



Transcript of League of Education Voters LEVinar with Washington state Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal on High School Seniors and Services for Students, April 23, 2020

Arik Korman [00:00:03] Hello, I'm Arik Korman, Communications Director at League of Education Voters and a parent of a fifth-grade son in the public school system who receives special education services. Like many of you, I'm trying to do Coronavirus triple duty: working, parenting, and teaching from home. In case you're not familiar with us, League of Education Voters is a statewide nonprofit working with families, educators, and leaders to build a brighter future for every Washington student. Our website is educationVoters.org. Our vision is that every student in Washington state has access to an excellent public education that provides an equal opportunity for success. Welcome to our free online webinar series, Lunchtime LEVinars. We started the series six years ago to share information and build knowledge on important and timely issues. Today's LEVinar is about high school seniors and services for students and families. And we are honored to have Washington state Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal with us. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all public and private schools in Washington state are closed until the end of the academic year in June. High school seniors have new clarity about graduation expectations, and school districts across Washington state are trying to provide technology, access, meals, and child care to students and their families. In this webinar, Superintendent Reykdal will outline the current state of our schools and answer your questions.

Arik Korman [00:01:33] A couple of housekeeping items before we begin. You'll notice there's a Q&A function at the bottom of your screen. This is a place for you to submit questions to us. As always, feel free to send any feedback about the webinar quality to us on the chat function or at info@educationvoters.org.

Arik Korman [00:01:55] As someone who believes his path in life is largely owed to the public education he received, Superintendent Chris Reykdal has dedicated his career to ensuring all learners have equitable opportunities for a high-quality public education.

Arik Korman [00:02:09] Since taking office in January 2017 after serving three terms in the Washington State House of Representatives, Chris has centered OSPI's work on equity and supporting the whole child, reinvigorated career and technical education pathways for students, and strengthened the agency's partnership with the legislature. In addition, under Chris's leadership, the legislature provided the first increase to the funding model for serving students with disabilities in nearly twenty-five years. Chris will continue advocating for enhanced funding until school districts no longer rely on local funds to provide these essential services. Chris and his wife Kim live in historic Tumwater with their two smart, talented, and hilarious children, Carter and Kennedy. Welcome, Superintendent Reykdal.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:02:59] Good to see you. And thank you, everybody, for being a part of the LEVinar today. Things are a little different - obviously, we're all trying to get used to these distance technologies and the ability to connect, even though we're sort of far apart. So I'm grateful for the opportunity. A lot has gone on over the last four or five weeks. As most folks know, the stay-at-home order is in place and the Governor had made had

made a determination to close our schools for the rest of the school year. There are about 40 states now that have closed for the rest of the year. All states are closed now, but about 40 for the rest of the year. We understand there about 1.6 billion children around the planet right now, not in their traditional learning models. That's about fifty-three million U.S. students. And obviously our 1.2 million public and private school students in the state of Washington. So one of the first things I get from a lot of folks is: we are losing ground and what happens and how do we catch up? And I always tell folks we are losing ground compared to where we want to be, but relative to other states and around the rest of the planet, we're hanging right in there. And in fact, I would say our continuous learning expectation, combined with the fact that we got engaged pretty fast on this, gives me pretty high confidence that we actually are developing a model that has higher expectations than a lot of the other states around the country. We're a local control state for sure. And we want to balance that and try to do the best we can to push. And still, a lot of the decisions to be local aren't so local that we couldn't make this decision to move forward. There are states around the country whose state OSPI offices simply said to their local communities, some of whom are run through county governments, "You decide. Keep learning. Don't learn. It's your choice. You make all the decisions." And we tried to find a little better balance.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:04:43] Just quickly on nutrition. We're serving about 300,000 meals a day right now. Normally, we would serve about for a little over 400,000 meals to free or reduced-price lunch students. So we know that a lot of kids are at home. And since many other parents are at home, they're taking the opportunity to just be a little more self-sustaining. But the ability to get to these families and most vulnerable ones has been really impressive by our districts. We are open. We've opened up about 5,000 childcare slots statewide and not all of those are filled, but we think there'll be added pressure to do that as the stay-at-home order gets a little more flexible. More and more parents will demand child care options. So we definitely want to keep those slots available to everyone.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:05:26] Another thing that we've been obviously trying to focus on here is our high school seniors. They don't have the luxury of time that a lot of our students do to make up work and to think about how they might engage differently this fall and beyond. They really need their momentum. So every district has engaged their seniors. They've built, if you will, a plan for each of them. They've checked in on their High School and Beyond Plan. They understand where they are in terms of credits in any local grad requirements. Districts are in-parallel doing three things. They are making sure that their students continue to get access to learning as seniors so they get their credits and their obligations met. They're looking at their own local grad requirements because we still have districts that do senior projects or portfolios or some other things, and districts have a lot of flexibility to waive those or to flex those up. And then the third thing that's available to seniors, of course, is assuming they work hard in that they continue to build momentum. There is a waiver available to them and our State Board of Education has worked really hard to put that in place. It's an authority they got right at the end of the legislative session that's in place. Lots of districts have already applied for that waiver. The district will receive the waiver and then the district will make decisions locally to apply that or not to seniors. So they can graduate on time. The data looks interestingly like a normal year. I know nothing about this is normal and we're at a distance and all that. But every year we have most of our seniors who are in really good shape by this time. They certainly need that last semester or trimester to finish out their credit requirements. But there's always some seniors who make it

