



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Teacher's feel so appreciated. Apology requested...

Suzanne Demarinis <dsuzluk@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 8:22 AM

I as well as several other teachers, are highly offended by a comment made by Koan Mercer at last night's board meeting.

" I do believe we are asking teachers to go into harm's way but it's worth it."

Mr. Mercer is not a teacher. Is it worth it to those teachers? Clarify why it's worth it to put teacher's in harm's way.... Is it worth it if a teacher gets covid and has long lasting health issues or possible death? Are you willing to pay for those medical bills?

Mr. Mercer can say this about himself but he has no right to say this about another human life...

Suzanne DeMarinis



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

(no subject)

Kelly McDonald <kpmcdonald@hotmail.com>

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 8:27 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Good morning MCPS school board and Superintendent Watson,

I appreciate the time you put towards meetings, understanding new recommendations, and reading public comments. Thank you Chair Holland and Superintendent Watson for the changes I've seen in the way you are proceeding, in the way the motions are made, the discussions and support or opposition voiced before the public comments are made, and the responses to the public concern. I really appreciate it.

Last night's meeting appeared to be all remote, and this tells me two things.

1. Someone has determined that it would be best if all of you meet remotely rather than for even some of you to meet together in the same room.

2. You have found ways to still hold your meeting effectively, and by being remote you have actually reached and included more concerned people than ever before at a meeting.

I hope you are correct in thinking that schools are not places where COVID tends to spread and I hope the scientists who state this have done solid research, but my senses are that there is still too much about this virus that is unknown. The risk is too great because once permanent changes happen, there is no way to go back and undo it or make it right.

I also wanted to mention there were a number of people who all had the same drawing of a school bus saying back to school as their zoom picture, I had heard that there would be a group of parents using the same picture or symbol as their zoom picture because they want to mock teachers who have a union and many have used a symbol or picture to show solidarity at prior meetings. These parents have created a private Facebook group of mostly white, elite parents, where they complain about teachers, say they don't want to work, call them lazy or say they are getting easy money. I am appalled by this. Now is not the time for an "us and them" mentality. We need to think as a community and think about ways to support each other not pull each other down. As for their complaints about teachers, I think they are greatly misinformed, wrong, and I think the exact opposite is true about teachers. Thank you again for your time. Sincerely, Kelly McDonald

High school schedule

sherry White <potomacfam@gmail.com>

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 10:38 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

I am a parent of a Hellgate High school student. We need to know as a family TODAY what the schedule will be. It is completely unacceptable that this was not thought and planned out over the last 10 months and dropped on the students and staff without a plan for this. It never should have been voted on in this disorganized state.

I would like the kids to go back to school when it is safe and when this has been planned. At this time I do not think that there are any indications that either of those criteria are met

I want to know if they are going to be in class 4 or 5 days a week and if they will continue the block schedule.

Sherry White

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Semester 2 Public Comment

Velita Rhol <vrholl@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 12:41 PM

Hello all,

I teach at Hellgate High School. I want to make it very clear that under the current schedule, prep time and time to work individually with struggling students is very hard to come by. As you decide upon final schedules, please keep Mondays planned as a remote learning day. It provides valuable time for students to complete homework and for teachers to make individual/family contact, to grade, and to prepare for the week ahead.

Thank you,

Velita Rhol

Social Studies Department
AP Human Geography and Human Geography
Hellgate High School
406-728-2400, ext. 6634
vrholl@mcpsmt.org

Plea no phase 2

Crystal Morgan <zzgash30@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 1:24 PM

Hello my name is Crystal Morgan, I have a high school student that goes to big sky high and I just received word that you plan to open school's for phase 2 next semester, I think this is the wrong call as a new strain of covid-19 has been found and that people who received the vaccine still got sick with covid. My high schooler has a three year old brother who is medically fragile even a cold could kill him and earlier this year there were several students that came down with covid, this could kill my child if his brother gets it through the school's. I understand that school's being closed causes some problems for other families but we need to protect our children not send them out to risk their health and lives. Our hospital's are filled to the max with covid patients and people are dying, please I beg you not to go to phase 2 and keep not only my children but others as well safe please! Thank you so much for your time

Teacher Mondays

Jeffrey Waniata <jbwaniata@mcpsmt.org>

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 2:35 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To whom it may concern,

Here are reasons to keep Teacher Mondays:

- 1) Needed prep time. We haven't taught in block format in the past and we need to come up with new lesson plans/structures. Can't simply combine 2 days into one. Need to consider student engagement and energy levels (can't lecture for 90 straight minutes!) Plus they gave us NO TIME to get this sorted out - here we're changing everything and it happens in less than two weeks, good luck! We need the Monday time.
- 2) Technically we are only supposed to have 5 preps and most teachers have 6 this year. Again, needed prep time on Mondays
- 3) Cleaning and safety - having Mondays off allows for a deeper cleaning for the week to come than just a quick wipe down after school.
- 4) Continuity for students. We've already shaken up student's worlds by switching from a 2-period to a 3-period schedule. Now we're telling them they have to go back full-time too. Let's just finish the year with Mondays off and back to normal next school year. From 2 - 4 - 5 days a week. It's a lot to process.
- 5) Students are still going to be absent and missing one day is like missing 2 and having Mondays open for virtual office hours will be helpful.
- 6) Why not give us all a day where we can breathe clean air and work from home. Students and teachers!
- 7) It seems like a difficult time due to increase our contact with students as teachers have been moved down on the list for COVID vaccines.
- 8) Stages seem important. Let's move to this stage now, and keep Mondays with the idea that by 4th quarter we can revisit this idea.
- 9) I'm still working. I currently have 3 -4 meetings regularly scheduled meetings on Mondays and I do most of my prep for the week as well. I am working those Mondays, but from home. The idea that all this can be accomplished without prep time is very difficult.

Thank you,

Jeff Waniata

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Jeffrey B. Waniata
Social Studies Teacher/Dept. Chair
Hellgate High School
406-728-2400 ext.6534

The old school Administration Building

Richard Hawley <hawleyrk2@gmail.com>

Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 7:29 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Sir,

My name is Richard Hawley. My wife and I have lived at 310 So. 6th. St. West since 1975. We are concerned about the future of the old school Administration Building. It is a grand old building. We heard that someone wanted to buy it but the Board does not want to sell. I know it was a school before WWII and I am sure it was an integral part of the neighborhood at that time and still is today. It surely blends into the Southside Historic District. We do not want a distillery or any business dealing with alcohol in the neighborhood. A Professional Plaza would be nice.

I know when Board decisions are made it will be in the news. Would you please reply to this email and let us know the intentions for the building at this time. It would be nice if the neighborhood was informed before the news so we are not the last ones to know what we will be living with for a neighbor.

Sincerely,

Richard and Kathleen Hawley

Regarding Second Semester

Juliana Arechaga <jarechaga@mcpsmt.org>

Fri, Jan 15, 2021 at 12:29 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>

Dear Board Members,

I am writing in regards to the recent decision by the board to move to phase 2 for high school students at the start of second semester and the discussion around pushing even further to a five-day face to face school week with all students.

I am a teacher at Hellgate High School and would first like to say how supported I have felt this year by our school's administration and to say what an amazing job the staff has done to support one another and our students.

I understand that many parents are worried about their children's mental health and academic progress, I have two small children and I completely understand where you are coming from. We all do, we are all in this. Every day I think about the lack of social skills and kindergarten preparation for my kids and it worries me. And although I think the combination of the new governor lifting the statewide mask mandate, the delay in teachers being vaccinated, and the rapid push to bring in all students four days a week, is a mistake and puts teachers and students at risk, it's been voted on and I will do my best to abide by this plan. I do want to explain to you all, though, what teachers do on Mondays in hopes that you can fully understand how necessary they are and will allow us to keep the Monday remote day.

Mondays are used to plan for the week, we have not had to teach classes that are two hours or hour and a half long and use this time to make and edit past lessons that are best for this altered block schedule.

