible.

The CDC also suggests that schools have “flexible leave policies and practices.” For teachers to not come to work if feeling badly will require substitutes. Most substitutes are retired teachers. They are at an age where their health is most at risk.

For these reasons, it would not be at all prudent to plan for schools to open next fall.

Distance learning

This means that Oregon schools should plan for a continuation of distance learning. If incident rates do not go up, it may be possible - and certainly would be preferable - for students to come to school individually or in small groups for a short time.

Proceeding under this assumption then requires an effective evaluation of what happened this spring. Note that this spring schools were thrown into this situation with little time for planning. It is important to look at what worked and what did not work.

Equity

Lack of equity was a huge concern. The lack of equity was related to lack of digital devices and connectivity, different situations in families, and instructional approaches that were simply not equitable.

Digital devices and connectivity. Schools clearly did the best they could under the circumstances. It is imperative that a significant effort be made to get more devices and connectivity - preferably not hotspots that require a parent to drive and sit in a car for extended times.

Family situations. Some families have not had significant difficulties. Other certainly have. Remedying this will take efforts outside of the education community.

We need to make sure that any family with a child under the age of 14 has one parent who is allowed to remain at home and receives adequate unemployment. It is also necessary for a community initiative to get all families and homeless teens into secure living.

A report from Education Week revealed that the most popular approach for teachers to use for instruction was live digital gatherings. This is discriminatory. This assumes all students can attend at a set time. This instructional approach must be discouraged or forbidden.

Oregon set forth an approach that provided "differentiated instruction" for students without access. Learning packets. It must be recognized that differentiated instruction is discrimination.

Trauma

Many students and families, as well as school staff, have experienced traumatic distress. This is a profound concern. As was clearly emphasized in a NASSP webinar on trauma, students who are showing signs of traumatic distress are incapable of concentrating and learning.

I wrote about an article that just appeared in US News and World Report. <https://www.usnews.com/topics/author/nancy-willard>. Look at the Pandemic and Summer Learning article.

Next year, above all efforts focused on learning must be efforts focused on addressing trauma and increasing resilience. Resilience will have to come before efforts to teach.

As I already expressed, every district and school must develop a comprehensive plan for how they are going to address the traumatic distress of students, families, and staff. These plans should be developed in conjunction with local mental health. An outline on what should be provided in this plan would be helpful.

You will note that my second article published by US News addresses resilience. I have published one book for teens on this. I am working on a second book (if my blasted computer would get fixed) that is shorter and more precisely focused on current needs.

It will be helpful to enlist student involvement in efforts to support kindness and resilience. I am going to develop some recommended strategies to do this.

Instruction

The instruction development approach needs to be simplified. Too many teachers were reinventing the wheel. It will be far more important for them to be focused on positive connections with students rather than curriculum development.

Instead of exploratory use of lots of different platforms and approaches, identification of the best would be recommended.

As parents are important for instruction, hopefully we will be able to ensure more are at home and have financial security. The next requirement is to provide greater supports in teaching parents how to teach. This will especially be important at the younger grades.

Ideally resources can be created and distributed for parents to increase their skills in delivering instruction.

Reading. A high priority should be placed on striving to have all Oregon students read a book 20-30 minutes a day.

If this initiative could be instituted this summer this would be best. The readings should be of a book of their choosing. The Common Core focus on non fiction reading has taken the joy of reading away from children. Let's bring it back.

If communities could launch efforts to have parents donate books their children have moved on from a huge book drive like this could result in a collection of books that children could choose from. See if we could enlist the services of the public libraries in this effort. Ask Goodwill and St Vincent to provide children's books to young readers at no charge. (Put limits on numbers.)

Math. The Kahn Academy approach of a specific focus on a specific math function appears to to an approach that could be emulated. If math teachers in the state could divide up the required math functions and create quality instruction videos, then students and parents could watch the videos. Worksheets should also be provide. Then Elementary teachers and secondary math teachers could support this learning. Perhaps students could earn badges for successfully learning math functions.

Project Based Learning. <https://www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl>. https://www.definedlearning.com/blog/what-is-project-based-learning/?utm_content=buffer34402&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer <https://www.edutopia.org/project-based-learning>

Project based learning is authentic learning. PBL is far more likely to engage students at this point in time than scripted Common Core lessons. Student engagement has been a huge challenge.

Many sites can be mined for PBL lessons.

I would encourage Oregon schools to ask every teacher or even groups of teachers to create a PBL lesson. ODE could establish a website to submit these lessons to. The submission should include grade, subject, and learning objectives. Also teacher contact. This would create a searchable database of lessons.

In this way all teachers would have access to high quality lesson plans without having to generate them on their own.

Attendance at school.

If the infection rate will allow this, it would be advisable to try to arrange some time with face to face - or mask to mask - time for students. Especially students with special needs, any students who are struggling or are not participating, and younger students.

Individual face to face meetings with students and parents to establish or strengthen relationships and discuss strategies at the first of the year would be highly advised.

All social distancing would be necessary. It would help if the governor would require masks so this does not have to be a fight with parents for local schools.

Delay student start

It also likely would be helpful if actual instruction can be delayed for several weeks to make sure school staff have sufficient time to connect and coordinate.

Cancel tests

Obviously accountability achievement tests are no longer valid. If administered all they would report is level of privilege. Cancel the tests. Use the money elsewhere.

Okay. My thumbs are shot. I hope this is helpful.

Blessings,

Nancy