

Crook County School District

where students dream, learn, & succeed



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Crook County Schools Push Pilot Designation to Bring 4-12 Students Back *Hybrid Model Would Rotate Different Grade Levels Each Day for In-Person Instruction*

The Crook County School District sent a letter today formally requesting the Oregon Department of Education for a pilot designation that would allow students in grades 4-12 to return to school starting Monday, September 28th. The district was allowed to open school earlier this month for K-3 students and several small schools based on state exceptions for rural counties. The pilot request is focused on grades 4-12, so nothing changes for students already attending school in-person.

Covid-19 cases have remained low in Crook County for the past two months, but the health metrics created by the Oregon Health Authority are proving very difficult to meet three weeks in a row. Crook County can only have two reported cases each week to stay within the requirements. But one extra case – going from 2 reported cases to 3 reported cases – prevents the school district from fully opening and causes the three-week clock to start all over again.

“We safely and successfully operated Kindergarten Jump Start this summer and opened schools for over 600 students in various grade levels for nearly two weeks now,” said Superintendent Dr. Sara Johnson. “Our metrics are consistently low, and no new cases have been connected to our schools since the first day of school on September 8th.”

The pilot designation would create a hybrid, in-person instructional model that would rotate students in and out of the buildings each week. The school district would designate certain days for students to be in the classroom and other days to learn online from home. Students would remain in specific cohorts to limit interaction and prevent the spread of Covid-19 if a student or staff member tests positive.

Dr. Johnson says this approach is about striking a balance between safety, serving the needs of students, and helping families who rely on schools to maintain jobs and childcare.

“We have extensive precautionary measures in place, and we’re in constant communication with the Crook County Health Department. I’m confident this is the right approach, and we’re still providing the option for families to keep their students at home learning online if they have health concerns.”

Several parents praised the school district for its reopening efforts at Monday night’s school board meeting but also pressed school board members to allow students in grades 4-12 to return to class.

They cited lack of social interaction, mental health concerns, and students falling behind in school if they stay online. After a quick discussion, board members unanimously agreed to investigate alternatives and allow the school district to return students as soon as possible.

"I think we understand the metrics were designed very fast with good intentions. The hope was to save lives. Unfortunately, time has shown that the metrics unfairly penalize smaller communities, and all good systems need periodic adjustments," explained Board Chairman Scott Cooper. "The board is asking the State of Oregon to practice good management and make the needed and obvious adjustments. The data suggest our kids can have a more normal life, and we can still operate in a safe environment. When something isn't working, it's time to fix it. We're not criticizing anybody's efforts. We're asking for practical and common-sense adjustment."

Dr. Johnson sent the letter via email late Wednesday morning to Colt Gill, Director of the Oregon Department of Education. It included a chart of the county's metrics, highlighted the students already back in class, and outlined the school district's hybrid plan. The closure of public schools last spring has proven how important schools are to the economy and health and well-being of students.

"Our primary mission is to serve and educate students, but the pandemic has reminded us that public schools are vital to local economies and the social fabric of our community. We hope the ODE will partner with Crook County and accommodate our request," said Dr. Johnson.

Crook County Schools currently open to students:

- Barnes Butte Elementary, K-3
- Crooked River Elementary, K-3
- Steins Pillar Elementary, K-4*
- Paulina School*
- Brothers School*
- High School Hybrid Learning Campus at Pioneer*

**These schools either met the metrics for K-3 or the state's exception for small or rural schools based on county population under 30,000 and schools under 250 students.*

Pilot Designation (hybrid model would bring the following students back):

- Barnes Butte Elementary, 4-5
- Crooked River Elementary, 4-5
- Crook County Middle School, 6-8
- Crook County High School, 9-12

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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