Mondays are used to collaborate. I cannot tell you how amazing it is to have this time to talk and plan with fellow teachers, especially when teaching an IB class that I am not certified to teach. But being able to ask my colleagues, both in building and with a wonderful colleague who is teaching on MOA but has used her personal time to also help, is so beneficial. The students now have a cohesive curriculum, which is especially important in this particular IB class, because it is two years and so what they learn junior year directly impacts what they cover senior year. With the time to work with my colleagues, this helps this year's students not be at a disadvantage for when they take their test for this class next year.

Mondays are used to help students. On Mondays each department holds a virtual office hour to help students. I have helped multiple students on Mondays during this time period, as have other teachers. With students frequently being quarantined for anywhere from two days to two weeks, having this day to virtually talk with those students or parents has been incredibly helpful. Our special education department also has students in the building on Mondays which is especially important this year with no study skills classes being offered.

Mondays are used to grade. With the chaos of this school year, many students have late or incomplete assignments, on Mondays we have time to go through our emails and google classrooms for late work, time to thoughtfully grade and give feedback, and time to email students who have missing work.

If we move forward with all students five days a week, teachers will put their students first, we will go to school during the weekend and stay late during the week instead of spending time with our own children to plan, to grade, to contact students, to reply to emails, to try to keep up with this ever-changing school year. But I'm asking you to work with us. To support us and our families in our support for yours. I hope that you sincerely consider this and truly hear what we are saying.

Best,

Juliana Arechaga

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Fri, Jan 15, 2021 at 12:29 PM

To: jarechaga@mcpsmt.org

Reasons to Stay in the Hybrid+ Model with 4 Instructional Days

Lindsay Thompson <lmthompson@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Jan 15, 2021 at 1:41 PM

Hello,

I am writing to explain why teachers (particularly high school teachers) need to maintain Hybrid + model with Mondays being non-instruction time for the remainder of this school year (as long as COVID remains a threat to our community). I think my school has done it's very best in keeping staff and students safe and engaged, and I believe Mondays are essential to maintain this process.

- 1) We need the prep time. Why? Multiple reasons:
 - a. At my school we haven't taught in block format in the past and we need time to come up with new lesson plans/structures. It is not simply combining two lessons from separate days into one block period; we need to consider student engagement, a myriad of activities, and student energy levels – we cannot lecture to students for 90 minutes straight for example.
 - b. We have been given almost no notice of this change and get this figured and sorted out.
 - c. Technically at my school we are only supposed to have 5 content periods and 1 duty period, so you are already working us above the contracted time, so we need that prep time for extra work for that 6th period.
- 2) Cleaning and safety - having Mondays without students allows for a deeper cleaning for the week to come than just a quick wipe down after school. Our custodians are working as hard as they can, but they can only do so much in the time allotted to them.
- 3) Continuity for students. We've already shaken up our student's worlds by switching from a 2-period to a 3-period schedule. Now we're telling them they have to go back full-time too. It's a lot to process. Let's just finish the year with Mondays for non-instructional time and back to normal next school year.
- 4) Students are still going to be absent and missing one day is like missing 2, or worse if they catch COVID or have to be quarantined from it, they'll miss a significant amount of time, which would mean having Mondays open for virtual office hours will be helpful.
- 5) It seems like an awful time due to state government decisions about COVID that recently happened (Governor Gianforte's repeal of mask mandate, his pushing of teachers on the vaccine list from phase 1b to 1c - meaning instead of being vaccinated in February/March, we'll be lucky if we get it in June!) Educators are front line workers, but due these recent decisions, it feels as if we're not being protected by the state or our district.
- 6) *Trustee Koan Mercer was quoted in the Missoulian stating, "I do believe we're asking teachers to go into harm's way, but I think it's worth it."* This statement caused many teachers (myself included) major concern. Student mental health is incredibly important, but what about teacher mental health? Mondays will help us retain it.

Please take my reasons for retaining Mondays for non-instructional curriculum time through the 2020-2021 school year under serious consideration.

Thank you for your time and stay safe!

Sincerely,

Lindsay Thompson
Hellgate High School

Phase 2 Public Comment- Wineman

Ashley Wineman <arwineman@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Jan 18, 2021 at 6:58 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, mholland@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org

Hello MCPS Board Members,

I appreciate the work that has gone into making this school year happen. There is so much that happens behind the scenes that I am unaware of and I know it takes time and effort to complete. I have attached a letter regarding going into Phase 2 in the coming weeks. My intent is to share my perspective as a high school teacher in this district. I encourage you to reach out to me with any questions or to discuss my letter further.

Thanks again for all you are doing.

Best,

Ashley Wineman
English Teacher
Hellgate High School



Wineman Public Comment 1_18_21.docx

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January 18th, 2021

Dear Board Members,

I am appreciative of all of the hard work that has occurred to make this school year happen. None of us signed up for the challenge of what it has turned into, but we have all found a way to persevere.

I hesitate to write this email considering a decision about moving to phase 2 has already been decided, but I think it is important to have my voice heard and counted. I will keep it short and do my best to keep my emotions out of it. With that said though, please know that this week (like many others this year) has been full of anger, tears, fear, and helplessness. It has also been followed by immense gratitude for my colleagues.

My concerns about going back to having all students in school are:

- I do not have enough room in my classroom to accommodate the 29 IB students on my roster. While some classes would be fine, I think it is unfair to ask those 29 students to be more at risk just because they chose to be in that class. To my knowledge there is no plan regarding how to handle this situation.
- Going back with the current proposition as I understand it (start two days a week for a few weeks and go to 4 days a week (possibly 5) sometime in February) puts our students at a distinct disadvantage and creates an equity issue.
- This feels incredibly rushed with a lack of direction and creates a lack of consistency that these students (and staff) need. The ups and downs and changes in scheduling contribute to a lack of stability which also contributes to mental health issues (which are not singular to being kept out of school).
- The message I am hearing as a teacher is that we are doing a good enough job so we can handle more, but in case we can't it's okay for us to be in harm's way. Just because we have done a good job of not spreading the virus within school, doesn't mean it is okay to assume we are well equipped to push forward- mentally, physically, or safely.
- Lastly, we have been demoted to 1C for the vaccine by the governor. It is counterintuitive and entirely unsafe to push us back full time now. If there was an option that kept students and staff safe, that would be one thing. Going back with a full classroom of students right now takes away one measure that currently keeps us safe: social distancing.

I acknowledge that we are all under immense pressure from various sides. I also understand that a decision has been made to move forward. However, this year has been full of inconsistencies and stress that negatively impact the effort we are making to educate our students. Unless you have been a teacher, you will never understand what is like to be in the classroom. It would be unfair for me to expect that from you. But please hear me when I say this could be handled with more direction, more safety, and more awareness of what you are logistically asking from those of us in the classroom. I appreciate you taking the time to read my letter and encourage you to reach out with any questions you may have.

Best,

Ashley Wineman
MCPS Teacher

Safety is a prerequisite for educational growth

Nicholas Grener <njgrener@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Jan 20, 2021 at 3:49 PM

Missoula County Public Schools Board Members,

I thank you for volunteering to take the time to thoughtfully read the comments below, in addition to the numerous other pieces of public comment that have been directed your way this year. Like so many of us in other contexts, you did not sign up for this responsibility expecting this!

According to the National COVID-19 School Response Dashboard (linked to in the “Schools and the Path to Zero” report), in the states in which school reporting has been consistent and reliable (Texas and New York), the case rate for school staff in schools that are operating in either a hybrid or fully in-person model has been between 1 and 1.6 times that of the community case rate during every period of reporting. Certainly, then, school staff are less safe than the average citizen as it pertains to the pandemic. While the “Schools and the Path to Zero” report encourages us to implement a fully in-person learning model independent of the level of community spread, I ask you to consider the psychological toll the level of community spread is taking on teachers. You, personally, may be able to watch the regular Missoula County Health department reports on case numbers and say to yourself, “That concerns me, but I am taking precautions,” but teachers look at that and think, “I am on the upward-driving end of those numbers- what I am seeing is an underestimate of my risk.” As a reminder, against this backdrop, we educators are implicitly tasked with not just being consistently optimistic for the community’s youth, day in and day out, but also being an encouraging, energetic leader pushing them towards self-improvement. Simultaneously, we deal with the same personal losses and frustrations that everyone is experiencing these days. It is terribly exhausting, and while I have certainly had periods of mild burnout before in my 18-year career as an educator, I have never been ready for the school year to end in January before, which is where I find myself today.

