

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

(no subject)

Breezy Rhinehart <breezyrhart@live.com>

Wed, Nov 11, 2020 at 7:28 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us" <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Please do not resume full-time in-person learning until case counts have dropped significantly.

Breezy Rhinehart

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
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Re: MOA for Spring 2021?

Beth Morey <eamorey@gmail.com>

Wed, Nov 11, 2020 at 3:47 PM

To: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us

The reason I am emailing is because between my work, helping my kids with remote learning, and all of the other stresses of life during a pandemic, I do not have time to sit on the phone. Thanks so much for being accommodating and understanding.

If you'd prefer to specifically address my queries during the public board meeting instead of replying via email, I'd be very satisfied with that. I understand that you are stretched thin as well.

I just read this article, which seems to be in direct contradiction with what you shared with me. I'd be very grateful to hear your in-depth comment on this either here via email or at the public board meeting: https://missoulia.com/news/local/mcps-sees-covid-spike-stress-on-staffing/article_cd53d45c-2611-5be5-b950-e0d6eac0f75e.html

Specifically this quote: " Missoula County's current incidence rate is at 65 new cases per day per 100,000 people as of Wednesday, and Watson acknowledged the community is currently not meeting the Harvard model's standard for having students in hybrid learning."

Also, in the article I learned that the MCPS COVID task force has still not settled on metrics for moving in and out of remote/hybrid/in-person learning...more than two months after reopening the schools. While I know this is a difficult time, I'm appalled that you brought kids and staff back together with no plan of how to decide when there is too much risk in gathering face-to-face.

It also explains why you have not been able to satisfactorily answer my questions — you truly do not know how many sick/infirm/dead students, families, and staff from COVID-19 are too many. This hubris and lack of responsibility greatly erodes my trust in the MCPS administration.

Particularly now that Montana is experiencing unchecked community spread — which includes our schools. The two cannot and should be separated.

I look forward to hearing your statement at the next public board meeting explaining why at two months into the school year MCPS STILL had no exit strategy for hybrid/in-person learning as our cases exploded — and continue to explode — exponentially.

Thanks for your time,
Beth Morey
Franklin Elementary Parent
Montana licensed educator

Sent from my iPhone

On Nov 10, 2020, at 9:01 PM, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us> wrote:

Thanks Beth. As I stated in the last message — please set up a time for a phone call. I would rather not go back and forth over email. Regarding any message from the County — please reach out to the County Health Officer Ellen Lahey and ask about her opinion regarding transmission of cases in MCPS. Thanks,
Rob

Hi Beth,

In my email I stated that we are seeing very little transmission due to in-person learning in our schools. I did not say that there was no transmission. We knew that there would be cases in our schools when we made the decision to return to in-person learning. Our goal has always been to limit the number of active cases in our schools and hopefully not cause transmission with our in-person schedule.

I am basing the statement on the data below:

One chart demonstrates what we have seen regarding COVID 19 cases in our school. Please look at the route of transmission %. This is determined by case investigation by our nursing staff. This data is updated at the start of each week.

<u>New Cases by Week</u>							
Summary	Gr K-5	Gr 6-8	Gr 9-12	Staff	Total New Cases by Week		
8/26 - 9/25	0	0	5	3	8		
9/28-10/4	1	1	8	9	19		
10/5-10/11	4	1	6	3	14		
10/12 - 10/17	7	2	6	3	18		
10/18 - 10/25	6	2	10	5	23		
10/26 - 11 2	5	2	3	0	10		
11/3 - 11/9	6	2	4	9	21		
				total	113		
<u>Active Cases in MCPS</u>				<u>Active Cases per 10K in Missoula County</u>			
10/11	12		10/11	44.3			
10/17	18		10/17	44.1			

I would be happy to discuss further on the phone if you have any questions or further comments.

Thanks, Rob Watson, Superintendent

From: Beth Morey <eamorey@gmail.com>
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2020 at 9:20 AM
To: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>, "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>, Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>
Subject: Re: MOA for Spring 2021?

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What empirical evidence supports your statement that schools are not spreading COVID? We've had multiple cases in every school and our county and state numbers are skyrocketing, with our hospitals beginning to fill up.

Thank you so much for taking the time to clarify this for me. I truly appreciate it and look forward to your reply.

Beth Morey

Franklin Elementary parent

Montana licensed educator

Sent from my iPhone

On Nov 10, 2020, at 8:00 AM, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us> wrote:

Hi Beth,

We will be making some final decisions and announcements about the MOA in the coming weeks. I anticipate we will be able to make an official announcement during the first week of December.

