



## Board Talking Points

September 2021

It's been uplifting to see students returning to school. Needless to say, the past few months have been extremely challenging for school leaders. Your support of public education is truly appreciated. By centering students in our decision-making, we will get through this pandemic together.

Rather than discuss mask mandates and vaccination requirements, this month's Talking Points is focused on a high school student. Nate Bingaman, an Imbler High School senior, is an incredibly articulate young man who recently presented to the Imbler board. His testimony during the public participation portion presented a compelling, heartfelt message from the eyes of a student. As a reminder, the Class of 2022 has not experienced an uninterpreted school year since they were freshmen.

Nate's testimony is as follows:

My name is Nate, and I'm an incoming senior at IHS. I'm an officer on the Student Council, in the FFA and FBLA, and in the national honor society.

I'll be straightforward in the fact that I was extremely disappointed when I came home from last week's meeting. Even more embarrassing is the fact that our neighboring communities were able to hold a more civilized public meeting. I hope that if parents cannot, that students will remain together in discomfort rather than disrespect.

I'd like to take a few minutes to tell my pandemic story. Many speakers have been parents of elementary students, or parents of students outside of the district, and no substantive opinion has been given by a high school student.

When school was cancelled on Friday, March 13th of 2020, I was in the busiest season of the year as a track athlete and FFA officer. The shock of my very school-involved lifestyle being pulled out from under me hurt a lot, but I got over it.

The summer was relatively uneventful, consisting only of harvest and an occasional trip to the drive-in with friends. School was set to begin, and while we were unsure of what it would look like, there was no large anxiety amongst my peers.

School began uneventfully, and weekend adventures with friends continued even though we were unhappy with school protocols.

There was a late-night conversation on the way home from one of these that took a dark turn. I sharply realized that one of my friends had not only contemplated, but had attempted suicide.

## MISSION VISION

To provide outstanding customer service to our school districts in four areas: special education, technology, school improvement, and administrative services.

IMESD strives to ensure the success of every child by providing equitable services to close the opportunity gap. We are committed to the values of antiracism and multiculturalism.

They weren't the only one. From mid-August until late October, I was approached by 3 other close friends who shared similar stories and thoughts. I was vaguely warned of at least 2 others not within my immediate circle.

Four friends and two other peers. In conversations, they listed their reasons and their anxieties. These included cancelled sports, a lack of activities, struggles to find new passions, turning to substances to keep busy, and general social isolation. I want the focus to turn to what was not listed: The requirement to wear masks at school.

In the debate over masks, I worry that community members are losing track of the motivation for students to be in school. Those are career and college readiness, extracurriculars, and human connections.

From this perspective, I would urge the board to be firm in following state guidelines, to be even stronger in advocating for school activities to occur, and to continue in doing what is best for the district.

Thank you for your time.