I was under no illusion that the hybrid learning model we have been implementing was going to create the ideal year for myself or my students, but I truly believe that Hellgate High- the only school community that I can faithfully speak for- was doing pretty well, all things considered. We were able to keep programming options for our students high while also keeping class sizes low. Small class sizes have been especially valued this year, as it has 1) allowed for us to maintain consistently adequate social distancing in the vast majority of our classrooms (some of which are uncomfortably small in square footage), and 2) given us the opportunity to have more one-on-one discussions and emotional check-ins with individual students. Thanks to our collective effort, my Advanced Placement Statistics courses are on track to complete the full curriculum before the year-end test they need to pass in order to earn college credit. The other day, a student in my Algebra Concepts & Skills class said, “I’ve never gotten this much personal help in a math class before.” I present these anecdotes not to imply that we’ve been having a blast, but to suggest to you that perhaps the job of educating students has actually been getting done. So I was upset to observe the decision for grades 9-12 to move to Phase 2 the other evening, and I was disappointed that this move happened in such a hurried manner. The COVID task force recommendation was released to teachers on Tuesday afternoon at 3 PM in an e-mail from Dr. Watson, and at 10 PM that night, it morphed into a resolution that was voted into policy an hour later. If you want to use the “Schools and the Path to Zero” report as guidance in your difficult decision-making, that is more than reasonable, but please do not skip

over the foreground sections on building trust. You should know that a not-insignificant number of my colleagues felt blindsided and betrayed by the district administration's and board's moves this week.

Students, too, are feeling the crunch. In addition to losing the extended one-on-one time with teachers that they have grown to appreciate in our hybrid model, many of them are worried about the increased risk of virus transmission that larger classes will bring. To be clear, my classroom is one of many in the Hellgate building that *will not* be able to allow for 3 feet of minimum social distancing between my students. I plan on being transparent with parents of students in my larger classes about this fact, and I will prioritize giving needed space to those students whose families are concerned about this guideline not being met. It feels like the ship has already sailed on the hybrid model being abandoned, but I want to remind you that this virus finds its way into the most vulnerable populations in our community, and I am very worried about the secondary effects that increased crowding in schools will have on the families of my students. Since the announcement of our move into Phase 2, I have had multiple students express concern about the impact this will have on their families; this situation of feeling less safe in school cannot be beneficial for their ability to focus on their education.

On a different note, teachers were assured that moves between phases would be slow and sustainable whenever possible. Good educational design takes time, which is something that you aren't quite giving us with your decisions. Let me bring to your attention an example of just one very important educational consequence of your decision that was not brought up at the board meeting the other night and that school administrators and staff are left to figure out on top of everything else that is happening. It pertains to students who are quarantining because they are either COVID-positive or have been identified as a close contact of someone that is. This pandemic is not going away anytime soon, so people will have to keep removing themselves from the population to protect each other. "Close contact" numbers have been steady all year long; according to our own district's summary data, there have been between 24 and 82 high school students quarantining as a close contact each week this school year. It is reasonable to expect these numbers to increase in the coming weeks because 1) the community case numbers are currently pretty high, 2) government restrictions are moving in the direction of loosening, and 3) because we are moving to Phase 2, each person in our school building will be in close contact to more people during the school day.

In Phase 1, if a student misses 2 weeks, they're missing 16 hours of in-person instruction (8 hours of 2 classes), but can keep up with the material pretty well (this was my experience this semester) because some of it is already designed for remote consumption. Plus, teachers have Mondays available for Google chats and emailing to make sure these students stay on top of things. Under the new schedule, two weeks out of school means making up 36 hours of instruction (12 hours in each of 3 classes), and that's just in the 4 day-a-week version of Phase 2. No longer is there a remote aspect to the class, so the student in question is just flat-out missing all of this content. In a typical school year, missing 12 consecutive hours of classroom time would only occur if a student was out for 3 consecutive weeks. This is not an unheard-of occurrence, but it is extremely rare. In Phase 2, it will be a consistent system-wide concern, because we are talking, on average, about roughly 50 high school students in the district facing this scenario each week. Hence, you can expect upwards of 100 MCPS high school teachers will be potentially staring this question down weekly. Are teachers expected to make remote versions of all of their curriculum out of fairness to these students? When/how does that happen... are Mondays even enough time for that?

The MEA high school representatives have discussed our concern about losing Mondays with Rob Watson and Russ Lodge; we appreciate their leadership and insight in these challenging times, but I feel an additional need to share these thoughts with the board so that you can get a fuller picture of the context of the superintendent's recommendation and board action. If you take nothing else away

from this letter, I implore you to allow us to not exceed 4 days per week of in-person time with students for the remainder of the school year. Not just in the name of the mental health of school staff, nor just for our district's ability to maintain faithful contact tracing, but for the quality of education we can provide for your children. High school teachers, for the second time this year, are being asked to lesson plan for an unfamiliar bell/blocking schedule, to manage large numbers of extended absences, and to do this with the added pressure of needing to be vigilant and alert at all times with an eye towards keeping your children safe against a health threat that is not completely understood.

Sincerely,

Nick Grener

Math teacher, Hellgate High School

Missoula Education Association Building Representative



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Maintaining Mondays

Carla Hinman <chinman@mcpsmt.org>

Wed, Jan 20, 2021 at 5:55 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hello and thank you for reading...

I am a teacher at Hellgate High School. As you continue to make schedule changes, please know that under the current schedule, prep time and time to work individually with struggling students is incredibly difficult to come by. ***Please continue to keep Mondays planned as a remote learning day.*** It provides valuable time for students to complete homework and for teachers to make individual/family contact, to grade, attend 504/IEP meetings, to prepare for the week ahead, etc. I will respect your time by saying I mimic the concerns listed in detail by other teachers who have posted public comments on this issue. As we again jump into an unfamiliar block schedule, and continue to teach 6 out of 6, this time will be precious.

I would also like to add that myself and my colleagues are in complete shock to have not received an apology and/or clarification email from Trustee Mercer. That small piece of communication would have meant the world to a group of professionals who currently feel demoralized, dismissed and disrespected.

Thank you for your time,

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Carla Hinman

Keeping Remote Mondays

Caroline Lurgio <cclurgio@mcpsmt.org>

Thu, Jan 21, 2021 at 3:31 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Dear MCPS Board Members and Dr. Robert Watson,

I am a teacher at Hellgate High School. As we prepare our move into Phase 2 at the high school level, I would like to make a request that Mondays continue to be used as a "Remote" day and that the high schools plan for a four day face to face schedule. I understand that we have two hours every morning to prep, but those hours are being used to attend IEPs and 504s, make last minute copies, meet with colleagues to review the day's materials, grade the previous day's assignments in order to use in the current class period, and meet as a Staff with our administration- both IB and regular. We really need more time to successfully meet the needs of our students and the demands of our curriculum. Here are my reasons for keeping Mondays remote:

1. In the past, Hellgate had one class period a week where students could meet with teachers to make up missing assignments, work to improve grades, and get extra help. This was called our Office Hours time and it took place every Wednesday. With the new schedule, we now use Mondays as our only day and time to connect, though virtually, with students who are struggling or have missed school for illness, sports, or other reasons. Missing a class period in this hybrid model equates to missing at least 3 full class periods; there is a lot to address- skills and assessments.
2. Because Covid could require a teacher to be absent at any time, we are working hard with our peers to stay lock-step with the curriculum at each grade level. This way, we can ensure that other teachers could step in if needed. We are currently using Mondays to PLC in order to backwards plan for condensed chunks of time. This requires ensuring building blocks are used to lead to a final assessment, scheduling these blocks with ample time to assess for the next step, and preparing the right materials. Planning for 8-10 hours of in class instruction/ week will alter our current model and require new planning and preparation.