Regarding the move to remote learning, I don't anticipate the Board will move to remote learning, unless ordered by the Governor's office or local health

reason do not feel like in-person schooling is the right choice for them during this pandemic.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this.

With gratitude,

Beth Morey

Franklin Elementary parent

Montana licensed educator



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

MOA

Lisa Davey <ladavey25@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Nov 11, 2020 at 8:51 PM

Dear MCPS school board,

I have a high school child who is greatly benefitting from having a robust MOA experience. He has full classes and has even made new friends. He is at high risk for complications from the novel coronavirus and having MOA available not only slows the spread of the virus in our community, making grocery stores and medical appointments safer, it helps keep our vulnerable students and teachers safe while not excluding them from experiencing school along with substantial number peers. Thank you so much for continuing MOA for next semester. I'd love if you'd consider going to a block schedule there as well so that students only have 2 classes to worry about at a time, like their hybrid peers, and for the same reasons you did it for in-person learning during this time of community wide stressors.

Thank you,

Lisa Davey

MOA

Lara Mattson <laramichelle30@hotmail.com>

Wed, Nov 11, 2020 at 9:09 PM

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

To whom it may concern

As a parent of two children in the Missoula Online Academy, a middle schooler and a high schooler, I just want to say how much I have appreciated the fact that we have had this online option for schooling this semester. Now that we've had some time to adjust, both my children are doing well in the online environment and I so appreciate knowing they are remaining safe, especially given that we have frequent contact with both my mother and my grandmother. I am sincerely hoping that MOA will remain an option for the second semester of school, especially given that case counts of Covid continue to rise here in Missoula County. As a mental health therapist, I realize that online is not the ideal option for everyone. That some families and children need the additional support that in-person school provides. By having the online option available for those who can utilize it, those who are not able to at least have fewer contacts when they are in attendance.

I appreciate all the hard work you all have done to keep our children safe and learning!

Thank you so very much!

Sincerely,

Lara Mattson Radle

MOA**Christine Hays** <christineann03@gmail.com>

Thu, Nov 12, 2020 at 5:49 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello

My daughter is a 3rd grader currently enrolled in MOA. We have had an amazing experience with remote learning so far this year! The first couple weeks were full of confusion and technical issues. However, the teachers and other staff did a wonderful job working through everything and encouraging students to keep positive attitudes. I am thoroughly impressed with my daughter's teacher, Becky Nordhagen, and her ability to keep students engaged and interactive during zoom meetings. My 3rd grader is absolutely thriving this year! She's been able to learn time management skills, become more confident in her academic abilities and loves attending her daily zoom meetings. I really commend and appreciate everyone who has made MOA possible. Knowing my family has been able to lessen the risk of covid spreading while my daughter is still able to receive a quality public education is worth so much more than I could ever explain. We have high risk people in our household and having one less stressor during this trying year has truly made our lives better. We hope MOA is able to extend until this pandemic is over and our country has a better grasp on keeping covid numbers down long term.

Thank you for your time

Christine Hays



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

MOA is great!

Julie Burkhart <julieannburkhart@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Nov 12, 2020 at 12:19 PM

We are writing to show our support of, and thankfulness for, Missoula Online Academy, and also to testify to its effectiveness. We've completed our first, highly successful, semester of learning from home in MOA (Missoula Online Academy)!

Our son is thriving with his scheduled online learning. We are very pleased with the content, the teacher, and the stability of this option. We have a stable, doable, well-rounded schedule, facilitated by a highly capable instructor. It is a great format for our son.

Our family is doing very well with this fully online option. It has been wonderful for the physical, emotional and mental health of our family during this pandemic. We are in a good headspace and a good routine. The initial growing pains, getting technical issues resolved, were short-lived and have been completely resolved. We have smooth learning-filled school days, 5-days per week. We are thankful we are able to focus on learning rather than having to be in an unstable brick-and-mortar schedule which is focused on limiting disease exposure. We would homeschool before being forced to go the in-person route.

We are so very thankful we have the MOA option and so very thankful for all those who helped create it!

Sincerely,
Julie Burkhart



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

MOA Thank You

Jaime Hand <jaimehand@outlook.com>

Thu, Nov 12, 2020 at 6:50 PM

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

Hello,

We wanted to express our appreciation for the MOA program. It's been a great alternative for families like mine that want an 100% online option. Without this program we would have home schooled. This is great because my son gets to see his friends virtually and learn different ways to connect with others.

