

April 5, 2021

McMinnville School District
McMinnville School Board

We want to personally thank you for all of your efforts during this difficult time for our schools and through this pandemic. We have not commented on this situation until now in order to give the school district the space to analyze the situation with the full expectation that all efforts would be exhausted to return our schools to as much normalcy as possible. We now feel compelled to voice our concerns regarding the reopening plan that has been implemented by the school district and implore the school board and administration to reimagine and improve this woefully inadequate plan.

WE MUST PRIORITIZE OUR CHILDREN AND THEIR EDUCATION

We appreciate the difficulty in meeting everyone's needs in this situation as there are children, parents, educators and staff that are involved. I am sure that everyone agrees that the primary mandate for school is to do what is in the best interest of the children, while ensuring safety for all other stakeholders. It is incumbent upon everyone to take into greater consideration the unbelievable hardship the current minimal plan is putting on our community and most importantly our children. We must devise a plan that actually fulfills the mandate of the school system to put our children first.

One of the wonderful aspects of living in McMinnville has been the high achievement of the school district and its ability to create programs with imagination that delivered for all of its students. During the pandemic, though, it is clear that this spirit has been lost and the current system is not delivering on its primary mission. The district seems to be caught in a spiral of fear and are unable to make courageous and scientifically sound decisions. Based on our current knowledge of COVID data from reopened schools and the troublesome student outcome data, it is obvious to anyone that more needs to be done. Ironically, one of the perverse outcomes of this lack of action is that the most vulnerable students and families in our community are more greatly impacted by your lack of action and it is creating even more inequity in our community.

When Governor Brown mandated that all schools open by April 19, we excitedly anticipated that our school district would once again find its footing and respond to the challenges it faced with an imaginative and courageous plan to get back to educating our children. Unbelievably, the revised hybrid plan that was unveiled does nothing more than meet the absolute bare minimum of the governor's mandate and results in less student-teacher interaction than the current remote learning mode by making every

Wednesday asynchronous while only offering 5 hours of potential in person instruction. The burden on our community to get students to school for only 2.5 hours, twice a week, then getting them online on the same day is a huge burden and completely untenable for working families. Is this really the best that can be done and is this really putting the needs of our children first?

There is a real and present danger to our children by not responding with a better plan. Assessment data from the Curriculum Associates i-Ready platform from around the country and used by our school district, found that students learned only 67 percent of the math and 87 percent of the reading that grade-level peers would typically have learned by the fall. On average, that means students lost the equivalent of three months of learning in mathematics and one-and-a-half months of learning in reading. By the end of the school year, students in the U.S. are likely to have suffered up to nine months of learning loss in math, on average, by the end of the academic year because of disruptions caused by the pandemic, and students of color could be as many as 12 months behind according to an analysis of the toll this unprecedented school year has taken on children¹

CDC, SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE ALL SHOW WE CAN OPEN OUR SCHOOLS SAFELY FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

The irony of all of this is that we have the scientific research that proves that we can safely reopen our schools with no real discernible increase to the transmission of COVID-19 in our schools or our community. The CDC has analyzed this issue in depth and showed that studies have found that it is possible for communities to reduce incidence of COVID-19 while keeping schools open for in-person instruction. A study comparing county-level COVID-19 hospitalizations between counties with in-person learning and those without in-person learning found no effect of in-person school reopening on COVID-19 hospitalization rates.²

Based on the greater risk of severe illness and death among adults with COVID-19, reasonable concerns have been raised about the occupational risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection for teachers and school staff. Evidence suggests that staff-to-staff transmission is more common than transmission from students to staff, staff to student, or student to

¹ Rielly, Katie. "The Learning Gap Is Getting Worse as Schools Rely on Remote Classes, Especially for Students of Color". *Time.com*,. DECEMBER 8, 2020
<https://time.com/5918769/coronavirus-schools-learning-loss/>

² Harris DN, Ziedan E, Hassig S. The Effects of School Reopenings on COVID-19 Hospitalizations. Technical Report from the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice (REACH). 2021; Published 2021 January 4.

student.³⁴⁵⁶⁷. Safeguards are easily implemented to reduce this possible source of spread and it is clear that the spread of COVID-19 from students to teachers is low to non-existent. There is no scientific reason not to open for in-person learning.

IT IS TIME THAT WE DO MORE AND PRIORITIZE OUR STUDENTS

We are calling on the school board and administration to do more and to meet its basic requirements. We call on you to fulfill President Biden's key goal of opening K-8 schools for full-time, in-person classes by his 100th day in office. Nearly half of schools in our country are open full-time as of March 23, 2021, and we see no rational reason why McMinnville cannot do the same. Furthermore, we demand that school be full-time for all students from the beginning of the next school year and that the school board and administration accept nothing else, lest be deemed an abject failure.

We demand the best for all children in our school district and that their educational and emotional needs to be put first. Open the schools while keeping remote learning opportunities available for those uncomfortable with having their students attend in person. Science and experience clearly shows that schools can be opened safely, and the failure to do so is a failure to our students, the community and our future.

We appreciate your consideration of these concerns,

Scott and Lisa Neal

³ Ismail SA, Saliba V, Lopez Bernal J, Ramsay ME, Ladhani SN. SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: a prospective, cross-sectional analysis of infection clusters and outbreaks in England. *Lancet Infect Dis.* 2020;S1473-3099(20)30882-3. Published online ahead of print 2020 December 8. doi:10.1016/S1473-3099(20)30882-3

⁴ Gandini S, Rainisio M, Iannuzzo ML, Bellerba F, Cecconi F, Scorrano L. No evidence of association between schools and SARS-CoV-2 second wave in Italy. Preprint. *MedRxiv.* 2021; Posted online 2021 January 8. doi:10.1101/2020.12.16.20248134

⁵ Stein-Zamir C, Abramson N, Shoob H, et al. A large COVID-19 outbreak in a high school 10 days after schools' reopening, Israel, May 2020. *Euro Surveill.* 2020;25(29):2001352. doi:10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.29.2001352

⁶ Yung CF, Kam KQ, Nadua KD, et al. Novel coronavirus 2019 transmission risk in educational settings. *Clin Infect Dis.* 2020;ciaa794. Published online ahead of print 2020 June 25. doi:10.1093/cid/ciaa794

⁷ Ehrhardt J, Ekinci A, Krehl H, et al. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in children aged 0 to 19 years in childcare facilities and schools after their reopening in May 2020, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. *Euro Surveill.* 2020;25(36):2001587. doi:10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.36.2001587