

To: State Board of Education
From: Nancy Willard, Embrace Civility <http://embracecivility.org> and nwillard@embracecivility.org
Re: Lack of Effective Guidance on Distance Learning
Date: October 12, 2020

This is an additional short memo because I have spent an hour today trying to provide some assistance to an educator who contacted me from a district in a rural county.

This county is on the watch list. Their rate of infections is quite high. The superintendent is proposing allowing Limited In Person Instruction — which based on the description will be an attempt to set up hybrid learning. This will be exceptionally dangerous, given the infection rate in the county.

This is a high poverty county. Many migrants. The students have computer devices. But at this is a rural county, many do not have any access. Very few have the access that would support Zoom instruction.

This district has received ZERO guidance from ODE on how to provide effective instruction in this kind of environment!

ZERO GUIDANCE!!!

It was clearly evident in July that rural counties were at greater risk in Covid-19 outbreaks. The folks in these communities are less inclined to support protective measures. The medical services are more limited. The national authorities were warning of a second wave in the fall — gee, wasn't this obvious?

The school staff in these districts frequently have lower levels of expertise in educational technology. The students in these counties clearly were and are at greater risk both overall — and they were going to be left out because of the lack of adequate access.

But ODE, OHA, and the Governor (Lindsey Capps) have spent the last 5 months trying to figure out how to get students back into school and HAVE NOT focused any attention on how to provide EFFECTIVE distance learning to the students who need to stay home to keep school staff, themselves, and their families safe.

The key reason that many parents are urging schools to bring students back is ineffective distance instruction. Distance learning is not the problem. **Failure to provide the necessary guidance to educators on how to effectively deliver instruction at a distance is the problem!**

I am presenting on trauma and resilience next week, including a presentation on resilience and one on Trauma, Resilience, and Equity in the Age of Covid-19 and Black Lives Matter at the Association for Middle Level Education. I am actually a recognized authority in this area — as well as bullying, harassment, and digital safety/cyberbullying.

Instead of getting my presentations finalized, I am spending my time giving free guidance to a frantic teacher from this rural district on how to propose an alternative way to effectively provide instruction to their students — without putting their health and lives at risk! I dearly wish ODE has done its job!