Thanks, Jaime

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Getting our kids the education they deserve

Karen Regan <karenregan44@gmail.com>

Fri, Nov 13, 2020 at 3:41 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To the board of trustees,

I know that you are working hard to do what you think is best for the kids who are part of MCPS. Things have been constantly changing during this pandemic, but unfortunately this school district is failing to adapt to these changes. Our kids should've been in school full time back at the beginning of the school year when we only had 35 active cases of COVID. The cases are now much greater, but the evidence shows that the risk to kids who are exposed to COVID is negligible. I understand that there are people who are concerned about family members who have compromised immune systems or are elderly. That's why MOA was created. Why are we accommodating that population both through the hybrid program and MOA? There are many Missoula residents that would feel comfortable sending their kids to school full time. I personally have really embraced having the extra time with my kids, but unfortunately I am not a trained educator. My kids' teachers are. They need to be in the classroom full time. Even though I have them with me a majority of the school week, and I put a lot of value in education and completion of the online school tasks, they are still behind by a month right now according to my daughter's teacher. That delay is in math and ELA. They aren't even doing any science and social studies.

Our kids are going to be competing against other local students on standardized tests and possible college admission exams down the road. Everyone else in Missoula is going to live school full time and making it work except for MCPS and Target Range. I have been able to make my work schedule accommodate my kids' school schedule. I am the exception. Not the rule. What is going to happen with the kids who aren't thriving at home? Does that mean that when we finally get back to school we will have further education delays as we work to get these children caught up?

If a 5 day in-school schedule isn't a viable option at this point, then we need to sort out the bus schedule and get the kids 2 FULL days at school. Not 2 shortened days. We also have an opportunity to have the kids attend in person every other Monday. Monday online learning is a joke. I am running into elementary school teachers, who are being paid to educate our kids, at the gym and grocery store during working hours on Mondays. This is shaping up to be a day off for them to live their best lives. I had one teacher tell me that she's never been so caught up and that she has time to take on other things. I don't. I'm at home doing their job and I've never been more behind on my work stuff. Why am I having to run home feeling guilty for taking a break to exercise or run a quick errand to help my kids get through their work when the very people who are being paid to fulfill that obligation are out and about doing their off hours stuff? If they aren't willing to put in the work on Mondays, then they shouldn't be given the extra days off throughout the year for meetings and conferences. These Mondays should count toward those days. Our kids are suffering a double hit with the gratuitous days off, the shortened days while in school, and only 2 days of live learning. I have been willing to make sacrifices for my kids' education, but I can't say the same thing for MCPS elementary.

Unfortunately, the lack of in school learning is really alienating many families. I am usually at the school 1-2 times each week to help out and be supportive, but I haven't been there since I dropped my daughter off on her first day. Your decision to accommodate only the group of individuals who are uncomfortable with live learning by having a limited hybrid schedule and MOA is pushing away many of the families who support the school the most financially and physically. These families are pulling their kids out of the school district and putting them in the other local schools who are brave enough to allow for full time learning.

Thanks,
Karen Regan



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Employees high risk

Elizabeth Harper-Schurman <feelgoodmt@live.com>

Fri, Nov 13, 2020 at 3:59 PM

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

Dear board of trustees, I am writing this because I am frustrated watching discrimination over and over again.

My question pertains to a recent job opening. When an employee has extensive experience within M.C.P.S. for a job and that job is posted, applied for, and then passed by, questions arise. The interviewers are biased in this situation even to the tune of one of them asking with a chuckle, "how does it feel to work for someone younger than you?" There have been many instances of discrimination from this superior, because of Native American Status?, because an honest employee makes the superior uncomfortable?, or because of age? These items show not getting the preferred position makes sense even though it is disheartening.

However, with the need to be away from others during COVID due to needing to take care of a 94 year old, this position would have protected the health of the employee and family as it is outside. The interviewers knew this too.

My hope is that the person who got the position is actually more qualified for it. If not, the discrimination will be proven.

Thank you

Elizabeth Harper-Schurman

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
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Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Keeping schools open is essential

Pelah Hoyt <hoyt.pelah@gmail.com>

Sun, Nov 15, 2020 at 4:30 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Pam Wright <pcwright@mcpsmt.org>

Dear Missoula County Public Schools,

I urge you to do everything you can to keep Missoula County Public Schools open and to move from the hybrid schedule to the all students in class everyday schedule as soon as possible. While I have two kids in Rattlesnake Elementary, I am writing today with the wellbeing of all Missoula County Public School students in mind. School is essential and keeping schools open should be among our highest priorities. Schools are particularly important for disadvantaged students and who are suffering disproportionately during this pandemic.