I only have two reasons but I think they are crucial to our current success and sanity. Moving forward, I expect my job to be more difficult, more risky, and more rewarding. But, without having a day built in to plan, prep, and work, I'm not sure that I can be successful.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Caroline Lurgio

Sent from Mail for Windows 10



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Comments made last week.

Caroline Lurgio <cclurgio@mcpsmt.org>

Thu, Jan 21, 2021 at 3:32 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

As a teacher, I would appreciate an apology from Koan Mercer. His reasoning last week was appalling and should not be "tossed under the rug."

Caroline Lurgio

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

schedule change

Rhian Clark <rrclark@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Jan 21, 2021 at 3:35 PM

I am a teacher at Hellgate High School and I am advocating for keeping Mondays remote. Aside from the fact that teachers are being asked to increase our work load with very little notice and having to find time in the morning to lesson plan, PLC, grade, complete IEP and 504 meetings, aside from supporting students and fellow staff members, how much are we thinking about the students? All of this change has been extremely overwhelming to our kids and I know that Mondays have been a day of solace and productivity for many of them.

Selfishly, I ask that we keep Mondays remote because our jobs will be near impossible to do well without them. For the good of OUR KIDS, all of our kids, I ask that we keep Mondays remote.

Rhian Clark

Semester 2 high school schedule

Darci Coffman <ddawnc@msn.com>

Thu, Jan 21, 2021 at 7:08 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Cc: "rwatson@mcpsmt.org" <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>

Hello and once again thank you, trustees, for your service to our community. I teach at Hellgate High School, and I'm grateful for the way our administration and my colleagues have worked together to provide the best education we possibly can so far this school year. Although the shift in schedules is mighty abrupt, I am ready to do my best to adapt again and build with my colleagues another new version of safe, high quality education for the students we care so much about.

I write this comment to implore you to please help us do that by keeping our Mondays as currently used: a day for IEPs and 504s, other meetings, grade level collaboration to revamp what we're teaching, grading, engaging my students via my Google Classrooms, contacting students and families, etc.

I teach 6/6 class periods, like so many others. And with so many other unknowns in the equation, which many of my colleagues have enumerated, it just seems prudent to stick with four days of in-person classes a week.

Thank you to the many parents and other community members who've been kind, thoughtful, and supportive as we all muddle our way forward through this pandemic together.

Respectfully,
Darci Coffman, English teacher
Hellgate High School

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Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Remote Mondays

Michelle Beatty <mabeatty@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Jan 22, 2021 at 9:25 AM

School Board Members,

Thank you in advance for taking the time to read my concerns.

My name is Michelle Beatty and I teach at Hellgate HS. I have taught Math at MCPS for 19 years to give a little background.

I am pleading that you do not go back to 5 days/week at the HS. I desperately need Mondays to plan, prepare, communicate with students/parents and grade. This year, I have 3 brand new preps and during the new spring model of classes 1-3, then 4-6, I will have to plan for all 3 classes each rotation (1st:IB A&I; 2nd:Geom; 3rd:Alg C&S)(4th: Alg C&S; 5th:Geom; 6th:IB A&I). I am barely staying afloat now with the pace of our classes.

As I mentioned above, these are all new preps this year so I am writing lesson plans, gathering materials, and writing quizzes and tests for each class. I also picked up the Alg C&S class this year to cover for a MOA teacher. I would not have had this prep otherwise. This also bumped up the number of classes that I teach from 5 to 6. I know I am one of many who picked up classes that were not on the original fall master schedule to cover classes for MOA teachers. This increased the workload and stress on top of an already stressful COVID situation.

I would also like to point out that I have not had a single sub this school year. Why? Because I have been able to schedule doctors' appointments on Mondays. These appointments otherwise would fall during the school day and I would need to arrange for a sub. I can't speak for all MCPS employees but I'm sure I am not the only one who has made use of this. I am positive this has saved the district a great deal of money.

I believe our COVID positive numbers in the high school were low because of your decisions for the fall. I am concerned about us jumping head first into a full schedule **and** increasing it to 5 days/week. We don't know how our numbers will increase going to every student every day. I would like the Board to error on the side of caution and see how 4 days a week goes for at least the two 6 week rotations. "Only time will tell." This will also allow us to cover the same content for all 6 periods. Before we transition to the two 3-week blocks, the Board could revisit the idea of moving to 5 days/week.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Michelle



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

"phase two"

William Philliber <22phiwil@student.mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Jan 22, 2021 at 10:27 AM

Hello Board of Trustees, my name is William Philliber and I'm a junior at Hellgate and I have to say I don't approve of your plans to implement phase two in our county as students are still testing positive. You want us to double the number of students at school at one time, double the amount of time we're at school, and cut social distancing in half from 6 feet to 3 feet. I've heard this decision has come from a study from Harvard saying there is no correlation between school outbreaks and hospitalization. Very bold of you to implement such drastic changes to our schedule based on a study from a college 2,500 miles away. I know I'm not going to stop this transition from happening but I'm encouraging you to understand where students as well as teachers are coming from. We are concerned for our family and friends well being as well our own mental health. please consider waiting a couple months before bringing back Mondays. I'm expecting another outbreak in three weeks, mark my words.

Sincerely, William Philliber



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Concerns with high school schedule for spring semester

Melissa Hart <jwh_mmh@earthlink.net>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Jan 22, 2021 at 11:27 AM

Dear MCPS,

As the parent of a high school senior, I was shocked and dismayed when our school board voted to bring all students, high schoolers included, back to 4 days a week for the spring semester. Doubling the number of students in each class and doubling the days per week means a quadrupling of potential exposure to Covid-19 for Missoula high school students, teachers, and staff.

But I was even more disheartened by yesterday's email confirming the switch from two classes to three classes at one time. This is six times the exposure to Covid-19. Under the fall semester's hybrid model, roughly 10 students per class met 2 times a week for 2 classes, meaning roughly 40 potential exposures. The new model would have roughly 20 students per class meet 4 times a week for 3 classes, upping the ante to 240 potential exposures.

Under the hybrid model, MCPS has successfully limited transmission within the schools;, and I am grateful for the hard work that entailed. But it will be much harder to maintain this success with six times the potential exposure (and teachers not yet eligible for vaccination).

This comes at a time when headlines from major news sources report that more European countries are shutting schools and consensus is emerging that children are a significant factor in the spread of Covid. (See for example this January 16th article in the Wall Street Journal: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-schools-are-closing-again-on-concerns-they-spread-covid-19-11610805601>) We also don't know how Covid-19 variants with potentially higher transmission rates will change the landscape in the next few months, and whether current measures will be enough to prevent spread of variants.

This is playing with fire, potentially jeopardizing the health of our children, our school workers, and our community. I understand the concerns that led to this decision, but it is **too much, too fast**. For every child failing for lack of in-person instruction, there is another panicking at the thought of bringing Covid-19 home to their family. That scared child will not thrive under the new model, nor is there any guarantee that more in-person class time will be able to help the failing child. Valuable as it is, in-person instruction is no panacea for all the negative forces potentially weighing on kids in our pandemic-ridden country today.

After the school board's decision, I read that students concerned about increased exposure would be offered the opportunity to switch to the online academy, but no further information was offered. What I've been able to learn on my own is that, while a wonderful option for many students, the online academy is unable to offer IB and AP courses, meaning that students in those college-prep courses who wanted to switch would find their schedules upended. This is not a time when anyone needs anything else upended.

Covid-19 continues to spread throughout our community; today alone, Missoula County reported 71 cases. I urge the board to reconsider the high school schedule for spring semester. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Melissa Hart

301 Burlington Ave
Missoula, MT 59801

Semester 2 changes public comment

Hannah Rafferty <21rafhan@student.mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Jan 22, 2021 at 4:19 PM

To whom it may concern,

As a senior at Hellgate High School this year, I strongly urge the board to not move to a 5 day school week for the 2nd semester. As we all know, this past year has been marked with an unforeseen amount of challenges for students, teachers, and staff alike. While I understand moving out of the hybrid model is necessary, I believe that returning to 5 days is unreasonable and extremely inconsiderate for everyone involved. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on students, especially relating to their mental health. There is not a single person I know whose mental health has not been negatively impacted by the coronavirus, and it is extremely difficult for some students to even be able to manage now. By suddenly throwing everyone back into a 5 day school week, you are only creating more of a detriment to students' educations. Our day-to-day life has irreversibly changed since the pandemic began, and expecting everyone to pretend like everything is "normal" again is inconsiderate and incognizant of the global situation that we now see ourselves in. I believe that a 4 day work week would be more reasonable given the circumstances. I strongly urge the board to be considerate towards the health and safety of their students in this matter.

