

SLSD from A1

in all locations and submitting to weekly COVID testing, two issues which were among the most heavily criticized by staff on Monday.

**Testimonies**

Prior to the vote, all five teachers up for dismissal took time to provide public testimony in the special session. Testimonies excoriated the school district for decisions surrounding the vaccine mandate.

Samantha Beach, a fifth-year second grade teacher at Bohemia Elementary School, began.

"I would like to make it clear that I was not recommended to you for termination because I refused to comply with the governor's mandate, but instead because I could not in good conscience comply with the requirements that were being forced on me from this district after my exception was approved," said Beach.

She cited ORS (Oregon Revised Statutes) 333-019-

1030, which stipulates that school staff must be vaccinated against COVID-19 or have a documented medical or religious exception, adding that her own exception had been accepted by the school district on Sept. 10.

"Therefore, I should have been in compliance with what was required of me by law," said Beach. "Imagine my surprise when the district added its own mandates in the form of a list of eight additional requirements solely for staff with approved exceptions."

Beach described the accommodations as a list of rules which "may look benign on the surface, but they are leading this district into a culture of discrimination and shaming."

The requirement to wear a KN95 mask at all times and locations, for example, would mark unvaccinated staff out from others and potentially cause differential treatment from those aware of the rule, Beach explained.

"This rule is a clear violation of medical privacy," she said.

Beach also took issue with an expectation which

prohibits unvaccinated staff from removing their mask to eat or drink with others in the room, further segregating and socially isolating the unvaccinated and causing barriers to "proper hydration and nourishment" as isolation in a school environment is "almost impossible."

She also asked that the document be removed by the superintendent as the stipulations in it were not mandatory.

"I chose not to sign this document because I believe it is pushing us down a dangerous path of segregation, harassment and violation of protected medical and religious rights," said Beach, invoking the school's policy of non-discrimination.

Next, Harrison Elementary School teacher Peter Bowers chastised the district for holding the meeting at 8:45 a.m. and stated he was missing work to attend the meeting.

"It's only going to look like you're trying to duck public scrutiny," he said. "That's not a very good look."

He also complained that his access to his district email had already been cut off.

"We are not here because of this mandate," he said. "We are here because of the unreasonable expectations foisted upon us by the superintendent."

Bowers also criticized the requirement to wear a mask all day as discriminatory.

"According to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, my employer cannot discriminate against me by requiring additional restrictions on me based on medical or religious grounds," he said. "And in so doing the employer is putting qualifications on my right to hold and live by my religious beliefs."

Bowers went on to reject the condition of weekly testing, which he said contained a substance known to cause cancer and an alternative method suggested would not prove timely.

He also took issue with the district maintaining the right to impose further restrictions in the future if it deems necessary.

The coercive nature of the requirements, he said, were unacceptable.

"As it turns out, holding one's job over their head is a

powerful motivator towards compliance," he said.

Bowers added that "to be ripped" from his classroom has caused stress and anxiety for himself as well as students.

"I don't think that this decision is best for students," the teacher said. "In a world that's full of big, scary adult issues, kids need a consistent place to feel safe and cared for. I was that place. Now they're in a place of uncertainty. This is not what I would consider putting children first."

Regardless of vaccination status, even vaccine breakthrough cases may transmit the Delta variant effectively, making him no less a public health threat than a vaccinated person, he stated.

Bowers implored the board to consider that a vote for dismissal would be tantamount to siding with discrimination.

London School teacher Kimberly Green next spoke of her 17 years as a teacher, five of which were in London School, and her adherence to the restrictions imposed through the last year of pandemic regulations.

Green took issue with the grounds for dismissal, namely "insubordination and neglect of duty," pointing to her compliance with regulations and continuous contact with the district regarding mandates.

She also rejected the requirement to constantly wear a mask.

"Not only is it not recommended by OSHA for more than two hours, it is not possible to teach and talk continuously with a restrictive mask for six hours or more a day, with only a 15-minute break and lunch break," said Green.

A mask can be a particular barrier to teaching for special education students, she added.

Echoing Bowers' criticism, Green also stated that the frequent testing requirement, which returns results in five- to seven-days' time, was not effective and that both tests would require the release of private medical information.

Green pointed to her following of state and district protocols as a counterargument to the "neglect of duty" dismissal basis.

"I have broken no laws in this process," she said.

"I've been honest and true the entire time, upholding my integrity as well as my religious convictions. I have complied with each of them."

While she had intended on signing the district's document, she said she felt that the additional accommodations required were unreasonable.

"That document was changed so many times," said Green. "And exceptions were made for some and not others. Some people had some things removed and initialed and others were not given those same allowances. ... Those were hand-picked accommodations by the district."

Green encouraged the board to reconsider their approach.

"It could be very simple. You could remove this document and we can move on," she said. "There is no equity in this stance. There's only division."

Jill Hermansen from Bohemia Elementary School also addressed the board and spoke of her 25 years of dedication to her students.

"I have put children first not only in my professional life but in my personal life as well," she said, listing the many hours and extra duties she performed in the interest of bettering students' lives.

"For 16 years my identity has been centered around being a speech therapist for South Lane School District," Hermansen said. "It's what I do. It's what I am."

Though accepted for a religious exception, she told of her disappointment when learning that this exception was "conditional" on signing a document of expectations that she did not feel were equitable.

As with other testimonies, Hermansen did not see the efficacy in the weekly testing mandate or a speech therapist required to wear a mask at all times.

