



Published October 28th, 2020

## Orinda Intermediate School survey reveals continued disagreement on return to school

By Sora O'Doherty

Stacy Wayne, Principal of Orinda Intermediate School, presented the results of a return to school survey of OIS students, parents and staff at the Oct. 14 school board meeting. In general, students and teachers were more aligned in their responses, and parents less so.

While parents tended to want a return to school for all six periods per day, teachers and students did not favor that option. Students and staff were more positive than parents about the OIS session cycle model, which involves two classes per session of distance learning.

All groups were in agreement with the small cohort size in the synchronous Zoom sessions. Students, staff and parents were largely in agreement that both synchronous sessions and asynchronous work are relevant and engaging, with the majority of both students and parents thinking that the amount of asynchronous work is appropriate and staff largely feeling that the asynchronous work being assigned is appropriate to cover the content and essential standards. However, a sizable minority, about a quarter, of parents or guardians think that there is not enough asynchronous work.

While students said that they feel a sense of connection to their classmates, their parents and guardians strongly disagreed. Both stated that they would like more opportunities for students to meet with friends and classmates for clubs, sports and other activities.

Regarding willingness of teachers and staff to return to school and their preferences about timing, the majority favored continuing distance learning until the end of the school year. If that isn't possible, their next choice would be to return in March and less favorable would be to return in January.

Of teachers and staff asked about their intentions to return to school, 41.4% of teachers reported that they would return to work on campus and another 28.3% agreed to work on campus, but preferred not to. While only 7.6% cannot return to school owing to a medical condition, 22.8% said they would have to discuss the matter with the principal. Classified staff numbers were similar, although the return from staff was lower. Board member Carol Brown expressed how hard this decision is. "I think we're not supposed to be governing by survey," she said. "Surveys are useful in finding out about feelings and health issues, but we are the ones who are supposed to be deciding this. This is what we signed up for, whether we anticipated this or not." Brown wants to have a decision by the end of October. Another meeting was scheduled for Oct. 26, after press time.

Board president Cara Hoxie said, "We are trying to do everything we can to mitigate the risks and find a route forward. We can't have school without teachers." Risk cannot be eliminated, she said. "I want to take care of the teachers," she said, "because they are freaking exhausted. If we send them back in the hybrid model they will be working twice as hard." Charles Shannon, president of the Orinda Educators Association, told the board that in the face of the global pandemic, teachers are experiencing fear and exhaustion. They are approaching their breaking point, he said, and are calling out for help. Many public speakers expressed views ranged from wanting an immediate return to the classroom, deeming it completely safe, to those who feel that teachers should not be forced to choose between their jobs and their health.

Board member Jason Kaune agreed with Brown that the board is at a turning point where they have to make a decision. "This is tremendously hard," he said. "The community is super divided, and that division is so prominent in all our communications, making it really hard for us to make the decision, but we have to make the decision."

Board vice president Liz Daoust agreed, adding, "Nothing is going to be perfect, nothing is going to be ideal."

Reach the reporter at: [sora@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sora@lamorindaweekly.com)

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