Thank you,
Hannah Rafferty

Why MCPS shouldn't further open.

Kelton Keck <keck.kelton@gmail.com>

Fri, Jan 22, 2021 at 8:19 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

I recently learned about MCPS' intentions to move to a 4 day a week schedule and more importantly combining both letter groups together. I disagree with the school administration's decision on the matter and think it endangers student's, their relatives, and our teachers.

While Missoula County has seen a slight decrease in cases over the past month, the continual spread of Covid outlines my hesitancy with opening up High Schools further. I understand the importance of data, so looking into that matter I turned to the Center for Disease Control. On January 5th the CDC released an infographic to analyze the safety of a school. It relates safety procedures put into place and the number of cases per 100,000 people in the last 14 days to determine the safety of a school and is attached below.

In the last 7 days, according to the Missoula County Health Department (Missoula City-County Health Department), we have had 40 new cases in Missoula per 100,000 people. Extrapolating that data we can assume there have been 80 new covid cases per 100,000 people in Missoula County in the last 14 days. This places Hellgate into high risk of transmission of Covid in school. While hellgate practices 3 of the mitigation strategies, I think opening the school would make effective social distancing very difficult, and limiting the people you interact with near impossible. Not to mention removing Monday would remove time to effectively disinfectant schools.

I hope you understand where my concern for my health, my classmates' health, and our teachers' health comes from. I would hope that schools would delay their combination of letter groups until a time that the CDC deems appropriate or until vaccination is widely available. Thanks for your consideration.

Student whose health is affected by MCPS' decisions,
Kelton Keck

P.S.

I echo worries about cleaning procedures, class prep, students' safety, students' mental health, and above all, the teachers whose health is directly affected.

Guidance	Lowest risk of transmission in schools	Intermediate risk of transmission in schools	Highest risk of transmission in schools
Classroom	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Extracurricular	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Assembly	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Community and service projects	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Guest speakers in the classroom	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Guest speakers and assemblies	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Cleaning and disinfection	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
COVID-19 testing in schools	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9
Students should follow the additional mitigation measures outlined below to ensure proper practice, process and results.	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9	Students follow strategies 1-5 and 7-9

3-foot distancing is meant ONLY for elementary and middle schools, NOT high schools.

Willow Affleck <waffleck@hotmail.com>

Sat, Jan 23, 2021 at 10:54 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

School Board Trustees,

It's really important that you understand that the new recommendation for 3-foot distancing is meant only for elementary and middle schools. The CDC still recommends 6-foot distancing to avoid Covid-19 transmissions for high school students. It's also important for you to know that if we were to move away from the current alpha split (in-person 2 days a week) and have all of our students come to school every day, then most high school classrooms will not be able to accommodate 6-foot distancing.

This will lead to more high school students becoming infected. Those students will bring the virus into their homes and potentially infect their families. This will directly lead to an increase in the Covid-19 infection rate and mortality rate in our community.

As a mom to 2 boys who attend MCPS schools, I understand why parents want to move away remote learning. Being in the classroom with teachers is the best way to learn. However, it is not worth the risk of spreading this virus more throughout our community. The vaccines will soon be able available to all of us and then we can all safely head back to our beloved schools, together.

Best,
Willow Affleck
Science Teacher
Hellgate High School

Remote Mondays

Laurie Mitzalis <lkmitzalis@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 24, 2021 at 8:58 AM

These are the tasks I accomplish on remote Mondays

Google Meets with students
Emails/calls to parents and students
Lesson planning for the week
Grading
IEP meetings and preparation
IEP assessments with students
case management: checking student progress, goals, checking in with teachers/parents, updating records
Department meetings via Google Meet
Co Teach planning with colleagues

Google Classroom updates, preparation, posting weekly remote learning

Due to the fact that our school no longer has a study skills class, due to the hybrid schedule, finding and working with students who have an IEP is a challenge. Finding time to complete the necessary assessments to prepare an IEP is very challenging. Monday provides essential preparation time.

Thank you.

Laurie Mitzalis

COVID Phasing Decisions

Beth Cole <bwcole@mcpsmt.org>

Sun, Jan 24, 2021 at 9:03 AM

To: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>, Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Nancy Hobbins <nhobbins@mcpsmt.org>, Marcia Holland <mholland@mcpsmt.org>, Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Sharon Sterbis <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, Jen Vogel <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Dr. Watson and Missoula County Trustees:

My name is Beth Cole. I attended Missoula County Public Schools, sent my children there and have taught at Hellgate for more than fifteen years. I have been particularly proud to teach at Hellgate because our priority is to help ALL students, regardless of circumstance. Central to our teaching philosophy is student safety. Students learn best when they feel physically and emotionally safe. Teachers can serve those students best when guaranteed those same basic needs.

This commitment by Hellgate teachers has not changed, even through the pandemic. The staff at Hellgate has been resolute in supporting our students through fully remote learning, then hybrid learning, and now into phase 2. This has required a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes to provide the best instructional support possible.

The board has directed that we move out of the hybrid phase to in-person learning for all students four days a week. This shift is not supported by a majority of our teaching staff. Cases remain high, the US is seeing increasing cases from a new variant, and vaccinations for teachers are delayed. The choice by administration and the board to move forward shows a disregard for the basic safety needs of staff and students.

There has also been a strong push by some parents to have students attend five days a week. It's important to consider that the loudest voices for this change may not represent our most at-risk families. Many of our lower income high school students have taken jobs to assist their families during trying financial times. An abrupt change to our schedule may force these families to choose work over education. The Board's dismissal of these realities discounts the needs of some of our most at-risk families. Additionally, many of these vocal families don't fully appreciate the benefit their own children receive by having the additional support provided in smaller classes and on Mondays when their child has to miss school.

Hellgate staff uses Mondays for student interventions. Teachers update grades, reach out to and meet with struggling students as well as those who have missed due to illness, quarantining or activities. Loss of this time would mean many of our students, including our most at risk students, lose that important support.

Mondays allow time for teachers to participate in staff meetings, IEP/504 meetings, PLCs and district committee work.

High school teachers have had an additional class added to their schedule. Often, this means they must develop new curriculum. Teachers must also adapt their curriculum to different time blocks and develop both online and in-person content. Having Mondays to complete this work has been invaluable.

Please consider the needs of all staff and students when making these decisions. Ideally, we would remain in the hybrid schedule which allows smaller class sizes, more robust individualized instruction and time for interventions for absent or struggling students. If the board deems that is not possible, please keep the remote Mondays to allow teachers time to plan, attend meetings and work with students who need the additional help.

Thank you for your consideration.

Beth Cole

--

Beth W. Cole | Hellgate High School
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Intro to Photography | Graphic Design 1 & 2 | Film 1 & 2
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Phase 2 Concerns

Darcy Hover <dhover@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 24, 2021 at 9:09 PM

Phase 2 Public Comment

Dear School Board Members and Dr. Watson,

I am a veteran teacher at Hellgate High and am not comfortable going forward with your recent decision to progress to 5 days per week. I have 2 concerns about your decision to move to Phase 2, progressing to 5 days per week.

1st Concern: Safety and Well Being for Staff and Students

I don't think you took into consideration the difference in age groups and curriculum demands between a high school and a K-8 school. In the proposed phase 2 model, a HS teacher may have contact with 50-60 young adults per day, some who travel to other locations for extracurricular activities or work in the community after school and on weekends. High school students are socially active and it will be a challenge to maintain a 3' distance with 20 students in a classroom and all students in the hallways.

