

# PROTEST,

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and Danielle Bethell were two of the more prominent attendees at Friday's rally. Bethell, who is also a Marion County commissioner, was in attendance with her daughter.

"I recognize that (Superintendent Christy Perry's) hands are somewhat tied with the rulings that have come out from the Oregon Department of Education recently," Bethell said Friday. "But at the end of the day, she needs to give her building administrators the opportunity to do the jobs they are capable of doing. I believe she needs to take the mask mandate away and give what we consider local control back to the building. She can do it."

The Oregon Department of Education announced on Feb. 7 that the state would lift the statewide school mask mandate on March 31 and return decision making to local school districts and health authorities. Masks have been required in Oregon schools since students returned to in-person classes in March of 2021.

Many of the students, parents and educators at Friday's rally pushed for the district to end the mask requirement in schools before March 31.

Megan Lippold, a former college and career coach at West Salem High School, said she had left her job and pulled her children from the district due to the mask mandate and vaccine mandate for school staff.

"We're just passionate about having the choice for masks," said Lippold. "At



School board director Danielle Bethell (third from left) stands along Commercial St. on Feb. 18 with other protesters.

Photo by MATT RAWLINGS of Keizertimes

this point, I have absolutely zero trust in our governor to say what she means and mean what she says. I think the March 31 date is being used as a carrot to get this group not to come out and voice our opinions."

Amanda Reyna attended the rally with her three children, who are all students at Washington Elementary in Salem. Reyna said one of her sons was forced to leave school three times for refusing to wear a mask in class.

"I want the mandate to end sooner so my kids can breathe freely. The

masks can cause reading issues, slurred speech, lots of issues. It should be up to the students," Reyna said.

Multiple school districts have defied the state and already made masks optional. After the Molalla River School District was forced to cancel classes on Feb. 18 due to ongoing mask protests, the school board voted the same day to make masking optional as of March 3.

Alsea School District Superintendent Marc Thielman — who resigned on Feb. 22 after multiple workplace complaints were filed against him — announced in

January that masks would be optional in schools going forward. The state responded by withholding federal COVID relief funds until the district became compliant.

Both Bethell and rally organizer Jenny Maguire, a former behavior specialist at Scott Elementary in Salem, said the risk of forfeiting relief funds from the state is worth ending mask requirements in Salem-Keizer schools.

"The fact that the federal dollars are attached to COVID protocols is a problem," Bethell said. "If they were to deny



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