



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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August 13, 2020

Honorable Kate Brown Governor of
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, Oregon

Re: Re-Opening Private Schools

Dear Governor Brown:

We ask you to re-establish the clear and safe guidelines you previously provided regarding reopening private schools in Oregon for the Fall Semester of 2020.

We write on behalf of private schools throughout the state and ask that you return to the June 10, 2020 state guidelines as to dealing with the coronavirus pandemic in regard to private schools in our communities throughout the state. A single state policy applicable to all schools, even when differentiations are made on a county by county basis, will not allow us to do our best work in the interests of the children and their families in our communities.

You have already made distinctions as to early childhood education programs. We ask that you return to that distinction that was made as to private schools, as to the application of state pandemic controls, and as reopening private schools.

Each private school in Oregon was given guidance June 10, 2020 by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) through the Safe Schools, Ready Learners guidelines to develop its own "Operational Blueprint for Reentry that is tailored to the community it serves." (V1 p2) The blueprint involved choosing an instructional model. If the chosen model was in-person or hybrid instruction, each school was to complete Sections 1-3 of the guidance and was authorized to open following the plans each school developed.

On June 24, 2020 you issued Executive Order 20-29. Executive Order 20-29 required that all schools, private and public, meet the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) June 10, 2020, guidelines that were in effect at that time. All the private schools, which are represented by those of us signing this letter, accepted the requirements of Executive Order 20-29. We have worked very hard, over long hours of activity and discussion and planning, to meet the guidelines which were established at that time as to the reopening of schools. We have developed protocols which do meet those guidelines and we have planned to open our schools at the beginning of the Fall Semester. The original intent of the guidance was changed with the July 28, 2020 Governor's press conference mandating instructional models of schools based on a COVID rates metric. In a July 30 private schools webinar with the Oregon Department of Education, the justification of the metric for private schools was shared by Colt Gill using Section 5 – a section private schools are not required to complete. He goes on in the second video to confirm the Section 1-3 requirement only for the reopening of private schools.

Private schools have been told that there is no final approval required as to the plan (see photo from ODE webinar). They were to submit a plan to Local Public Health Agency (LPHA), post it on each school's website, submit the plan to the governing board, and provide a web link to ODE. Then, the school would be ready to open as outlined in the plan.

Private schools have, in good faith, spent time, finances, and committed to teachers and school families based on the guidelines that private schools were able to choose the instructional model that was best for their school communities, and could open for in-person instruction with a completed plan following Sections 1-3 of the guidance.

B.D. 20-274

The sudden mandate for comprehensive distance learning puts the integrity of private schools on the line, which, in good faith, committed to educate children in-person, and collected tuition from parents based on the premise that they could open under the conditions as outlined by the OHA. In addition, the shift did not come with any funds from ODE to private schools to implement the shift-unlike the promise to public schools.

Oregon's private schools depend on the participation of families on a voluntary basis. Our schools are nonprofits which need tuition income, but which also depend upon donations and grants in order to not only survive but to thrive. Our mission is to provide the best possible education for the children in our schools and we have parents and families who are heavily committed to that mission.

At the same time, we must pay our bills. We are challenged by the changing requirements which have been imposed upon the private schools subsequent to the June 10, 2020 guidelines. We adopted and followed the June 10, 2020 guidelines. Based on those guidelines, our schools have ordered materials and supplies, hired teachers and administrators, extended contracts, and made arrangements with parents and families for payment of tuition and registration. Private schools have also developed activities and plans, have gone beyond the hiring of teachers, the registration of students, the acquisition of materials, and the development of education plans. The schools have developed specific protocols, for each school, to meet the ODE June 10 guidelines (and current CDC guidelines) to ensure the safety of our students. These include proper spacing, use of masks, monitoring of temperatures, and limiting class sizes. Private schools also will maintain necessary contact information, etc.

Private schools' financial models do not rely on a steady stream of public resources. They rely on families and donors. Private schools will also not receive the benefit of the 28 million dollars that the public schools are being granted to offset operational costs as well as to help train teachers in comprehensive distance learning. Similarly, the private schools will not benefit from the 5 million dollars earmarked for public schools to assist in providing PPE for students and staff. Private schools must incur these costs on their own. Not allowing private schools to open safely in the fall may result in the permanent closure of some of those schools because of the financial strain.

Accordingly, it is highly important that private schools are able to meet the needs of our children and address the concerns of our families by opening up our schools to in-person education for the Fall of 2020, as the schools had planned and promised based on the June 10, 2020 guidelines.

The schools recognize the need to provide for the safety of our children, staff, administrators, and teachers. The schools recognize the need to be beacons of hope to the community where the schools can demonstrate that they can safely operate. Their small size helps and their sense of community also helps, but the schools also need to have a predictable plan in place and they need to be able to keep the promises they have made to their children and families as to opening in the Fall.

We know that in-person education is significantly better than online learning. We cannot subscribe to a one size fits all approach to opening our schools in the Fall. There may be one size which fits all in terms of large, urban, public schools. Oregon private schools are designed to focus on the needs of our own specific communities. In many instances, these specific communities contain a significant number of minority students. This is because many of Oregon private schools are focused on reaching out to minority communities and providing them with an extraordinary educational experience.

Accordingly, we request that you affirm the guidelines issued by ODE and OHA up to July 27, 2020, remain in effect for private school reopening as provided in Sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Safe Schools, Ready Learners document.

This is a matter of great urgency and we respectfully ask that you take prompt action on this request.

Sincerely,

voted nay
Chair Casey Kulla


Vice-Chair Mary Starrett


Commissioner Richard L. Rick
Accepted by Yamhill County
Board of Commissioners on
8/13/2020 by Board Order
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