Coupled with the slow vaccine rollout, the new variants and the unknown about each person's immune response to the virus, you have created an enormous amount of stress, fear and anxiety with your recent decision to move to 5 days/week. Safety and the well-being of all should be your #1 priority and I feel you have sacrificed this. Please do not go forward with a 5 day week.

2nd Concern: Maintaining Remote Monday for Staff and Students

When I compare the amount of non-student contact time/day when teaching 5 classes and currently teaching 6, it is the same and yet staff are being asked to adapt our curriculum to a different time schedule, develop an on-line presence, coordinate with PLC's and work with students who are out for extended periods of time due to contracting covid or quarantining.

Monday's are and will continue to be essential as time for us to provide a quality education during these difficult times and help insure success for all students. The pandemic has added a whole new level of stress and anxiety for students and some are very fragile right now and need Mondays to decompress or obtain one on one help from staff. I have reviewed my upcoming curriculum and feel I can cover 80% of the required curriculum seeing students 4 days/ week with adequate planning and preparation time.

Along with the 2 hour prep time during the school day, I need Mondays to accomplish the following:

Adapt lessons to fit the ever changing class length, reach out to students and parents, Intervention and makeup time for students who have been absent, grading; lessons promoting inquiry, critical thinking and technical writing take time to grade, fill out required 504 forms and attend meetings, collaborate with my PLC to insure all students are obtaining the same education.

If you eliminate Mondays, something will have to go, forcing me to make choices. Please don't put me in the position where I have to choose who I can help. We need to be here for all students.

Thank you
Darcy Hover

Phase 2 and Mondays at High School

Jill Derryberry <jderryberry@mcpsmt.org>

Sun, Jan 24, 2021 at 9:35 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, mholland@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org

Dear Members of the Board and Superintendent Watson,

To say I am disheartened by recent decisions would be a gross understatement. As one of many teachers who has risen to every challenge presented by this pandemic, I now feel defeated - by you.

Here is some of what the decision to return to Phase 2 earlier than recommended means for me, my students and my classroom at Hellgate:

1. My class sizes are not smaller, they are bigger. My English classes will not simply double the daily student number from semester 1 hybrid - they will also have additional students who are returning from MOA, as well as repeating students who need to recover credit, and other students needing schedule accommodations or who are new additions to our school.
2. As I try to meet the 'recommendations' for spacing, the larger class sizes make this nearly impossible despite adding more furniture to small spaces. My classes were at 3' spacing during the hybrid schedule, and my numbers are still growing for semester 2.
3. The attendance in my classes has often been lacking due to illness, quarantine, sports, families feeling unsafe, etc. For each absence, I have done the following during my prep time:
 - created online content with extended resources to cover what was missed in class instruction
 - sent an email to students extending my regret of their absence, including the links to the online materials and offering help
 - sent follow-up emails to parents if students are unresponsive or grades start to falter
 Attendance semester 2 will be worse with more in-person instruction missed, and I will not have the time to be able to do the above.
4. Due to these absences and a large population of at-risk students, I have met with many students before school to provide additional instruction and assistance. However, now I will need to use this time to prepare and attend many required 504 and IEP meetings. As a frame of reference, last week I had 4 meetings and worked with 4 students before school on different days, taking all but one hour of my morning prep time for the week.
5. In addition to the time I spend with students, Hellgate provides interventions and additional time and access to technology on Mondays that many of my students use. Taking away our remote Mondays will also take these opportunities away, further hindering our most at-risk students.
6. We have already adjusted to 2+ hour classes for 3-week blocks and will now need to adjust to 90-min. classes for 6-week and then 3-week blocks. We have adjusted to the hybrid model blending in-person and online learning. Now we need to adjust to 4-day weeks and perhaps then 5-day weeks of in-person learning in an intensive block. Each of these adjustments means choosing appropriate curriculum to be covered adequately in the time provided while trying to meet specific standards, adjusting materials, lessons, activities and assignments to meet the time while also engaging students. While I would benefit from working with colleagues, that requires time. We have not been given sufficient time to collaborate or make these adjustments effectively.

None of the above mention the added health risks for students and staff as they navigate large classes at close distances for extended periods of time with minimal cleaning opportunities. There are added risks, too, to the mental health of students and staff as they cope with added stress. You've taken away the opportunities in the schedule to help mitigate some of this as well. While some board members may feel the risk is "worth it," I place higher value on the well-being of my students, their families and myself.

You made the poor decision. Now it is left to your exhausted, demoralized teachers to enact all you have put forward, and you have made it nearly impossible.

Teaching - education - does not happen by magic. It happens through the grace, goodwill, dedication and diligence of the teachers you have done very little to support. And right now, in the midst of all that is happening beyond our control, your lack of support has stacked even more odds against us.

The VERY least you could do is give students and staff Mondays to do our best to meet all the challenges presented by the pandemic and, now, by you.

Jill Derryberry
English/Journalism
Hellgate High School

Remote Mondays are Critical for Student Success

Jason Van Hyning <jtvanhyning@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 24, 2021 at 10:38 PM

I am a teacher at Hellgate High School and I am writing to implore you to keep Remote Mondays for the remainder of the school year. Not only are Mondays necessary for grading, planning, and posting assignments on Google Classroom for the upcoming week, they are crucial for collaboration with my PLC, and most importantly for parent and student check-ins and one on one virtual sessions. With the approach of yet another new block schedule on February 2nd, Mondays will become even more critical for student success.

Thank you,
Jason Van Hyning

Protect Monday Planning/Prepping/Remote/Remediation Day for Teachers

Alexandra Startin <handyzandy16@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 25, 2021 at 12:11 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS School Board:

Thank you for taking public comment, and for accepting and taking the time to read my written statement. I'm taking a few minutes out of my lunch break to plead with you to preserve the Monday time for instruction-related preparations. To be honest, I don't actually have time to take a "lunch break," but I wanted to make a few last edits to my comments before sending them to you for your consideration, and I didn't want to miss the deadline.

You've heard of "living paycheck to paycheck?" Well, I'm "teaching period to period." Although I've taught the same subject and mostly the same classes for decades (currently Geometry, Algebra 2, IB A&A Y2, and – new to me this year – IB A&A Y1), under the current circumstances it is not possible to do so much as minimal justice to any curriculum if all I have time for is a quick tweak of plans and materials. Even if we could "go back to normal" tomorrow, we would still need to adapt everything during the second semester to make up for all the shifts that occurred to accommodate the first semester. Until COVID is largely vaccinated against, all our planning must be fluid so that we can adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Because it means we need time to rethink and rework every class we teach, the opportunity to meet regularly on Mondays with other teachers is critical. It also means adding a much more robust online component for each of the different courses we teach (for me that's 6 periods, 4 different courses). It means shifting everything we do in our classrooms to become teachers of truly hybrid classes that are ready at any time to go fully online or fully in person or anywhere in between. We have had to continue to learn new ways of delivering and assessing mastery of content and become proficient at using them well. And, when students have no choice but to miss school, we must be ready to provide an alternate experience for them which – as much as possible – gives them every opportunity to stay connected with the class and caught up. We must deal with work being completed/turned in as students are able, which means re-grading the same assignments over and over. Topping everything else off, in the high school-level math classes, most of the teaching materials we use this year are new and there has been quite a shift. Every set of notes, every quiz and test, is starting from scratch. And even though I don't teach every one of my students every day, that doesn't mean I don't stay in regular contact with them remotely, encouraging them to get caught up on missing work, communicating with parents, etc.

Our time in the mornings during the rest of the week allows us to make adjustments to our week's plan as needed and prepare for each day and to have the occasional department meeting. But for some of us about half of that time is spent teaching an "early bird" (myself included). Without the Monday time to meet and plan with colleagues, prepare materials for the week, set up the online components of our courses, grade, and do all the other things previously mentioned, the quality of the time spent in class with students will suffer. As will my morale, which is already at an all-time low.

