

The members of the OBOB Executive Board are all volunteers with work, family, and other demands on our time. We are not always able to respond quickly, especially to questions that require a unified position and message from the board, so I reiterate that your patience and understanding are appreciated.

These last two years have been hard on many of us and our families in the same ways life has been hard on so many across Oregon, the United States, and the world. Some have battled COVID infections or had to care for loved ones who have contracted this disease; some have had to navigate the strained medical system for themselves or loved ones dealing with other serious medical conditions; many have worked hard to provide enriching experiences for their children and grandchildren during a global pandemic, not only by putting on OBOB. Please understand this is not a decision we wanted to make, but it is a decision we are unified in believing to be the only one available for this season.

As mentioned previously, we intend to focus our energies on creating the best OBOB experience we can for tens of thousands of students who play OBOB at the local/school and Regional levels. While we understand the thrill of potentially winning the State tournament is a good motivator for readers, it is not the only motivator, nor even the most important motivator. Competing for and having a chance to win local and Regional competitions is also very exciting. Just reading, preparing, and participating with your team is exciting.

While we are relieved, as so many are, that COVID has gone much easier on children than other groups, we are cognizant of many other factors. 1) COVID continues to have disproportionate effects on different groups, hitting many historically disadvantaged groups the hardest, 2) While OBOB is played by children, the vast majority of volunteers who run Regional and State tournaments come from much more at-risk groups, often retirees, 3) Recent news out of South Africa shows the Omicron variant causing record numbers of hospitalizations among minors in that country. This variant is faster spreading and has recently appeared in our neighbors California and Washington.

Many are citing the reinstatement of sports as a precedent for OBOB. The OSAA has been able to start many sporting events, but there are many factors at play that differentiate OBOB. First, we do not fall under OSAA, nor do we enjoy their event insurance. We cannot get event insurance to run our State tournament, which protects the institution of OBOB and individuals acting on behalf of OBOB. The tournament does not fall under the liability shield provided by State Law that school districts and other local government entities enjoy. Second, our historical venues for large events that accommodate the State Championships or large Regionals are not available to us. Community colleges and similar venues require event insurance. Most community colleges are not renting out their event spaces in a manner that would allow for our competition. Chemeketa Community College where the last many State Championships have been held, does not employ an event staff any longer. Third, we tried to get our State tournament up and running. At this point in a normal cycle we would already have contracts signed for event space, recruitment of volunteers, etc. underway. We persistently met with dead ends. Fourth, our Local and Regional organizers need more time to conduct competitions considering the myriad challenges they face. By making this decision, we allow extra time for local schools and libraries

to conduct competitions and for Regional Managers to plan brand new competitions in the virtual world. There is not enough time, with our new timeline, to pull off a brand new State tournament with integrity.

Please take this communication as the Board's final word on the matter. We have much to do during the holidays and into January—including urgent tasks such as editing and rewriting thousands of questions, recruiting and preparing Regional Managers capable of running virtual competitions, settling exactly how those competitions will work, communicating with hundreds of schools and libraries conducting local competitions, selecting titles for next year's OBOB season, and organizing all registered entities into mini-regions. We respectfully request that you refrain from tying up the Board re-litigating a decision that we did not want to make, but had to make.

We truly love your passion for OBOB and the children for whom you are advocating. If we didn't have that same passion, we wouldn't be volunteering so many hours of our time each and every year doing the planning and work required to run a program of this scope. Remember, it is the State tournament that is canceled, not OBOB altogether. The heart and soul of OBOB, promoting literacy and quality literature in our state, is alive and well. You can still support your readers and OBOB by volunteering to help conduct the virtual mini-Regional tournaments. We need many volunteers to conduct Regional tournaments each year and consistently struggle to get enough volunteers. A special thanks to those who have already volunteered to run virtual mini-Regionals this year! We appreciate your commitment in challenging times.