a little scary at the end and have to get some work done in a real hurry. And there's definitely that scenario right now. But the connectivity to them has been quite good statewide. The planning is going quite well. We're gonna graduate our students. That's the bottom line. We're gonna graduate them. And there'll be some like every year who need additional support over the summer. They didn't quite get to that credit requirement. Most of those will get the support of the waiver if they really need it. And again, a few more might need a little more support over the summer. So that's a good news story. The tough part is we don't really have relief from our proclamation about being in our building safely for learning or for recreation. And that means graduation ceremonies continue to be a low, low probability face-to-face. So I really want to be clear about that. The Governor still hasn't totally ruled it out. We're working with him about what the science and the epidemiology says about the curve, of course. What might be in order in terms of his stay-at-home order? What kind of relief might be there? But people are planning lots of virtual graduations around the state right now. And if you've got a senior or know someone who you want to honor in that, I would definitely encourage you to reach out to those folks. This isn't a normal time and they're losing some really important rituals that mean a lot for some of our families. So I think districts will do the best they can to connect and try to make a pretty meaningful experience at the end. But it would be awesome if you'd reach out to a senior that you know and just wish them well and tell them to keep learning. This is not a time to slack off. Senioritis has been real for a hundred thirty years in Washington, and this of all years is probably one where they really want to be diligent, checking in with counselors and teachers and just triple checking. I have my credits. Do I have my local requirements? Do I have everything else? And I know we'll get over the hurdle.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:08:52] The last thing I want to make clear in terms of our guidance is we didn't anticipate needing to change any grading policies as this all cranked up four weeks ago. But we've got a lot of feedback from around the state that there were really inconsistent policies out there. Our districts historically have had the authority to make a lot of their own decisions about grading. The state, however, that being OSPI, is one of the places in law where it's really clear that we do have the authority to say what a meaningful credit is and to set the framework for our high school transcripts. And so, once we got feedback from districts that they wanted a little shape around that, we went on a big soul-searching mission with superintendents and principals and students and parents. And we've asked for feedback through multiple channels. And it's been really, really amazing to hear the feedback. The bad news is there wasn't a ton of consensus. There are people who see inequities in grading systems of pass-fail systems. There are all kinds of opinions about this. And it's one of the strange things where I think every time I read it, I said, well, I agree with that. And somebody had just an opposite opinion. Say, I pretty much agree with that, too. I guess what I would encourage everyone to think about is how inequitable our system was when we started before COVID-19, whether it was dependence on technology, a growing number of expectations of our students that they connected, submit electronically, and be engaged electronically, all the way to grading systems where a fifty-nine-point-nine means you may not graduate, but one-tenth of one percent more and you get a credit for a class and you get to move on. The arbitrary nature of grades has always been a struggle, and our state is one trying to push to standards-based. So we want to know what students know. We want to figure out how they can demonstrate their knowledge and whether they'll have success in their next step. That's the way we've been moving. But the grading systems tend to hang behind that. I want to thank on this broadcast here our higher ed partners. They've worked really, really hard to try to give counsel to our high school seniors, juniors,

