

WORKER SAFETY

Teachers union blasts Gov. Brown for reversal on school reopening

Oregon took months to develop guidelines for safe reopening. Now they won't be enforced.

Amid a record coronavirus surge, Oregon governor Kate Brown announced Dec. 23 that she won't enforce her previously announced guidelines for safe school reopening. The reopening guidelines—developed by the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Health Authority—are based on measures of local community spread of COVID-19, but Brown said as of Jan. 1 they'll be advisory rather than mandatory. Instead decisions on reopening will be made by each school district.

In a letter to the two agencies, Brown said she hopes more Oregon schools, especially elementary schools, will transition to in-person instruction by Feb. 15.

Oregon Education Association (OEA) denounced the change, saying elected leaders shouldn't allow political pressures to dictate public health measures.

“Instead of providing clarity for students, families and educators Governor Brown’s decision to abruptly end the enforcement of the state’s public health metrics will simply be another example of the continually moving goalposts in our fight against COVID-19 that has left so many Oregonians and Americans frustrated with, and distrustful of, our elected officials throughout the course of this pandemic,” said OEA President John Larson.

The governor also directed the agencies to work with schools to provide on-site, rapid testing as a safeguard. Brown previously announced that educators and school staff will be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccinations.

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