MCPS has done a good job creating a safe environment for learning this trimester. Thank you. I know that it has not been easy and I appreciate all the planning, creativity and dedication that has gone into opening MCPS during this pandemic. Please continue to make every effort to keep schools open.

Sincerely,
Pelah Hoyt
1693 Missoula Ave
Missoula, MT 59802

Kids returning to school

Kelly Robinson <kellykaterobinson@gmail.com>

Sun, Nov 15, 2020 at 4:56 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: rwatson@mcpsmt.org

I am writing to you today to voice my concern that our children are ready to move from the Hybrid schedule to the Phase 2 schedule or something similar. We are one of VERY few school districts in the state of Montana that continues on a Hybrid schedule. Other schools, including Hellgate Elementary, have displayed that it can be done. I understand that cases are on the rise and Montana is a hot spot....but it is NOT our children that are spreading it through the community. School is a controlled environment where masks are worn and social distancing is monitored.

Our children are learning nothing at this point. They are given "busy work" to keep them busy on the days that they are at home. They are not retaining information that is given to them along with having NO desire to learn when at home. Some parents are choosing NOT to do the work at home because it becomes such a struggle between the parents and the child. Our children are struggling at this point. They need school. They need social interaction. Some need the meals. Others need the help to report abuse at home. ALL kids benefit from being in the school and learning. If other schools are able to return to a normal schedule, I don't understand why we are not trying for OUR students. Our kids are falling behind and we need to make some sort of change.

I understand the frustration of the teachers and their concern. Unfortunately this will be our new normal and I feel like we need to jump right in and make it work. The teachers have been given the opportunity to "practice" with half of the capacity for the last 3 months. If other teachers in the state have made it work, why can't our teachers step forward. Maybe we don't go 5 days a week. Maybe we go 4 days a week with one day online? Even three days a week with Monday's and Friday's being online? We need to change something so the kids are attending school more that 2 days a week.

I know that there are a few parents that don't agree with me. I would like to remind those parents that they do have the option to go to complete remote learning. As parents, it is our responsibility to help with the spread of the virus. That being said, it is our responsibility to limit our contact with others while the kids are attending school.

The most important thing in all of this is our children and their well being. Their education is on the decline and we need to make changes. I suggest to you, if you decide to continue with the Hybrid schedule, that the online work changes in some capacity. I have contemplated sending my children to a private school here in Missoula because they are doing what needs to be done when the kids are at home and learning. They are checking in at 8:30am. They are online just like they are in a classroom....and they are learning ALL DAY long. I don't understand why our teachers can't do this on Mondays. Also, on the days that the kids are NOT in the school, why are they not Zooming into the classroom. Maybe this doesn't work with K-2...but it would for the older students. If you decide to stay with the Hybrid schedule, please make changes to the online learning.

We need to make a change!

Thank you
Kelly Robinson

Something to add to my comment

Kelly Robinson <kellykaterobinson@gmail.com>

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: rwatson@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Nov 16, 2020 at 6:58 AM

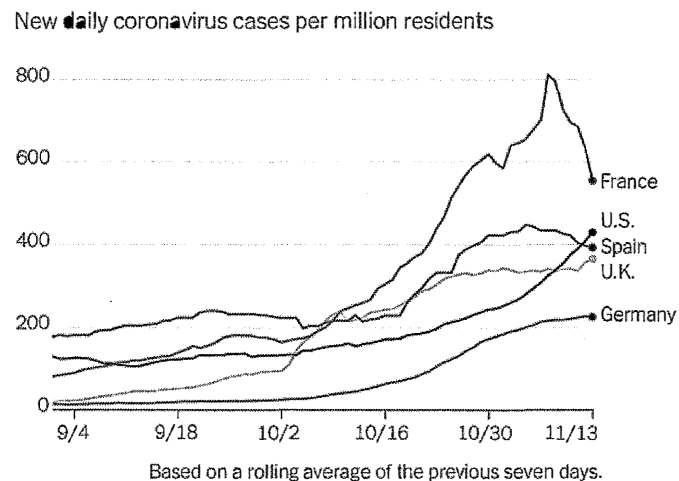
Hi again. You received a public comment from me yesterday. This morning I woke to The New York Times Briefing daily email. Here is what they said.....

Cocktails? Yes. School? No.

As the coronavirus has surged again in recent weeks, much of the United States has chosen to keep restaurants open and schools closed. Much of Europe has done the opposite.

The European approach seems to be working better.