and our students. They've been clear that they're gonna be incredibly flexible with admissions coming in for resident undergraduates. But they were also really honest that they can't speak for out-of-state institutions. They can't speak for the military scholarship organizations. A host of other decisions get made around student grades. So that's why I made the decision to produce guidance to our system that we will continue to grade. A couple of caveats on that. Every student will have a chance to improve their grade from where they were when the closure began. No student will be allowed to receive an F. There'll be no F grades, no failing grades, and no deterioration to GPA as a result of failing grades. Districts still get to choose that scale, though. They can choose an A to D scale, an A to C, an A to B, or an A scale with an incomplete as the real option for students who don't feel they met standard or their teachers don't feel they met standards. And then our districts have a responsibility to then create a learning plan for that student. Again, our seniors, we need to focus on them because they don't get another chance. But for all of our other students, they'll get pretty good engagement to make sure they get that credit. The incomplete will not impact GPAs - it will not be calculated into GPAs. Again, there are great arguments on every side of what is equitable and what is not. We felt that a pass/fail or pass/no-credit system - we really examined it and looked at the research - was not a very equitable system that treats a student who's really accelerating in an A exactly the same as a student who is not proficient, but is still sort of barely passing a class. Probably a true pass/no-credit system was likely to result in a lot of folks just getting a P and they weren't necessarily ready to move to the next step. And so there was no expectation for continuous engagement. So again, nothing perfect about this. And there are definitely downsides to everything. But we thought a better framework should come together, more consistency and opportunity for students to express themselves through the grading system we have - no harm to them in their future endeavors, no Fs, no backsliding. And everybody will have a denotation - there'll be a note on the high school transcript for this period. And that was Higher Ed's idea. They really wanted us to do that. So did a lot of folks in the business community. They said, "Mark this moment, because three and four years from now when some ninth-grader is trying to get into college and somebody sees an Algebra 1 or a geometry class on that transcript, they're going to want to remember what the environment was at this time."

Superintendent Reykdal [00:13:21] So that's some of the big chunks of guidance we've given out. I'm really proud of our system for stepping up. It's been hard. It's been challenging. There are still technology access issues for sure. But generally speaking, we think about three-quarters or more students have connectivity. It's not always highest quality, but that's part of the deployment that districts are doing and we're doing to get hotspots and devices in the hands of students and also get the private sector to help us with more connectivity. So that's what I know for now as a baseline. Let's get to those questions and we'll rapid-fire these for as many as we can get through.

Arik Korman [00:13:54] Great. Thank you so much, Superintendent Reykdal. All right, this is your opportunity to submit questions to us. No question is too basic. There is a Q&A function at the bottom of your screen, and that is where you can type in your questions. Superintendent Reykdal, the first question is about equity and student supports. What should the state and districts be doing to anticipate increased dropout rates and measure for learning inequities as a result of the COVID-19 school closures?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:14:23] Yeah, I definitely wouldn't presuppose higher dropout rates, but definitely the disconnect becomes a real, real concern right here. So that's why districts are really focusing on seniors to make sure they get supports, but they're really reaching out to every family and really understanding what's your situation, what's your circumstance, how complex is it for you to engage in the learning? The reach-out right now and the connection with families is so important, so that they understand there's a bridge from this moment to next year. There's an opportunity right now to engage in continuous learning as much as it can be challenging. So that's one thing. And then, you know, we do have targeted dollars for some of our student groups who really need extra support. Districts are being really intentional with those dollars now. There is federal money coming very soon. It's not a ton. It's a probably a 1.3 or 1.4 percent addition to our state budget. And it's really flexible.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:15:15] So districts who didn't feel they had the connections that they wanted that need extra supports for students, maybe even get them access to technology or Wi-Fi or maybe get really intensive on IEPs for students with disabilities or services. Those districts will get a lot of flexibility with that. And it's driven by Title 1 formulas, but it's not limited to that expenditure. It can be on really anything COVID-related or response related.

Arik Korman [00:15:41] I have a question about the federal stimulus money specifically, which is: how will you prioritize? And is there a way to ensure that that money is spent on students most impacted by the closures and opportunity gaps distributed equitably and going directly to address student needs?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:15:58] Yeah, 90 percent of the money is required to go out by the Title One formula, so it definitely has a focus on high poverty communities. That's a really good first step in terms of a priority for sure districts. They'll get a lot of discretion. So the federal government, the U.S. Department of Education, along with Congress, has definitely made a clear interpretation that this is really a wide-open opportunity. But there will be some guidance around it and we'll probably write additional framework around it at OSPI so that as districts draw down those resources and then expend them, that we have a really good understanding of what they purchased, what was their target, what was their focus and what student groups were they trying to make gains with. We'll have a pretty good framework for that so that, as this thing progresses and certainly by the end, we'll have a really good sense of how that went. Again, it's two hundred million dollars and we spend 15 billion a year right now. So it's not going to move the world. But boy, for some places, it's going to be a big deal.

