

## **PAT Statement of Purpose for Bargaining the Reopening of Schools**

The Portland Association of Teachers has always held that the primary mission of public education should be to prepare every student to become a successful, well informed critical thinker who is ready to fully engage as an active member of their community. The members of PAT are dedicated to all students regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or economic status.

Progress in achieving our mission met an historic stumbling block when in March of 2020, Oregon confronted the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in the Governor abruptly closing schools, placing school districts in a crisis management model of distance education. Although that was necessary given the situation in March, it was not successful for many of our students, and we know that students of color, students with disabilities, and emerging bilingual students fared the worst under this model. We can and must do better when instruction resumes in September.

The PAT believes that we face two gigantic tasks in this negotiations process. First, we must restart schools with an agreement between Portland Public Schools and the Portland Association of Teachers that will provide the greatest level of academic, social/emotional, and physical safety supports available to every student, educator, staff member and PPS family. Secondly, we must enter into a new Collectively Bargained Agreement that builds on the positive work of our last agreement so that students and educators can continue to grow and prosper.

Our initial task is to agree on a model of instruction for the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year that protects the wellbeing of students, staff and their families. There is no perfect option, yet we must agree quickly to some system so that the rest of the Portland community can plan for their work and home lives in September and beyond. The negotiations to accomplish the second task, agreeing on a successor CBA, can follow once we agree on a model of education for the next year.

There are three main areas that must be addressed in order to successfully begin the school year. The first is that the work environment must be safe. We strongly believe that students and PAT members will be needlessly exposed to COVID-19 infection if PPS and PAT attempt a Hybrid school model of instruction at a time when the community spread of COVID-19 is not under control. No student or staff member should be asked to risk their life or the life of a vulnerable family member to attend school. **Even if the statistical odds of illness and death were small, our students, staff and families are not statics – they are people – and the only acceptable number of them to lose to COVID-19 is zero.** After considering the publicly available information on rates of infection and ways to suppress those rates, and the consequences of failing to do so for the most impacted members of the Portland community, the PAT believes that we must only reopen schools in what the Oregon Department of Education refers to as a Comprehensive Distance Learning model. Virtual school is clearly the only way to keep our school communities safe at this time.

The second goal for the upcoming year is to address elements of educator workload. The PAT believes that the opening of this school year must recognize that the educators' workload under

the March to June 2020 crisis management model is unsustainable. It is clear that virtually every educator was working far beyond a normal “workday” to plan, create, and deliver instruction in an online setting. The strain of trying to connect with students facing difficult circumstances outside of a traditional school only added to an already untenable workload. This year’s plan for implementing a distance learning model must be more student and educator centered and must account for the unique challenges posed by virtual teaching and learning during a pandemic. This would be accomplished by providing time within the work day to deliver instruction, develop lessons, create learning materials, assess students work, provide actionable feedback to students, gather and track data, communicate with families, collaborate with other staff, and engage in the professional development needed to become a virtual educator during a pandemic.

The third goal of our deliberations is to acknowledge the needs of the community and develop actionable plans to address those needs. A partial list of needs includes:

1. Secure partners and resources to respond to the basic needs of students and families (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, mental/social/emotional health supports)
2. Provide students and families access to online learning (e.g., digital devices per/student rather than per/family, hot spots, technology support).
3. Provide support, including technology support, for families in their home language.
4. Provide dedicated staff teams to consistently support at-risk students, students who had limited or no access to instruction during the spring 2020 school closure, and students who have been out of contact with their teacher in the current school year.
5. Provide paper materials as well as books, art supplies, pencils, manipulatives to support students with limited access to technology. Make these available at school-based food-distribution sites, and/or delivered directly to students’ homes when transportation to sites is an obstacle.

We must agree upon a plan that keeps the students and their families safe, while ensuring equitable access to the physical, social-emotional, and academic supports that we know based on our experience last spring that our families need.

To be separated from our students is profoundly painful to the educators of PAT and we want nothing more than to be back in our classrooms face to face with our students and our colleagues. But to do so when it could potentially cause grave harm to the people we care so much about is unacceptable. The educators of PAT will physically return to our classrooms when public health data confirms that COVID-19 is no longer a threat and PPS can demonstrate that the conditions in our buildings meets or exceeds the Oregon Department of Education’s *Comprehensive Distance Learning* safety requirements. We look forward to exchanging ideas on how that might be accomplished, and to a common-sense plan for reopening the schools that we love.