## SCHOOL from A1

"I am just so blessed to be in a building of staff that have just opened up and are ready to wrap around our youth and provide support and whatever they're going to need this year," said Tammy Sandefur, assistant principal at Cottage Grove High School. "It's going to be a great year."

New masking, sanitation and distancing policies are in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Educator and administrator accounts at the meeting seemed to point to a general adherence to these policies.

Still, the year hasn't started without challenges.

For one, there are positions remaining to be filled in the district.

While the district has hired an unprecedented number of licensed and classified staff members this year, there are still 14 positions listed open on the district website.

The Human Resources

department has reported it is looking to hire more licensed staff specifically to support the mental and behavioral health and social emotional development of students, such as school psychologists and counselors.

As for the state of staff themselves, representatives from education worker associations provided the school board with an update last week.

Brenda McClean, co-president of the South Lane classified employees union and librarian at Bohemia Elementary School, starting by thanking administrative staff for wage corrections initiated this year.

"We can't tell you how



Staff at SLSD reported being delighted to finally welcome students back into buildings.

much this means to all of us and to all of our families," she said. "It has given us an infusion of hope, a reason to believe that better days are ahead."

However, she added, more work was needed to address other permanent positions which may be underpaid.

In addition, the vaccine mandate has created a staffing crisis, she said.

On Aug. 19, Governor Kate Brown announced that all adults in K-12 school campus communities and all health care workers must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 18.

The education requirement applies to teachers, educators, support staff and volunteers at the state's K-12 schools, though exemption can be made based on health or religious grounds.

"So we face the next couple of months with a heavy mix of emotions," said Mc-Clean. "It is an absolute joy, though, to have the students all back in the school. And as always, we will be doing whatever is possible to keep them safe and help them to be successful."

A representative of South Lane Education Association, which represents the certified employees of South Lane School District, echoed that staff seemed to be very pleased with the return to in-person learning.

"Where we are right now, it sounds like everyone is really putting in 100 percent to make sure that we are we are abiding by the guidelines and doing what we need to do to enable the in-person learning, which I, on a personal level, can just say after a single day is so much better than CDL," he said, referring to the Comprehensive Distance Learning strategy employed last school year.

"And I don't want to disregard all the hard work that went into CDL, but it's a transformative experience. And we just want to continue to work on keeping everyone safe and making sure that voices are heard."

SLSD Superintendent Yvonne Curtis reported that the first few days seemed to be going smoothly, though there were some challenges in transportation as the district started out short six bus drivers and experienced a system crash. Routes also had to be shifted as not all student transportation was covered effectively at the outset

Besides other minor challenges regarding the segue into the new school year, COVID has offered its own obstacles.

"It's important for the board to know that we are being impacted by COVID," said Curtis, reporting that, as of Sept. 13, there were around 13 people affected by COVID and a larger number in quarantine.

It was not specified if the affected people were staff or students, though the quarantined people were said to have simply been in the presence of someone who tested positive.

"But we are going to start

publishing the total number who have COVID," said Curtis.

As of *The Sentinel's* press

time, no new numbers have been released.

Over the past week Cur-

Over the past week, Curtis was scheduled to meet with other Lane County superintendents to develop strategies for a year which will potentially see a slump in educator positions.

The South Lane district has sent two rounds of surveys to its staff, hoping to gain insight into who is already vaccinated, planning to get vaccinated or may be asking for an exception by the Oct. 18 deadline.

As of last week, around 40 staff had applied for exceptions and some had already been approved, Curtis said, adding that guidelines would have to be reviewed in order to create situations which could protect the unvaccinated and others around them.

A handful of staff members have also indicated they would not be getting the vaccine for various reasons including maternity leave and finding other jobs, Curtis said.

SLSD is offering options for coaches, volunteer coaches and substitutes as well.

"Many school districts are not allowing people who are not vaccinated to serve in those roles," said Curtis. "We are extending them the same opportunity for exceptions because we want to maintain as much of our programming as we can."

SLSD did not respond to requests for an interview for this article.





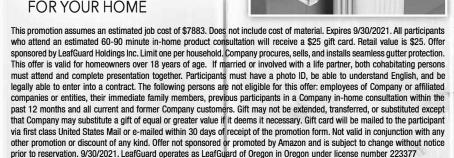
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