Arik Korman [00:16:53] Right. Thank you so much. The next question is about special education. What do you recommend parents do if their school district does not formally address special education? And if they've tried reaching out to their district, yet received no real answers and/or getting the runaround?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:17:09] Well, our districts have been guided consistently through this that there are no waivers or exemptions from laws around FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education), around IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Our students with disabilities have a positive civil right to have those IEPs followed. But we also recognize right now some of those services are going to be really challenging. So we told

districts to make sure they're following IEPs. They're engaging families in that. There are times when you need to revisit an IEP and, you know, really that's relationship. Those you who have been in this space, you know, its relationship with your district. And if you feel like you really needed a re-engagement on your IEP, I strongly encourage folks to reach out to their school district or building principal or leader. And then what we're telling districts is you really want to deliver those services. And we see some pretty cool stuff out there at a distance. But there are times where it's really challenging - both the connectivity side for families and access. And then sometimes the service that is needed isn't really conducive to an environment like this. So we've told districts you really have to document, document, document. Make sure that everything is accounted for in terms of the expectations of the IEP for both services and minutes, and that way you get relief dollars, additional state supports, and you get more time next year or over the summer. You can be really targeted in your supports for those students. This is one of those, again, with no easy answers. And a lot of people say, 'How can you make us or ensure us or guarantee us?' The state (education) office in all 50 states, nobody has that direct student, direct family role. This is through guidance to districts, and local school districts are the ones who deliver on this. So I really encourage that relationship.

Arik Korman [00:18:44] Thank you very much. The next question is about grading. I am struggling to understand how an A or incomplete where every student passing gets an A is different from Pass and Incomplete. It seems that admission officers will be devaluing these A's. Also, I'm interested to know what research and data was used to determine that Pass grades will harm students in admission since all students in the U.S. are in the same situation.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:19:10] Yeah, it's a really great question. So we grabbed data from around other states. We brought in Dr. Reeves, one of the experts in this space. We pulled together some real instructional leaders in our state, about 20 to 25 folks from around the state. A lot of educators and some building leaders and others. We understand that there are strengths and weaknesses to every plan. So what we were trying to do is make sure that the expectation for continuous learning was there. And we heard from a lot of students that they want to keep engaging our chance to improve. So the Pass left them without really much of an option and very little incentive. If you get an A, B, C, or D and everyone gets a Pass, I think Dr. Reeves and others had indicated that that's probably the least of the incentive systems for getting students to try to continue to engage and move forward. And part of the question I think for us was who doesn't have an incentive based on the system that you pick? And what we really wanted were students who are kind of on the bottom half of that grade scale, who may be getting the credit, but not really meeting standards to have the most push. And we think that districts who focus on a grading system and challenge each student probably gives us the best opportunity to target our energies with those students because they obviously want to do better. And they want to at least maintain momentum.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:20:33] Believe it or not, most students don't want an Incomplete. They don't necessarily want to have to reengage in the learning. So you've got to keep pushing them. But yeah, that's that. And then our scale, we just heard from enough districts that say give us some local opportunity to make decisions, though. So Seattle has selected an A or Incomplete scale. We don't think most districts are interested in that, but there's definitely some who are exploring it. And they make a very powerful argument about

equity, as the questioner points out here. Higher ed will have to just think about this time as a remarkably unique time anyways. And that's why they asked us for a notation on the transcript - universal transcript notation - just to make sure we all know this moment. And definitely there are folks who feel like, you know, giving everyone an A or lots of A's, if it's standards-based it's great, but we're not fully there on a standards-based system. So we heard from a lot of students who said, "Fine that that's an option, but don't make everyone do the A or Incomplete system because we find it hard to believe that students who are really accelerating and exceeding standards are at the exact same spot as students who are really struggling." And so very complex decisions, a lot of feedback from families and students. And we landed here as better guidance than just the Wild West, but it's not perfect.

