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## **IMESD District Board Talking Points November 2020**

### **IMESD Responds to Updated School Metrics from ODE**

On Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) released an update to its *Ready Schools, Safe Learners* guidance, including updated metrics for students to return to in-person instruction in schools. According to ODE, the metrics are based on the latest COVID-19 studies and data, align to CDC recommendations, and are in line with standards in other states to help Oregon meet its priority to return students to in-person instruction.

ODE stated that an important lesson from the review of national school data is that Oregon school districts can help protect student and staff health during in-person instruction when community spread is sufficiently low and when districts strictly adhere to the health and safety protocols outlined for schools.

Key changes to the metrics include:

- A clear set of reachable targets for communities to strive for
- Acknowledgement that Oregon's *Ready Schools, Safe Learners* guidance's strong public health protocols in structured settings like schools can greatly reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19
- Additional time for schools to transition between in-person and distance learning models.
- Increased access to in-person instruction at the elementary level; incrementally increased access for in-person instruction beginning at the elementary level
- A two-week "Look Back" at the Metrics Data rather than one week at a time over a three-week period.
- Removes State Positivity Rate in favor of County Positivity Rates.

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- Maintains use of some exceptions, including a hold harmless clause
- Extends implementation windows and advises use of an equity decision tool
- Limited In-Person Instruction: Changes cohort size from 10 to 20, removes 250 absolute student limit

According to the press release from ODE, the updated metrics take effect immediately and, based on this week's data points, potentially allow close to 130,00 students to return to some in-person instruction. The guidance recommends that schools consider both equity and a methodical and cautious approach at the beginning that return a portion of the school population first and then add more students on-site over time. This will allow schools to build new safety routines, stabilize cohorts and avoid sudden, disruptive transitions back to Comprehensive Distance Learning due to quarantine or isolation.

Dr. Mark Mulvihill, superintendent of the InterMountain ESD, has been working with multiple state committees for months. Mulvihill said the planned fall review by ODE of the school reopening metrics is timely and appropriate. The updated metrics may allow some of the IMESD's districts to re-open to in-person instruction, but Umatilla County's current COVID-19 case rate is still too high for schools to re-open with students.

"The new state metrics provide increased flexibility for Oregon schools to open safely. Many more students in Oregon will be able to attend school in-person. Union and Morrow County schools will be able to remain open due to previous exceptions and their continued success in mitigating spread. However, Umatilla County's case numbers and positivity rate are still too high, even with these new metrics. It is now up to all of us to reduce the spread and get our kids back to school," Mulvihill said.

For more information on the updated school reopening metrics, please visit the ODE website: <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Pages/Planning-for-the-2020-21-School-Year.aspx>