

October 23, 2020

Hello Dallas Students, Families and Staff Members,

I'm sorry that this letter is a bit lengthy but there are a lot of important things happening right now.

In my letter earlier this month I shared that our distance learning model of instruction is not our first choice under ordinary circumstances. Social interaction, character development and academic growth is unequivocally not the same for our students using a distance learning model. Now, a few weeks later, my sentiment is even stronger. We want our students back. We want them to experience "in-person" education, and soon. We know it's not time--yet. The safety of staff members and students is paramount and this must be realized before full return to our schools can happen. I just want you to know how important it is (to our entire community) that students return as soon as possible. Until then, I continue to be so proud of each staff member for their commitment to our distance learning efforts and to our students and parents for being responsive and cooperative. We keep our students at the center of all that we do in Dallas School District. Here are a couple of resources to help you support your student's learning at home.

### [Creating an At-Home Work Space](#) [At-Home Study Habits](#)

**When will students return to school?** I am uncertain. We were hopeful it could occur as soon as the week of November 16. That's not going to happen based upon the [COVID-19 return to school requirements](#) from the Oregon Department of Education. While the Polk County COVID-19 case numbers are trending in the right direction, they must meet the minimum standard for three consecutive weeks before the return of all students. The standards for return of our K-3 students are even less so these grades would return first, when allowed. We are monitoring the metrics each week and we remain hopeful. However, it is realistically possible that the COVID-19 cases may not decrease enough for any student return until after the holidays.

**Adjustments to the School Calendar** -- I am proposing two calendar changes to the Dallas School Board that I want you to be aware of. 1) -- Move the district assessment day on November 6 (no school for students) to November 20; 2) move the 6-12 assessment day on April 12 (no school for 6-12 students) to April 19. These changes balance the weeks between grading periods which had been affected by the delay to the start of the school year. I anticipate approval of these changes during the board meeting on October 28.

**All Students Belong** -- A few weeks ago, the Oregon Department of Education approved a temporary rule which creates a safer and more inclusive school climate in all Oregon schools. The [All Students Belong](#) rule is now in full effect in Dallas School District and prohibits the use of hate symbols in schools. The rule requires school districts to adopt and implement policies and procedures that prohibit, at a minimum, the use or display of the noose, swastika, or Confederate flag in any program or school-sponsored activities except where used in teaching curriculum that is aligned with the Oregon State Standards. This applies to both in-person and distance learning environments. This action supports the committed efforts of Dallas School District to provide welcoming and inclusionary support to all, regardless of differences. As we move ahead, I am committed to furthering our equity efforts in support of each student. This is central to our mission and who we are.

I wish my best to each of you. As always, please contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss our efforts in Dallas School District.

Andy Bellando, Superintendent