Arik Korman [00:21:50] All right. Thank you very much. Next question is about reopening schools in the fall. Understanding that widely available vaccines probably won't be available in September, what plans are being made at the state level to prepare districts for safely reopening? I understand that each district is locally controlled. However, good leadership and a lot of transparency of what is ahead can help reluctant or overly optimistic districts begin to plan and respond now rather than later. For example, is the state considering changes to school density - more square feet per student? What about requiring a reduction to the number of students allowed in the classroom at one time? Can you share any policies that are being considered to promote and establish a safe reopening of schools in the fall? And I also got a question: will there be PPEs -personal protection equipment - for teachers or school staff that might be immuno-compromised or over 60?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:22:42] I'll start by saying there are no decisions. And the governor's office is working a lot with Department, Health and Centers for Disease Control and the University of Washington experts to obviously map out their projection for the virus and disease. You saw today in the news that New York is maybe starting to get an understanding of how many people have had it and perhaps built an antibody to it. And we don't know that yet in Washington. So the Governor's team, as we understand it, are really focused on test kits of any form, trying to understand the prevalence of the disease. That says a lot about the possibility of coming back in a safe way, but nobody thinks we're coming back and anything that doesn't still look like social distancing in a framework. So what are we already starting to think about? Everything you've just described in the question. What are alternating A/B schedules look like, and buildings to create that distance. People are talking about how a high school becomes an elementary school, so we focus the face-to-face time on our K-8 students who are probably least likely to have success online. And they're doing a lot of the early literacy and early numeracy building blocks and really focused time, face-time, with them and our students with disabilities and have more of our high school students focus on the distance technology. There are people thinking about unbelievable schedules and that will all sort of feed both emergency management's thinking on the Governor's thinking and ultimately as they make some decisions on our re-open. We will have a framework in place and hopefully a menu for school districts, but part of it is geography. If you don't have the same density of people, you may have a bigger opportunity. Part of it is size. If you're a school, an entire school of one hundred students in rural Washington, that's very different than a two thousand person high school for your opportunity. So we've given the Governor a lot of variables focused on the learning and the education system. He's thinking big picture about disease and safety and those will come together.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:24:37] As far as timing goes, we understand they want to spend a lot of time in May bringing in quite literally a million or more test kits and doing a significant effort here to understand where we sit in the state of Washington with respect to the prevalence of virus. And then they are hoping, they are telling us that is their goal, to give us some real guidance by early June about our September restart. That's about the best they think they can do right now. And we're just in an unknown time. So there's no certainty about it and there's no decisions right now. But all of those variables are starting to come into play.

Arik Korman [00:25:13] Thank you so much. The next question is about enrollment. Is OSP tracking the rate of students who are transferring to virtual public schools? If so, can you describe this trend? And do you have any suggestions for schools trying to determine their budgets based on enrollment?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:25:30] Yeah. So there's a two-stage process here. When a student officially moves to an online virtual program or virtual academy, there is a process where they disenroll, if you will, from their home district and they reenroll on the other. Normally, that's a pretty straightforward process. And we can see that our data systems and we definitely think statewide out of a million kids that they're several hundred who have done that, but not a huge volume. What's little less known as some of those programs have said, you know, you don't have to disenroll right now. We want to give you any opportunity. It's possible. So we know there are probably hundreds of students who are still enrolled in their district, maybe getting some guidance and coaching and support from their teachers, but they're also jumped over and try to pick up a class here and there. That's a little less known to us. And we're trying to map that out right now. I've heard from every sector who's worried about this. The public (schools) say we're going to lose students. The privates just said, "Hey, we're a tuition pay system. And we're afraid those students will either, you know, jump to the publics or because of cost or family income/loss of wages, that they'll make the leap." And we've heard the charter sector say, gosh, this is a really tough time. And although we're smaller and a little more intimate in terms of our ability to deliver that, they'll be concerned. So it's one of those deals where there's a lot of speculation. So far, the data does not appear to be a big transformation yet, but we're going to learn a lot more about that as the spring completes and everyone understands where they are.

Arik Korman [00:26:54] Great. Thank you. The next question is about childcare. How do we find out where childcare is available? Are there restrictions on who can use childcare? And are daycares allowed to stay open for non-essential workers?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:27:06] Yeah. This is a rule for the DCYF - Department of Children, Youth, and Families - and they are really the state agency in charge of traditional child care, birth-to-five. They're getting a slightly expanded role in that because we're transferring some resources to them for birth to two supports, particularly for students who are already identified with the disability at that age. And so they've got a big scope here. I understand they've got some mapping systems available to them and we may have those I'll have our team check with you and then get something to you for distribution that allows people to know those opportunities. It's tough. We are pretty well convinced that a lot of small businesses, if you will, that are child care providers birth-to-five in community and in neighborhoods are really struggling, partly because social distancing orders and the real complexity of doing that, and partly because a lot of people are at home right now. With the