To be honest, I'm not sure I CAN do more. I had asked to teach online but was denied (and never given a reason). However, I pulled myself up by my professionalism and I showed up to teach, putting on a positive face and attitude every single day for my students. But let's not forget that teachers are also feeling the strain of dealing with families and COVID worries. I am anxious constantly about my 89-year-old mother and my TBI-disabled 66-year-old husband who has COPD, for both of whom I am the only caregiver. Neither have yet been able to receive a vaccination. It's already going to be an intense work *and* mental/emotional strain to go to three 90-minute periods, four days per week, with all students returning. I'm already concerned about what is going to happen to the quality of my classes. And I'm at a loss why even this change couldn't have waited until all educational staff and their at-risk family members have been vaccinated, especially with the rise of more virulent strains of the virus. Do you not realize that the entire system is going to collapse if we start having to stay home in greater numbers to isolate and/or care for family members to whom we might communicate the virus? Do you not realize that putting more and more burden on us is going to make us more likely to fall ill from things other than COVID?

And it's not just about teachers and adequate time to handle the unusual workload. There are a lot of other educational staff who are under tremendous pressure and at-risk. Just as one further example, the custodial staff. Many of them are also "not young," many of them have family members who are high-risk, and they are constantly having to deep clean rooms where there have been known COVID cases. From speaking with them I know that Monday is their best day to really go over everything before the week starts, which at least gives us all the security of knowing we start off each week with a sanitary room.

I've attended the last couple of virtual meetings of the School Board, so I know you're under a lot of pressure to get students back to school full time. And as a teacher of more than 30 years I understand that there are critical academic reasons for that happening as soon as is safely possible. But perhaps instead of caving in to the pressure of parents who want their children back in school full time (some of whom at the meeting sounded frankly more like they need a break from their children than that they're worried about their academics), just perhaps, it's time you worried more about the safety and well-being of your teachers and other educational staff, and focused your energies instead on pressuring the governor to get vaccinations to all of us so that – when we are able to go back to full-time school – we can do so knowing it's not all just going to crash again, while feeling safe and cared for as individuals and people with families of our own to care for.

Again, please maintain Monday as a critically important time set aside for teachers to collaborate and to give us a chance at giving students the best educational experience possible for the remaining time we have this year.

Sincerely,

Alexandra (Zandy) Startin



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Against Mondays

Julie Goodkind <jdgoodkind@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 25, 2021 at 5:46 PM

Dear Board of Trustees:

I am writing to first, thank you for your thoughtful consideration during these trying times. We know you are considering many perspectives and are doing your best. Second, I would like to encourage MCPS to stay in Hybrid + with Mondays off for the duration of the school year. I have two students at Rattlesnake Elementary and have heard from many teachers and parents that a switch to 5 days of school will be too difficult for all involved.

1) Prep time. Teachers need prep time on Mondays. We are still in a pandemic. Students and staff will still be absent, maybe even more now that we are moving to 4 days of larger classes. Teachers will be balancing in-person students with those who may be forced to be home due to COVID. Teachers need time to plan for these multiple scenarios.

2) Cleaning. Schools need an extra day to deep clean classrooms and public spaces.

3) Continuity for Students. Students are going through many transitions - some from MOA back to school, some from 2 to 4 days. They've gotten the message that it's not safe to be in school more than 2 days, and now we may switch them to 5 seemingly without reason. Let's let students transition comfortably and reduce the added trauma of so many transitions.

4) Teachers haven't been vaccinated. Many teachers are already uncomfortable moving to Hybrid+. Please, please listen to them and what they are telling you about their comfort level with moving to 5 days.

5) Less exposure is less exposure. Having a long weekend for everyone to rest and take care of our bodies may keep us all healthier.

6) Give it time. We haven't given 4 days a chance to see how the numbers among students, staff, and the community change.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not make a decision to add Mondays at this time. It is just not time to move to 5 days.

Sincerely,
Julie Goodkind



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

How it affects Students...

Joseph Boehner <21boejos@student.mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 26, 2021 at 8:47 AM

Hello my name is Joey Boehner, I am a senior from Big Sky High School. The Phase 2 Covid decision has affected many students already and it has not even started yet. It has affected me in a huge way. Because of the decision that was made, a beloved teacher of mine that I could go to for personal help as well as academic help has resigned. That teacher who has taught me for 3 and 1/2 years now is retiring due to the decision that was made at the board meeting 2 weeks ago. My heart is weighed down with sorrow with this teacher retiring, and I know that it will affect many other students the same way. The teacher that is retiring has influenced me in many many ways. I always love to walk into that teachers class and learn the material for the day even if it is online. The teacher has also influenced Big Sky High School for the better. Also many students and parents have lost their jobs because of this decision and can not provide for their family. I can not stress enough how the decision that was made at the meeting 2 weeks ago has affected many teachers and students at all the different high schools, so as a student I just wanted to express how this decision has affected us and bring our point of view into it. I hope you consider and read this in the meeting tonight on behalf of all students.

Sincerely, Joey Boehner

Public comment tuesday 1/26

Kathleen Wyskiver <kmwyskiver@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Jan 26, 2021 at 12:38 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To the administration and trustees of the board of Missoula County Public schools:

My name is Katie Wyskiver and I am a teacher at Hellgate high school. I am writing to beg, plea, demand that Mondays remain remote for high school for the second semester.

Mondays are the time that I use to plan for my classes, as our preparation time Tuesday-Friday is often filled with staff and district meetings as well as meeting students for individual student help. Even though this is my 10th year of teaching, even the trusty and reliable lessons that I have created and used repeatedly over the last decade need to be modified. Furthermore, almost everything I do needs to be accompanied by an online version of the lesson. Even though we are moving away from remote learning our lessons still need to be made available remotely; it is cold-hearted to deny students the opportunity to continue learning through their quarantines and cold-hearted to not give teachers the adequate time to provide that learning to students.

Because of Mondays, I am available for IEP meetings and 504 determinations, which may include essential accommodations for students who are struggling and finding it necessary to seek the academic support systems available to them at Hellgate high school. I assess work, update grades, and communicate with parents. I spoke with five parents yesterday, all of whom expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their student's progress and options. I have students that will be taking IB and AP exams that need extra instruction and more specific practice than can be offered in their current schedules. I meet with students for whom I volunteered as an advisor for their IB service project or extended essay. I am helping SAVE, the environmental extracurricular club for whom I volunteer as an advisor, navigate the leadership and organizational challenges that pandemic learning has created for our club, our activities and our progress. But most importantly, I have sacred professional time to offer to students and their families when students are absent as a result of quarantine, illness, stress and anxiety, or a combination of all of those things.

Advising student groups, connecting with families, moving forward with the essential work of my department and committee meetings, helping prepare IB and AP students whose progress has been hindered, and being available to students and families are all things that are at risk if Mondays become in-person instruction.

And finally, I am asking that you value Mondays as remote work days for the cleaning and contact tracing that can take place on that day. To abandon that valuable time while increasing exposure will certainly result in more quarantines for students and staff, which will create more delays in learning, and require more effort on behalf of quarantined students, their families and their teachers. As high school students are unique in that they are a part of our essential work-force, to disregard our obligation to clean and contact trace has a direct impact on our community in a way that is unique to grades 9-12.

Please support remote Mondays at the high school level.

Please don't support adding an additional class and three hours of face-to-face instruction *than we would have in a pre-covid schedule* for high school teachers.

Please don't put me in the position of choosing between keeping my limited and unpaid personal time sacred for my family, my young children, and my own mental health- or donating it to be available to help my struggling students. You're all very aware that the majority of MCPS teachers would fall on their swords for their students, and we're being asked to do just that. TREASURE OUR DEDICATION TO OUR STUDENTS AND OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITIES; don't exploit it.

Katie Wyskiver

Worried About the Changes

Amy Chilcote <achilcote0902@gmail.com>

Tue, Jan 26, 2021 at 2:12 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

As a student of Big Sky High School I would like to express my sincere worry about this plan to resume learning with all students in class together at the highschool level. This year my classes are fuller then they have ever been before, in my core classes all the possible seats in class will be full. Not only are my classes fuller than ever, but if all students are back at school then there will be no way to distance ourselves while in passing periods between classes. As someone who helps to care for elderly grandparents and overall is very worried about this virus, this plan to bring students back is causing a great deal of anxiety in both me and my peers. You as board members made it clear in your last meeting that you were more worried about students getting an education; then the lives of the students, teachers, and either of their families.

