



November 17, 2021

TO: House Special Committee on COVID 19 Response
FR: Morgan Allen, COSA Deputy Executive Director
RE: 2021-22 school year reopening

Chair Dexter and members of the Committee, my name is Morgan Allen and I am here today on behalf of the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators and our 2500 members across Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to share some statewide perspectives on school reopening and how COVID 19 has impacted our public schools.

I want to start by acknowledging the superhuman efforts of ODE Director Colt Gill in supporting school districts, families and students during this pandemic. His unwavering leadership, and singular focus on serving our students has earned the respect of educators across Oregon.

Our members believe that the #1 priority for this school year is ensuring that our students receive in-person learning, safely, every day. That is the driving focus for this school year. Administrators want to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of staff, students, and families are showing grace and patience and doing their best to navigate a very difficult situation. We know that vaccination requirements, masking and other health and safety precautions are not supported by all Oregonians, but we are asking every Oregonian to follow and observe state and local district requirements when at school or school activities.

Before I share some of the feedback from around the state, I want to comment on recent news headlines. Last week, the Newberg School Board voted to terminate Superintendent Joe Morelock without cause. From COSA's perspective, it is not possible to justify this action based on his job performance and outcomes for students. It spotlights deeper issues and brings into focus the work we must all do to achieve racial equity and belonging for every single student in our public schools. We urge the Legislature to address these types of situations in February.

During the month of October, the COSA team hosted 11 virtual regional meetings across Oregon. More than 250 superintendents and COSA members participated and engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about public education in Oregon. One of the questions we posed to our members was: *What are the biggest leadership challenges you are facing in your district and community?*

Some of the feedback we received at these meetings was near universal across all districts, large or small, urban or rural. Consistently, COSA heard:

- Student stress, anxiety and other mental health challenges are at an all-time high
- Navigating “culture wars” is extremely challenging and distracts educators from their core mission of serving students and communities;
- School districts need support to continue to respond to the pandemic, such as tools to implement test-to-stay procedures, contact tracing, etc.

- “COVID fatigue” is becoming a challenge to continued implementation of masking and other health and safety mandates;
- Staffing shortages and workforce challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic and exist at all grade levels, including
 - Chronic shortages of substitute teachers, bus drivers, nutrition & support staff
 - An insufficient preparation pipeline for the next generation of educators
 - Difficulty recruiting and retaining staff, particularly racially and linguistically diverse staff
 - Wages not proving competitive in the current job market, and
 - Staff fatigue and stress at an all-time high
- A call for school board members to receive governance and student equity training; and
- The need for continued investments with an equity focus for historically underserved students led at the local level, including BIPOC and tribal students, emerging bilingual students, students with disabilities & students navigating poverty.

Superintendents and administrators look forward to collaborating with the Legislature as we continue to focus students in all the work that we do. We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspectives about the school year so far.