stay at home order and the need to do that, a lot of people are at home and then they don't want to pay for childcare. So we think coming out of this, the 5000 slots that our schools have provided will be an important intermediate step. Remember, those were just health care workers. They were first responders and people in the food supply chain. Mostly grocery workers and pharmacy. Pretty narrow opportunity for that 5-year-old or say middle-schooler or that we provided and we'll probably as we reopen, that will normalize a little bit. I think the bigger worry that I have and DCYF and others have is that when families of birth-to-five age kids want their child care option, they're going to go to that private marketplace and find out that a lot of those folks aren't open right now or their startup will be a real struggle. So this is why you've seen energy in Congress to say, "Hey, treat these folks like small businesses and get them the resources that they need. Don't let that money go to places that don't need it as much as these small folks." And so I'm worried about it. It's not a scope that's in my world. But I worry a lot about it as a human being, as a Washingtonian, as somebody in the public sector. We have got to figure out with the legislature how to shore up birth-to-five in particular as we come out of this thing.

Arik Korman [00:29:11] Great. Thank you so much. The next question I have is about elementary school grading. I am an elementary school principal. What are the end-of-year expectations for elementary school? What is required of parents? Since standards aren't going to change, and given that we have standards-based grading, what should we tell parents? Will there be a big asterisk at the end of the year?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:29:32] Our guidance to districts on K-8 as long as the middle school credit their students is not high school level coursework, but the regular K-8 coursework for students. We've said to districts, "Maintain your current policies in terms of how you want to grade, how you want to evaluate work." We've told everybody though, we're just not going to have a normal environment here. It is not six hours a day in front of a certificated teacher and maybe a paraeducator doing the intensive work. It just can't happen. Those educators are watching out for their own kids. They've got their own family challenges. So they're creating learning opportunities. But it's not the same. So if you think about it that way, it's about not covering every chapter and every lesson that you always wanted. It's about what are the really important standards, the really important building blocks that allow the student to be successful at the next level. That's what we've guided folks to. And we're seeing some pretty cool stuff out there where they're thinking like, "I've got second graders and I know what they need for numeracy and I know what the third-grade teacher expects of them when they come in." It's just a real important building blocks to build on in math or say, reading. That's the focus - actually less is more right now. Be really focused on standards - it's not about volumes of homework or worksheets. And whatever evaluation systems they have been using in K-8, they can continue to use. But our general expectation is we're gonna move students forward. We're gonna move them forward, and then we're going to figure out strategies at every building level over the next year or two to really make sure that students get backfilled with anything that looks like it came up short.

Arik Korman [00:30:59] Okay great. I've got three questions coming up on student supports. The first one is: what provisions are being made to support parents in building skills to support the learning happening in their homes now? Is there any consideration being given to training for parents to be able to understand their student's needs and utilizing technology? For example, how to use Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Zoom, etc.?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:31:23] We see a little bit out there. Obviously, our state is a local system that's deploying various models. And Teams is one, Google classroom, of course, Canvas, and others. So we definitely see some really cool stuff out there, but it's really district by district, as all of our deployment generally is. Some of it is very focused on families. But more so right now, it's focused on a lot of the professionals who they too need to get up to speed on actually teaching at a distance. Our students need some support and capacity. But let's be honest, our students have been sort of twiddling their thumbs, in some cases saying, "Come on, adults, catch up with us here" - whether it's their parents or their teachers. They've been engaged in a lot of these platforms for a while. So I do see some good stuff out there. There's obviously an expectation there, but the systemic supports for that in Washington and in most states is pretty thin, partly because we didn't think we'd be in this moment, right. No state was prepared for this. Generally parent outreach and parent engagement involves how to support your student in a traditional model, how English language learners families can get additional access to supports. A lot of that has historically been around families with students with disabilities. How can they support that work? But a large scale 2 million person - we have 2 million parents and guardians in the state - getting professional learning to them right now for this thing that's got eight weeks left. It is not likely to happen at scale, but there are districts doing some pretty good stuff with it.