"I am saddened by the leadership and the legal counsel in this district that more effort was not put into finding accommodations to keep valuable employees," she said. "My religious beliefs or my beliefs about the vaccine may not coincide with your beliefs, but in equity, this doesn't matter. ... So please stop professing you believe in equity. You are not working toward a culture of acceptance and equity. You are simply choosing communities to support while being discriminatory towards others."

Lastly, Bohemia Elementary School teacher Lydia Shipley took the virtual floor and addressed the board directly.

"You as the board of directors are in a unique position to process what you have heard today and make decisions as to the direction moving forward for South Lane School District staff and students," she said. "Since the start of the pandemic, South Lane has been administering policies and actions under the guise of what's best for kids. I cannot reconcile how letting go of fixed, highly-qualified educators with years of experience in the wake of such emotion or educational loss due to the pandemic would qualify as what's best for kids."

Shipley went on to criticize other moves by the district such as replacing teachers with substitutes, which she characterized as "inexperienced" and "unqualified".

"What would have been best for kids is to provide a religious exemption for teachers that didn't subject them to a built-in discrimination that would do nothing but isolate them from their peers, identify them as unvaxed by their excessive PPE, and leave a blank check on the table for additional restrictions as the administration sees fit," she said.

Shipley lamented the loss of opportunity for dedicated teachers to continue investing in the community's youth and sympathized with parents who were concerned for their children's safety.

"If my testing once a week eased their worries, I would have done it without a contract whether I agreed or disagreed with their logic," she said. "Instead, Superintendent Curtis decided to shackle exception-seekers with a laundry list of expectations, violate their staff confidentiality by outing, involve staff in a bulk email and then follow it up with a lame apology while projecting responsibility elsewhere, hamper the process by failing to maintain an open line of communication and transparency, and finally, privately negotiated changes to expectations only to reverse them all later."

The way in which the situation was handled "created a mountain of distrust," she said, pointing to other districts across the state which accepted all exceptions and required minimal or no additional expectations.

See SLSD A11

**15% OFF**

Any service with coupon  
**Schedule your appointment Today!**  
 Not Valid on any service Exceeding \$100 • Expires 11/30/21  
 Not valid with any other offer.

**Our People Really Make The Difference!**



**Brad's Chevy**  
 COTTAGE GROVE CHEVROLET, INC.

541-942-4415 • 2775 Row River Road • bradschevy.com



**Anytime. Anywhere. Any day...**

**Matt Bjornn, Agent**  
 Bus: 541-942-2623  
 www.bjornninsurance.com

**That's when you can count on State Farm®.**  
 I know life doesn't come with a schedule. That's why at State Farm you can always count on me for whatever you need - 24/7, 365.  
**GET TO A BETTER STATE™.**  
 CALL ME TODAY.



1101198.1 State Farm, Home Office, Bloomington, IL

**NOW ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS**

1445 N Gateway Blvd  
 Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Contact our New Patient Coordinator at  
**541.640.7625**



**nova PRIMARY CARE**  
 Your Partners in Wellness

**NovaHealthPrimaryCare.com**


**Swap & Shop**

**Buy - Sell - Trade**

10:05 - 11am  
 Monday - Friday

3 Items - \$500 limit

This is truly the place to find that hard to find item or turn your unwanted possessions in to other people's treasure.



717 Main Street  
 Cottage Grove, OR 97424  
 Lobby Phone: 541.942.2468  
 Studio Line: 541.942.5548  
 Online requests: request@knnb.com

**TURNING 65 AND NEED HELP WITH YOUR MEDICARE CHOICES?**


Call Paul to help simplify the complicated.



**541-517-7362**

**Paul Henrichs ~ Independent Agent**  
 coverage4oregon@gmail.com

**Voted Best Senior Living Community in South Lane County!**



**Our caring staff and management team are exceptional! They've worked hard to make our memory care extraordinary and to ensure that our residents get the best in care.**

**Here's just a few things that make us the best:**

- Latest technology specifically designed to serve memory care residents
- Secure outdoor garden & relaxation area
- Sensory gardens & quiet common areas
- Lots of windows for natural light
- Personal furnishings and personal details
- Home-like environment with safety features
- 24-hour on-site care staff
- 3 delicious meals & snacks, served daily
- Life Enrichment Programs
- Large private rooms & bathrooms
- Medication management
- Weekly housekeeping/linen service
- Music therapy
- Wi-Fi and utilities
- Laundry

Experience Extraordinary

Full-service Memory Care with 24/7 immediate placement for urgent admissions.



**MAGNOLIA GARDENS**  
 MEMORY CARE

Call 541-942-0054 for more information or to schedule a tour!

1425 Daugherty Ave., Cottage Grove, OR 97424 • MagnoliaGardensSL.com

**MARTINEZ YARD SERVICES, LLC**



Serving Cottage Grove, Creswell, Lowell, Dexter, Pleasant Hill, Eugene, Springfield & Junction City

- Property Cleanup
- Yard Service
- Moss Removal
- Pressure Washing
- Gutter Cleaning
- Brush Removal
- Bark Installation
- And Much More

FRANCISCO MARTINEZ, OWNER  
**(541) 579-0454 • Call Today!**

**What's Rotary?**



We focus our time, energy, and efforts on service projects encompassing:

**Local Projects:** High School Scholarships, Bike Helmets for Lincoln Middle School, Literacy, Crousel Wheelchair Space, Aquatic Center Mural, downtown Bike Lockers and Playground Equipment for Coiner Park

**Global Projects:** Thai Library Project, Clean Water in Central America

**Become a member today.**



Contact Karol Kuhn Simons  
 rotary424cg@gmail.com

**Service Above Self**