COVID is still a very unknown virus that the long term effects are not known. Not only that but there are new strains that are becoming prominent in other areas that are harsher and more easily spread. It is nothing but a matter of time before those strains come to our area. You might not have seen a spread of cases in the school itself, but students could have been passing it to others they are in contact with (coworkers/family members). On top of that teachers who may potentially be incontact with 120 students in one day (saying they had 4 classes with 30 students each) have been pushed back in the timeline for receiving a vaccine. Let alone there might be teachers that may choose not to receive a vaccine for other reasons. That seems like a high risk that could potentially affect people's lives. MCPS may not have seen many cases of COVID in the schools this past semester, but maybe that was because of how we had had the school schedule set up.

Yes I know there are other options for learning in Missoula at this time, but some people just cannot learn online full time. Let alone the fact that from talking with people I know who are online learning, I believe I would be greatly behind if I went into online learning. With that in mind I believe that it is quite unsafe for us to continue into the new learning pattern, and that the board should understand that by approving this transition for the highschool level is an extremely worrisome and possibly dangerous decision.

Sincerely,

Amy Chilcote

over crowding the class rooms, endangering the lives of many

Peggy Chilcote <busyladymt@msn.com>

Tue, Jan 26, 2021 at 3:27 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

I have a student at Big Sky High School, The anxiety that the past year has caused my daughter is very real. Now it is becoming elevated due to the plan to bring more students into the classroom. She is worried about the rooms being to small and the students and teacher having a greater chance of being infected. She doesn't feel doing online is an option due to those in online are further along then those doing the classroom. So as a senior her options are limited. The parent group pushing this are only doing it for their benefit, not all families are for this. Reminds me of the way my daughter was bullied in grade school and the school did nothing about it because we were not in the elite class of parents of who these offenders were the children of. I can not support my daughter being exposed to more students and then having the chance of her bringing it home to others who are compromised.

Due to this plan to move to phase 2, who is going to pay for the counseling for the anxiety it causes in the students and teachers who are not comfortable for this plan to take place, who is going to pay for the medical bills incurred due to the higher exposure from this plan.

In one of my daughters class when asked how they thought about doing phase 2, the kids who want it say the miss their friends its not to come to learn. Most of the kids didn't what the risk of exposure.

People who want phase 2, need to think past their student and start thinking of the other students and the teachers their student is seeing everyday and how much higher the chances are for exposure, and remember we are all in this together so lets do it safely.

Peggy Chilcote

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

Trustee Comment Damaging to Trust

Tammy Reschke <tamreschke@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 26, 2021 at 6:23 PM

I would like to address the board regarding a comment made by Trustee Mercer at the board meeting on January 12, 2021. During discussion of bringing students to more in person instruction, Trustee Mercer stated **"I do believe we are putting teachers in harm's way but I think it's worth it"**. I was in shock and disbelief that a public servant making decisions on my behalf would make such a statement.

Trustee Mercer has obviously not read the Harvard document which is the research providing guidance for our district's decision on this topic. The first major heading in this document is entitled: Central Topics in Settling on a Strategy. The first heading in that section is: Trust. I would like to share the first paragraph of this section:

"One of the single greatest barriers to in-person learning at this point in time is challenges schools are having in staffing classrooms. Educators, including both teachers and paraprofessionals, and staff must feel safe at work...Trust is not a matter merely of levels of community spread. It is also a question of how school leaders make decisions, how well they do at incorporating educators, paraprofessionals and other staff in decision-making processes, how well they do at communicating around decision-making, and how well their decisions include an aligned focus on the health and safety of everyone in the building, students but also educators, para-professionals and other staff. Too much discussion about school reopening has focused almost exclusively on the question of risk to children. Their safety is critical but so too is the safety of staff and educators, and their ability to have a voice in decision-making."

Trustee Mercer's comment has blasted a huge hole trust.

Trustee Mercer, what is the "it" that you are referring to in your statement? What is the "it" that is worth more than the health and safety of myself and my colleagues? As I pondered this question, the only thing I could think of would be to protect my students from an armed intruder in the building. Yes, in that setting, I would put myself in harm's way to protect my students. But this was not the topic at the board discussion on the evening of January 12, 2021.

I believe a sincere apology is in order. If Trustee Mercer is not willing to apologize for this comment, then I believe a request for his resignation may be in order.

HGHI FAQ Page and JAMA article.

Adriel Shearer <aeshearer@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Jan 26, 2021 at 9:29 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Nancy Hobbins <nhobbins@mcpsmt.org>, Marcia Holland <mholland@mcpsmt.org>, Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>
Cc: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

You all deserve an early night after the last meeting, I wanted to briefly follow up on my comments tonight.

Below are a few links as well as highlighted sections from the HGHI recommendations FAQ page. We may be meeting two or three of the HGHI guidelines. Hand-washing is spotty at best, 3ft of distancing is next to impossible in many settings, universal masking is not possible as students are spending lunch without masks on and we are not doing satellite testing. More importantly is that the HGHI recommendations are not entirely focussed on those 6 items. They spend more time discussing trust than they do hand washing. But since the BOT leaned on the HGHI guidelines it is important to bring attention to MCPS's inability to meet those standards. To be clear many of our classrooms do not, are not and can not meet 5/6 mitigation strategies. IF you all are comfortable with that I believe you have a responsibility to bring the resolution back and revise it to clearly indicate what we are able to do. Or revise it to drop the guidelines all together. Either way this brings about honesty and transparency with the public and with ourselves.

I would like to be clear, me and many many many of my colleagues feel safe going back based upon the recommendations from HGHI and the other data. But all this data has caveats and we are ignoring those caveats. Worse is that we are allowing misleading information to circulate to the public in a way that will erode the overall trust between MCPS and the community, which is of critical importance. I am hopeful that all will work out well. I am excited to see all my students every day. I want to bring all students back. BUT I do not want to live under a false narrative that we are doing so based upon the recommendations of the HGHI. This simply is not true.

Finally, I would like to invite you to come and see the work we are doing and the classrooms our students are learning in or to continue this conversation with individual teachers or small groups of teachers. KaCee Ballou will be happy to set up a zoom call with any number of teachers from any grade level. She can give you teachers who are fully supportive of going back and those that are nervous. Just ask and we can help. Please come and visit our schools, please come and talk to teachers, please sit down with us to discuss what is going on in the buildings. I am happy to hop on a call. We are here to help support your decision making process.

Thank you for your continued service.

Ezra Shearer
Teacher Sentinel High School
MEA High School Representative at Large.

JAMA article: <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2775875>

FAQ page of the HGHI:
<https://globalepidemics.org/2021/01/17/schools-at-the-path-to-zero-qa-about-latest-guidance/>

Here is the excerpts about the goal and therein take-aways of the report:

Is the goal of the document to justify opening my school?

No, the goal is to help decision-makers focus on what is required to create a safe environment for in-person learning for educators, staff, and students in conditions of high community spread.

What is the main take-away of the report?

The main take-away of the report is that schools need to develop the organizational capacity to deliver infection control with the goal of achieving zero or near-zero in-school transmission even in contexts of high community spread. Achieving such organizational capacity depends on healthy partnerships among school and district leaders, educators and school staff, and public health officials. This organizational capacity for infection control will be necessary for many months to come, quite probably including in the fall -- regardless of how vaccination processes unfold. This focus on developing the organizational capacity for ongoing, continuous work on infection control has been under-developed in previous work, including our own. We seek to rectify that here.

What about lunch and other eating scenarios?

The contexts for lunch vary greatly across schools. This underscores the importance of having school infection control teams that can work in close concert with a district level situation room that includes public health officials as partners. Every school will have to pay close attention to the design of its approach to lunch. The basics pertain: be outside if you can, avoid congregating, stay distanced, eat quickly and put your mask back on when not actively eating. Other elements may also be pertinent depending on the school setting. Again, this is why it is so important to develop local understanding of and expertise in infection control.
