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## **Crook County School District Asking Oregon Department of Education to Waive Last Week's COVID-19 Metrics**

### ***No COVID-19 cases connected to local schools since students returned on September 8th***

Superintendent Dr. Sara Johnson sent a letter today to Colt Gill, the Director of the Oregon Department of Education, asking for a waiver from last week's COVID-19 metrics. Crook County reported 11 new cases, which exceeds the state's weekly metrics for Crook County schools. The decision to ask for the waiver was made after meeting with officials from the Crook County Health Department and learning the following about last week's cases:

- The 11 cases last week were all identified, traced, and confined
- More than half of the cases occurred within a defined group, and testing is complete
- There is no community spread
- No COVID-19 cases have originated from Crook County schools

The Crook County Health Department supports the district's efforts to keep schools open and continue providing in-person instruction with all of the existing safety measures in place. This includes wearing masks, social distancing, and consistently sanitizing classrooms and buildings. The health department also reminds families to keep their children home if they have a fever or aren't feeling well.

"This district is extremely diligent about following the guidelines to make sure we stay safe so we can stay open," explained Superintendent Dr. Sara Johnson. "But it's important to look beyond the numbers and find out what's really going on. Based on feedback from local public health officials, none of the cases are connect to our schools, so we don't believe our students should be forced back to distance learning."

Crook County School District opened its doors to K-3 students on September 8<sup>th</sup> and then to grades 4-12 on October 5<sup>th</sup> after meeting the state metrics. K-5 is back full time, while middle and high school students attend in a rotating hybrid schedule. Crook County Middle School has been running after-school sports camps, and Crook County High School successfully completed a season of spring sports last week. No new cases have originated from the schools or these sporting events.

To keep students in grades 4-12 in school, Crook County must meet the following metrics each week for two weeks in a row:

- 7 cases or less
- 30 cases or less per 100,000
- County Test Positivity Rate of 10% or less

If Crook County reports 8 or more cases this week, Dr. Johnson will be forced to announce that grades 4-12 must return to Comprehensive Distance Learning by Monday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>. However, grades K-3 and the district's small and rural schools – Paulina, Brothers, Steins Pillar, and the Hybrid Learning Campus at Pioneer – would all continue with in-person instruction based on state exceptions.

“We are hoping that ODE and the state of Oregon open a conversation about the metrics and consider making thoughtful adjustments. If we have to close down for grades 4-12, we might be looking at early spring before school can resume given how high the threshold is for returning. That just doesn't make sense when cases can be identified and confined and there's no existing threat to our schools,” said Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson is eager to hear back from ODE this week, so the district can provide timely information to district staff and families about next steps.

### **About Crook County School District**

Crook County School District is a thriving, rural, growing district in Central Oregon, serving more than 3,000 students from all across Crook County. It is an organization with integrity, a model for educational success, and a recognized leader for excellence in helping students dream, learn, and succeed.

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