

Carrie Douglass, Chair, Bend-La Pine School Board

Education Center

*520 N.W. Wall Street
Bend, Oregon 97703-2699*

May 5th, 2021

To: Governor Brown and Colt Gill
Re: State Quarantine Requirements
From: Bend-La Pine School Board

Governor Brown and Colt Gill,

We respectfully ask that you immediately adjust the ODE and OHA rules for school quarantines to reflect what we know about the spread of COVID-19 and to enable us to keep our kids in school full-time through the end of the school year.

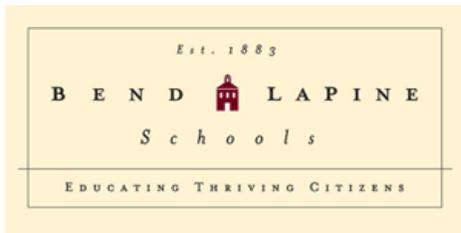
Bend - La Pine was the first large district in Oregon to reopen, and the first large district to bring all students back "all-in" and we have done so successfully. We have followed all regulations and have had virtually no in-school spread, with possibly 1 or 2 suspected instances of in-school spread out of nearly 18,000 students. With masks and physical distancing and other health and safety measures, we have confirmed what studies have shown - that schools are one of the safest places for students and not where significant spread is happening.

However, due to community spread, cases are being brought into our schools, and this is leading to mass quarantines which are disrupting school and student learning to an almost untenable situation.

Although quarantining is an important part of a public health response to a pandemic, I believe that we are needlessly over-quarantining our students, leading to our biggest disruption of in-person schools in Bend - La Pine Schools.

We currently have approximately 800 students quarantined in Bend-La Pine Schools due to possible exposure to students with confirmed cases of COVID-19. Our teachers, who are teaching full-time in-person, do not have the ability to also provide high quality learning experiences for students who are home due to mandatory quarantines, leaving these 800 students with almost no academic instruction for 14 days. The learning loss these students incur is unacceptable and disrupts the entire curriculum.

As you know, there are two sets of requirements that Bend-La Pine schools must follow with regards to quarantining:



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1. Oregon Health Authority:
<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/le2351t.pdf>
2. Oregon Department of Education: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/Planning%20and%20Responding%20to%20COVID-19%20Scenarios%20in%20Schools.pdf>

After talking with local medical professionals, as well as researching CDC guidelines and other state guidelines, our state quarantining requirements seem to be the strictest of any I can find, resulting in many more students requiring quarantine than is likely necessary. Of all of our students who have been quarantined for possible exposure, less than a handful have then tested positive themselves, meaning that hundreds of students have likely been unnecessarily quarantined.

We need to take COVID seriously, especially with reports of children possibly being more impacted by new variants. That being said, we also need to acknowledge what we've learned about how COVID-19 spreads, and not aggressively quarantine more students than is really necessary.

This far into the pandemic, we find it absurd that current quarantine guidelines don't differentiate between possible exposure indoors vs outdoors, or whether masks were worn or not. For example, possible exposure outdoors with masks should not lead to quarantine, while a possible exposure indoors without masks should.

Quarantine also shouldn't be required if you are vaccinated, don't have any symptoms or have recently had a confirmed case of COVID-19.

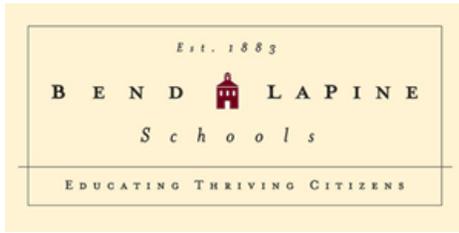
Finally, "close contacts" should be reduced from 6' to 3' in order to match the updated guidance for physical distancing. If students are approved to be within 3' of each other, quarantining shouldn't be required for contacts within 6'.

We're not epidemiologists, but we implore our public health authorities to not be overly aggressive with quarantining requirements.

Our understanding is also that our school quarantine requirements are currently much stricter than our local hospital. That is problematic in our opinion.

We continue to show that spread is not occurring in our schools, and that our schools are probably one of the safest places for students to be. Excessive quarantining is putting our ability to maintain full-time in-person learning at risk, and we must address it. School is essential and safe and we should be able to remain open, with full academic instruction provided to our students.

I am also including an attachment with the updated Idaho regulations and encourage you to consider their approach.



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Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie M. Douglass".

Carrie Douglass, Chair, Bend-La Pine School Board
Melissa Barnes Dholakia, Vice-Chair, Bend-La Pine School Board
Amy Tatum, Bend-La Pine School Board
Caroline Skidmore, Bend-La Pine School Board
Julie Craig, Bend-La Pine School Board
Shimiko Montgomery, Bend-La Pine School Board
Stuart Young, Bend-La Pine School Board

K-12 School Guidance

Quarantine When Masks are Worn

January 4, 2021

In K-12 instruction areas where there is close contact* between a person who has tested positive for, or is diagnosed with, COVID-19 (case) and students or staff (contact) and both the case and the contact were wearing masks** during the time physical distancing could not be maintained:

- The case must isolate at home as recommended by public health officials‡.
- The contact may attend in-person classes, but must monitor themselves closely for COVID-19 symptoms during the two weeks after exposure. If they develop symptoms, they should stay home and contact a healthcare provider.

Students or staff who are close contacts due to an exposure outside of instruction areas are still required to self-quarantine§.

*Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more.

** This policy is only applicable to those wearing a mask that covers both the nose and mouth.

‡ https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Interim-Guidance-for-Isolation-for-COVID-19_19july2020.pdf

§"Self-quarantine" should be considered synonymous with "self-isolation" in Idaho.