Arik Korman [00:32:48] Got it. And then another question is about English language learners. And the question is, what are your agency's plans to ensure that families who speak languages other than English have access to the resources and guidance you and districts are providing? Is there going to be a timeline on translating OSPI materials and accountability to ensure that districts are translating theirs?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:33:10] Yeah, so our EL office - migrant bilingual office - has put together a guidance that just went out to districts here, or maybe it's set to go out here in the next day or two. The expectation has not changed. Districts have always had a responsibility to provide resources, materials in multiple languages and to meet families and students where they are. Spanish obviously dominates in this state, but there are nine or 10 other languages of significance that really make up the bulk of all of the other languages by volume of students. But if we just found any student of a different language, there'd be more than 200 around the state. So our expectation is that that work continues. It's harder now, of course, because their folks are at a distance. So getting districts over this time period to catch up and do more of that work is hard for them. We definitely see it in our office. We've turned all of our videos, for example, that I produce each week. We caption those in Spanish the minute we release them. Those are available in Spanish at least. And we're doing a little more of that. We are working with some organizations that can take our guidance and put it in multiple languages. And we're likely to use some of our federal emergency money to use community-based organizations as contractors to translate more of our guidance. So at least from the state level, parents and families with multiple languages at least understand where we're going. District by district they have very different experiences with this. The expectation is there in the federal and state program expectations and we haven't released them from that responsibility. They really need to be doing the translation as appropriate.

Arik Korman [00:34:41] And one quick follow-up says, one of the problems talking about equity is the fact that many families, mostly immigrants, are not getting the information

because the main way that districts are sending out the info is by email and that many families are not familiar with email. Is there a chance that text communications could be used?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:34:59] It definitely is a district by district choice. We've never mandated, you know, the modality of this. But what we have observed are districts getting really creative because the email isn't always the best. And honestly, there's a generation of younger parents right now - email is really not their thing. And so they prefer other modalities. And so text messages we see obviously districts trying to maintain their websites. There's a lot of messaging services that get used to sort of blast services as well. And then, of course, we still have a lot of districts delivering in multiple languages homework packets via their bus routes while they're delivering food and nutritional services. So we've seen districts say, "Hey, we probably can't get to a lot of families with any electronic modality. And instead, we're going to stick with paper here. They copy homework, they copy messages to families. Again, that's generally in English and Spanish through parts of eastern Washington and some other parts of western Washington. So districts are trying to be as creative as they can. That's my observation. But honestly, I think the inequities we saw in the system four months ago are the same inequities that we see now. Some problems are being solved and other ones, via the distance challenge, are exacerbated. And this puts a big shining light on the system.

Superintendent Reykdal [00:36:11] What I've told a lot of folks that I work with statewide is, "Let us never miss this moment." You think of distance technology right now as this big gap we have to close with devices and hotspots, and that's important and that's good. But three months ago, you were asking students to do High School and Beyond Plans electronically. Sometimes they are only allowed to submit homework and papers electronically. You definitely if you want them to check on grades and monitor progress with families engaged in that activity at home, that's an electronic connection. We had connectivity expectations of families well before this. And it was creating an inequitable opportunity even before we identified it. Tech is not really a basic ed thing is you imagine. But I've challenged everyone in our state now to think about access as a utility. And I would encourage you to think about that broadly, right? There are some utilities that are public. There are some utilities that are quasi-private and regulated. And then there are some things that are very private. We use the private sector to buy textbooks. You know, government doesn't produce textbooks. But we don't make families purchase them. We have a basic ed system that says we are going to provide your learning materials when you're in our classrooms. We have to have universal connectivity. It is the Washington challenge over the next five years. We should be obsessed with this. I'll just give you one last metric on it. Four hundred thousand free reduced-price lunch families. There are services out there to get you twenty-five, three speeds, Wi-Fi. A direct line in your home where that's possible for \$10 dollars a month. Right? So for four million dollars a month, the state can ensure access to almost every free or reduced-price lunch family in the state. For four million dollars a month. So fifty million dollars a year on a \$15 billion dollar budget is very reasonable to create that expectation. And I think we should be the first state in the country that guarantees as a basic education right that every single family is connected. It would go a long ways.

Arik Korman [00:38:07] Great. Thank you very much. Last question that we have time for today is about mental health. As you know, students and families are facing a lot of anxiety and other mental health stress. What can schools do to help with this when school is in

