The OREGON SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS OF COLOR CAUCUS’ mission is to promote quality education for all students, with emphasis on the unique needs of students of color. As school board members from around Oregon, we are a part of volunteer community teams helping to assure that our education systems are aligned for successful student outcomes.

We believe that providing a culturally diverse curriculum is crucial for students to become great stewards of our global society. Understanding the diversity in social backgrounds and our inherent biases is essential for finding solutions that benefit all community members.

Ensuring cultural and ethnic diversity in teaching and educational leadership is one of the best ways school boards can assist in culturally based learning. The caucus works to engage community members of color to become great leaders, creating role models for students to emulate.

This newsletter is intended to provide school board members with ideas and resources on issues affecting communities of color. Please email questions, comments and submissions to Bill Graupp, caucus president, at bill.graupp@nmarion.k12.or.us.

BILL GRAUPP
caucus president
CREATING A NEW NORMAL:
Opportunities for
districts to respond in
unprecedented ways to
this unprecedented crisis

By Helen Ying, Erika Lopez and Dr. Satya Chandragiri

It has become increasingly clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the inequities that exist in our communities.

Although many school districts are doing their best to mitigate the inequities highlighted during distance learning, the opportunity gap still exists. As commented by a school staff member, we must recognize that distance learning is not the best way for teaching and learning for all and that in some ways, it is “like bailing out water at this point rather than smooth sailing.”

It is paramount that school board members recognize that what we are doing now is crucial. This can be a pivotal point for education to be transformed for the better if we do it right. Instead of going back to the way things were, we should look at how we can respond in an unprecedented way for this unprecedented situation. We work to protect and implement the Student Success Act and in the meantime, we put in place recommended strategies to bridge the transition.

DISTRICTS CAN:

- **OFFER** summer catch-up sessions to students who are at risk of falling behind and face challenges due to the opportunity gap in education.
- **START** the school year a couple of weeks early, when possible, or at least provide teachers with extra training and a wider range of curriculum materials during the ramp-up to schools reopening.
- **DEPLOY** additional assessment shortly after school restarts so teachers can better match instruction to students’ needs.
- **DRAW** on community resources, whether that means posting math questions in grocery stores or sharing technical tips with parents in need of extra support, to help reinforce learning during time out of school.
SALEM-KEIZER PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
A focus on service, not location

Salem-Keizer Public Schools is the state’s second-largest school district. Nearly 70% of our students experience poverty, 17% are English language learners and 17% have an Individualized Education Plan. Inherently inequitable, the digital divide has emerged as a key barrier that we have had to address during our transition to distance learning. Students can’t participate in distance learning if they lack the basic digital infrastructure needed at home: a device, Wi-Fi, etc.

Our district distributed over 30,000 Chromebook laptops to Salem-Keizer students and coordinated the installation of 10,000 internet “hot spots” and connections to ensure that students had the resources necessary to continue their education at home. Our teachers made over 50,000 video calls, providing technical support to students and their families during their adjustment to digital learning as well as support services for children in special education programs, including holding IEP meetings online.

Our teachers and staff made over 222,000 telephone and video conference calls with students and listened to their families, exemplifying what equity is all about.

The transition to distance learning also highlighted the resilience of our students. Some students shared a weekly Zoom support meeting with their friends or joined a virtual study group. Some participated in larger groups that included students from many schools within and outside the district. Plans are developing to start computer coding courses for the students by former students!

We cannot forget that equity is the heart and soul of all public education, and this pandemic will give us the chance of a lifetime to reset our schools to achieve this vision. Digital access is perhaps the only way to level the playing field where the academic outcome does not have to be determined by students’ ZIP codes. It will give an opportunity for students to connect beyond their schools and finally allow true “democratization” of learning. When the restrictions are finally lifted, we should be prepared to have a menu of diverse learning models for our public schools.
HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT:
Family liaisons to community resources

In this time of crisis, engaging our students means engaging with their families in unique ways, which has been an important aspect of making distance learning successful. Our educators have had to rethink how to engage families during these difficult times, particularly in communities hardest hit by COVID-19.

In the past three years, the Hillsboro School District has strategically invested in adding family outreach liaisons to schools deemed high need, such as Title I and dual language. These liaisons are authentically rooted in the community, and they act as cultural brokers to build bridges between school and home. They advocate on behalf of families and provide them with the assistance and information they need to navigate a sometimes unfamiliar education system.

For most families, meeting their children’s basic needs is their primary focus during this crisis. Hillsboro’s family outreach team immediately joined other staff members, such as graduation coaches and counselors, and began to address the specific needs of families, directly reaching out to families and checking in, learning their needs and what the district could do to support them. They coordinated food drives, provided tools and tips for distance learning and referred them to community resources. The family outreach team’s success flows from its cultural fluidity, socio-cultural humility and commitment to service and working toward improving students’ and families’ quality of life.

As we think about going back to “normal” we suggest that we don’t. Instead we should keep in place the urgency of supporting and connecting with our families and allocate resources to do so.

HELEN YING
is the Multnomah ESD board chair and secretary of the Oregon School Boards Members of Color Caucus.

ERIKA LOPEZ
is the Hillsboro School District board chair and a member of the OSBA Board of Directors.

DR. SATYA CHANDRAGIRI
is a member of the Salem-Keizer School Board.

ARTICLES REFERENCED:
Oregon students face profound learning losses from school closures, especially in math, new research shows
Washington County Latino community hit hard by COVID-19

LEARN MORE bit.ly(OSBAcaucus)