April 3, 2020

Dear OEA Member:

As we close out what has been an incredibly trying week, I want to thank each of you again for all of the work that you’ve been doing for our students and for our communities. Over and over again - in newspaper headlines, in social media posts, and in 1-on-1 conversations – I continue to see and hear stories recognizing the and appreciating the selflessness of our nation’s educators. And while the work you are currently being asked to complete is both physically and emotionally exhausting, I hope you know that your neighbors, your state, and your nation all see the myriad of ways you are standing up for your students.

This week started with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) releasing their distance learning plan, claiming that it was designed to provide every student in Oregon with an education should the school closure persist for the remainder of the academic year. However, the distance learning plan released falls far short of that lofty ideal. Rather than ensuring equity for our students, the distance learning plan would actually exacerbate the existing inequality in our public schools.

Students who need the most support - students with disabilities, emerging bilingual students, homeless students, students in the foster care system, and students at risk for neglect or abuse – would be left behind under ODE’s distance learning plan. Which is why I’ve been in constant contact with Governor Kate Brown, urging her to instruct districts to continue providing supplemental education and support for our students rather than rolling out this inequitable distance learning plan.

As a part of those ongoing conversations, I sent Governor Brown a written response to ODE’s “Distance Learning for All.” In that response, I explained to Governor Brown that under the distance learning plan a student’s grade would not be an accurate reflection of their comprehension of material, instead it would likely be a grade of their current home life. I also made it clear that the “Distance Learning for All” plan was setting educators up for failure – asking them to make an unprecedented shift in instruction without the adequate resources, time, or training.

OEA is advocating for our students and for our educators during the crisis, and we will continue to do so when life returns to normal. Please continue to work with your local OEA staff as problems arise, and please continue to reach out to me with your questions and concerns.

Thank you,

John Larson
OEA President

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