transition back to the September school year? And what is your transition plan to respond to these issues? What kinds of social, emotional supports and other mental health supports can students look for at this time?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:38:35] Yeah, I think I observed districts doing two things right now. They built continuous learning plans again with some limitations on accessibility. But they are thinking about ways for the learning to continue. And many of them now are already starting to plan their way back to the fall to say this is more than just making sure that there's content in front of students and that we're, you know, safely distancing ourselves. There is a big mental health and SEL component to this. And districts are working on what that looks like. Is it more intensive supports as students transition back? So more orientation, more engagement beforehand? How much evaluation of student mental health needs to be done? And then districts are thinking about how they transition resources to be stronger on the mental health side and the social-emotional side. Local control, local determination. Again, they are balancing their current resources. How much sort of federal CARES Act money will they get to do some of this work? But there is honestly a growing worry too about future budgets. Right? This is going to have a huge impact on our state budget and we're going to work really hard to protect all those resources. The vast bulk of them are basic ed and the Supreme Court has been really clear. You cannot cut basic ed for a budget purpose. There has to be a research basis to it. So we think we're in a really good position to strongly defend all the gains that we have made in K-12 investments. And a lot of those gains in the last couple years have been more mental health supports, social-emotional supports, and whole child supports. So not just content areas, but the things that make learning possible. And we're gonna do everything we can to protect those. It'll be really, really important. And I will always, always, always remind people we're still a state with 17 percent of our money that comes from local levies. It's way down from where it used to be in terms of dependence. But we still need levies. A lot of those extra supports are funded through those programs. So if you've got levies coming up or you got them in the next year, don't ever think that those aren't critical. Because they are.

Arik Korman [00:40:35] Thank you so much, Superintendent Reykdal. I know you've got to go. We got hundreds, literally hundreds of great questions for you today. If families did not get their questions answered or if educators did not, is there a way they can reach out to you to ask those questions that weren't answered today?

Superintendent Reykdal [00:40:51] Yeah. So right on our OSPI website, some of the very first stuff you see is my office on that website and there's a Superintendent inbox. I'd encourage people to go to OSPI - the front of our webpage here. I'm looking at (Communications Director) Katy, www.K12.wa.us. This is a little debate in our office because I never understand why there's a US in there. It's K12.wa.us. They can go there and there's a Superintendent's inbox. We've done this through this process. Really invite people to not just ask questions. Right? I'm always the teacher. And I always told my students that a concern or frustration without a solution isn't a team. So definitely ask hard questions and definitely raise good points. And if you have an idea or a solution for it, put that in your message as well, because it goes right to our executive leadership team table. Say, what do you think about this? I mean, we've had people give us extraordinary concepts, sometimes possible and sometimes not. But we bring that to the table to say this is a really interesting idea that came from Aberdeen or Seattle or Spokane. A parent or student says, "What if we tried this thing?" And it kind of shapes the way we think about what's possible. And as we transition,

for example, we're putting those on menu items for the Governor's office to consider. So keep it coming, everybody, and really grateful for the engagement. These are remarkable times. And as you saw from the picture earlier, I had more hair when all of this started. If this goes on much longer, it's not going to be pretty. But at least I don't need a barber since they're closed down. But keep focusing on the safety first and foremost. It is a public health crisis and it's real and it's not going away without a vaccine. So even as we have our slow return, we're going to have to be super careful. The world's a different place today. And we need to be aware of that. So thanks for having me and I look forward to the next one.

Arik Korman [00:42:42] Great. Thank you so much, Superintendent Reykdal. We will see you next month on the 22nd of May. So feel free to mark calendars for that. I will go ahead and include that email link on the follow-up email that you'll be receiving. Also, League of Education Voters is aggregating resources available in communities across Washington state to help us get through this difficult time. You'll find our COVID-19 Resources page on our website, educationvoters.org. Our next LEVinar is this coming Wednesday, April twenty-ninth, and it will focus on supporting early childhood education in Washington state during COVID-19. It's featuring a great panel of early learning providers and advocates. You can register by visiting our website, educationvoters.org, and clicking on Events, then Lunchtime LEVinars. I'll have that up by the end of today. I'll also send registration information in the follow-up email along with Superintendent Reykdal's e-mail address. Also coming up on May 7th, we're going to present a LEVinar on mental health and social-emotional learning for students during COVID-19. We'll also present a LEVinar featuring community leader Trish Millines Dziko of the Technology Access Foundation on May 13th on Now Is the Time to Redefine School. And finally, as I said, Superintendent Reykdal will be returning on May 22nd to discuss continuous learning around Washington state. Thank you to each of you for joining us today. If you have additional questions or comments, please send them to me, arik@educationvoters.org. And my first name is spelled ARIK at Education Voters dot org. A recording of today's presentation will be available on our website, educationvoters.org, and will be sent to you in the follow-up email, which should land in your inbox in about 24 hours. Feel free to share the recording with your friends and colleagues. If you would like to learn more about League of Education Voters or support our work, please visit our website, educationvoters.org. Thank you again for attending. Each one of us has the right to feel safe and valued. We hope you will join us at future LEVinars.

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