

Washington and Oregon plan to fully reopen schools this fall as Delta variant spreads

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12 July 2021

State governors in Washington and Oregon recently lifted all major COVID-19 restrictions for schools and businesses. As of June 30, businesses have been operating at full capacity, mask requirements have been lifted for vaccinated individuals, and social distancing and capacity requirements are no longer mandatory. Additionally, K-12 public schools are scheduled to provide fully in-person instruction this fall with limited safety measures. The reopening policies are being implemented as COVID-19 cases are on the rise in both states and the Delta variant is moving quickly through the population.

On July 7, 245 new cases and a seven-day average of 172 new infections were recorded in Oregon while Washington's latest data shows 486 new infections with a seven-day average of 355 new cases. Cumulative deaths from COVID-19 have reached 2,819 in Oregon and 6,040 in Washington.

Only 54.7 percent of Oregon's population and 55.8 percent of Washington's population have been fully vaccinated. Children under 12, a significant portion of the student population in K-12 schools, still do not have access to a vaccine and will soon be packed into unsafe classrooms. The decision to fully reopen schools is part of a criminal campaign by the ruling elite to normalize infections and deaths in the population in order to fully reopen the economy.

Last week, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new guidelines for K-12 school reopenings that further relax already inadequate safety measures intended to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 on school campuses. The CDC now encourages fully vaccinated staff and students not to wear masks indoors, posing immense dangers for the population given the high percentage of unvaccinated individuals, inadequate safety measures and reporting in schools, and the greater virulence of the Delta variant.

Washington and Oregon state officials have yet to formally announce their response to the recent CDC masking guidelines, but the decision on mask mandates will largely fall on local districts. Already, Estacada School District in Oregon has stated that they will allow optional mask-wearing for the upcoming school year. Regardless of masking guidelines, however, both states are set to fully reopen schools in the fall, under conditions in which the majority of students will be

unvaccinated.

Oregon public school districts will all follow state-issued reopening guidelines which recommend wholly unsatisfactory "key practices" for reducing the spread of the virus. For instance, Oregon school reopening guidelines "strongly advise" schools to "increase outdoor ventilation of clean air into indoor spaces." This assumes that schools have adequate and fully functional ventilation systems, which many do not. Anticipating this fact, the guidelines ask teachers to "consider placing a fan securely in a window."

Despite clear gaps in safety mitigation measures, the Oregon state legislature has allocated \$270 million of its federal relief money for in person K-12 summer school, child care and enrichment programs, which began offering services at the end of June and will last into August.

Portland Public Schools (PPS), the largest district in the state with more than 49,000 students and 81 schools, has opened nine of its high schools for its summer credit recovery program. At least 6,800 students across the K-12 grade spectrum have enrolled for summer school, according to PPS district spokesperson Karen Werstein.

PPS has also committed to daily in-person instruction beginning September 1. High school students in the Beaverton School District have not been required to wear masks throughout summer school, while Portland students are mandated to continue wearing masks. However, PPS will soon be releasing its safety protocols for the fall, which might adopt the new CDC guidelines and not mandate masks for vaccinated students and teachers.

Charles Boyle, a spokesman for the office of Oregon's Democratic Governor Kate Brown, released a statement Friday to a local news outlet which showcased the state's support for the recent change in CDC guidelines that relax the use of masks in schools. Boyle noted, "We have reached the point in the pandemic where unprecedented, statewide measures are no longer called for. For schools, that means a shift to a more traditional, local decision-making model, as reaffirmed by the CDC today, where communities make the appropriate public health and safety decisions based on their local conditions and that serve students best."

PPS has received no opposition to the reopening push from

the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT). Commenting on the recent board approval of a new contract for PPS teachers, PAT president Elizabeth Thiel stated, “Educators absolutely want to be live and face-to-face with our students. We are very much looking forward to a return to in-person conditions, with the expectation that community spread remains low.”

In Washington, the K-12 COVID-19 requirements for summer and fall issued by the State Department of Public Health use wording vague enough to practically eliminate social distancing requirements and other safety measures. The requirement mandates “3 feet in classrooms, and 6 feet elsewhere—to the greatest extent possible.” In fact, the guidelines further recommend against social distancing, insisting that “schools should have a contingency plan for the 2021–22 school year that does not include physical distancing.”

Seattle Public Schools (SPS), the largest district in the state with over 53,000 students, declared that they are “all in” with regards to daily in-person instruction when the school year begins September 1.

SPS began their fully in-person summer school session last Tuesday, which will continue until July 30. Brent Jones, the interim superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, spoke at a news conference July 2 to promote the district’s reopening plan. He remarked that the pandemic has presented schools with an opportunity to “innovate beyond imagination.” The now dominant Delta variant was not mentioned, nor were the real needs of working class families. Jones falsely claimed that “we have demonstrated that we can keep our students, staff and community healthy.”

The Seattle Education Association (SEA) agreed to offer in-person instruction for all grade levels on March 29, a direct response to an executive order issued by Washington’s Democratic Governor Jay Inslee that mandated in-person instruction. School board bureaucrats threatened teachers who strongly opposed the rush to reopen, while the union did nothing to defend them.

In contradictory and careless fashion, Inslee recently made the following statements in Tacoma when he announced the full economic reopening plan: “The virus is not done with us,” adding “I think this (reopening) will be a great spur to business.” These two statements encapsulate the “herd immunity” policy, first put forward by the Trump administration and further carried out under the Biden administration, which places the interests of profits over human lives.

Significantly, neither Washington nor Oregon COVID-19 guidelines present lock-downs as an option. No matter the number of infections or warnings from leading public health experts that schools are epicenters of infection, schools will continue to provide in-person instruction.

Teachers have expressed their opposition by joining social media groups and by voicing their opposition whenever and wherever possible. Teachers have faced such stressful

conditions this past year that the Center for State and Local Government Excellence recorded that 38 percent of Oregon public school educators considered quitting their jobs earlier in the year. K-12 teachers’ satisfaction with their employers sank from 69 percent in March 2020 to 44 percent in October.

This extraordinary stress and dissatisfaction is undoubtedly felt by teachers across the US, and in the case of Oregon and Washington, this can only be understood when it is acknowledged that the teacher unions in both states have not, and will not, represent teachers’ interests.

The OEA, WEA and their local affiliates operate under the direction of the National Education Association (NEA), which has roughly 3 million members. Despite the ongoing mass opposition from rank-and-file teachers to the dangers of in-person instruction, these bureaucracies have implemented orders directly from the state and federal governments which actively seek to cover up the severity of the pandemic and have forced millions of teachers into deadly conditions.

According to data from Johns Hopkins University, the US is averaging roughly 19,455 new daily COVID-19 cases over the last seven days, a 47 percent increase from the week prior. The CDC has announced that the Delta variant is now dominant in the US, with 51.7 percent of all recorded cases resulting from that variant.

Despite false declarations by politicians from both parties that the pandemic is over, teachers, parents and students in Washington, Oregon, across the US and internationally are still in a direct struggle for their lives and safety. Parents and teachers must demand that adequate safety measures be adopted, and all the necessary resources provided for online education. We urge parents and teachers to sign up today to join and build rank-and-file committees in your workplaces, in solidarity with other committees across the US and internationally.



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