Look at this chart, which shows the number of new daily virus cases in five countries, adjusted for population size:



By The New York Times

As you can see, both the U.S. and Europe

have been coping with severe outbreaks, with caseloads rising even faster in much of Europe than in the U.S. during much of this fall. But over the past two weeks, France, Germany, Spain and Britain have managed to reduce their growth rates.

What is Europe doing differently? It is cracking down on the kind of indoor gatherings that most commonly spread the virus. England closed pubs, restaurants, gyms and more on Nov. 5 and announced they would remain closed until at least Dec. 2. France, Germany's regional governments and the Catalonia region of Spain have also shut restaurants, among other businesses.

"I'm sure the Europeans didn't want to restrict their activities any more than we do," Janet Baseman, an epidemiologist at the University of Washington, told me over the weekend. "Everyone is tired and ready for this to end, but we have to accept the reality of the data before us."

Many Americans have resisted accepting that reality. Across much of the country, restaurants remain open for indoor dining. Last week, New York State announced a new policy that public health experts consider to be a bizarre middle ground: Businesses with a liquor license can stay open until 10 p.m.

The one indoor activity that appears to present less risk is school, especially elementary school. Why?

Young children seem to spread the virus less often than adults do. "Research has shown that if you put social-distancing protocols in place, school is actually quite a safe

environment,” Andreas Schleicher, who studies schools for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris, told NPR.

Closing schools and switching entirely to remote learning, on the other hand, has big social costs. Children are learning less, and many parents, mostly mothers, have dropped out of the labor force. The U.S. is suffering from both of these problems *and* from a raging pandemic.

There are no easy answers, to be sure. Closing restaurants and other businesses creates economic hardship (which some European countries are trying to reduce through government aid).

And the virus is now spreading so rapidly in the U.S. that keeping schools open does pose risks, including the chance that teachers, janitors and other workers infect one another. To keep schools open in a safe way, the U.S. would probably first need to close other public places. Only a few states — including Michigan, Oregon, New Mexico and Washington — have closed indoor dining recently.

“The U.S. case and hospitalization numbers we’re seeing right now are chilling,” Baseman said.

But if there are no perfect solutions to the pandemic, there are better and worse ones. Right now, the U.S. seems to be falling well short of what’s possible.

Thanks for reading....

Please close schools to in person classes

Eric Zalenski <ericzalenski@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Nov 16, 2020 at 7:34 PM

Dear board members

As a member of the community of Missoula, an active voter, and a friend to many teachers and parents in town, I ask that you please cancel in person learning.

Many students are missing school do to COVID infections. At the rate of known contraction, it will only be a mater of time until classrooms will be missing more than 10 students on average. What is the metric you plan on using to make the decision that the health and wellness of students and teachers need to take priority over politics? Do we need to contact trace a death back to our communities schools first?

- Our teachers are not disposable
- The children of this community are not disposable
- The families of teachers and students in this community are at risk when classes are held in person.
- Missoula will continue to have uncontrollable spread as long as school is held in person

Please make the right decision early. Close in person schooling, and start providing lunch pick up and drop off for students immediately. Every day you wait leads to more sick people in our community.

Thank you
Eric Zalenski

Thoughts about further reopening

Jaclyn Vosler <voslerjackie@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Nov 16, 2020 at 4:50 PM

Good afternoon,

First, I want to say that I feel grateful every day for the thoughtful plan that has been guiding us here in MCPS. We have so far experienced great success during a trying time, and it's because of a lot of hard work that was done (and continues to be done) by a lot of people. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of that. I just wanted to share a few thoughts about moving forward in our phases to further reopen.

We are trying to preserve as much face-to-face education for our students as possible, and we know that anyone affected by quarantine is effectively reduced to zero minutes of in-person education per week. When quarantine protocols are dependent on exposure, the level of exposure we orchestrate in our schedule matters. Our current plan not only limits exposure inside of our schools, but it creates a high chance that the infected individual was not even in the building when they developed symptoms. This combination has allowed us to greatly minimize the impact of this virus on our learning setting, despite the recent spikes in community transmission. I have friends working in other districts where they have not been as lucky. Districts that have failed to create a plan that sufficiently limits contacts are losing entire classes, grades, programs, and even buildings to quarantine. Many teachers and students have been in and out of school this fall, and some have had to return to an indefinite period of fully online programming.

The education experience during this pandemic is not easy. Not for students. Not for families. Not for teachers. But like we have heard from many educators in our district, all is not lost right now. We are together and we are learning, and the important benefits of these small groups remain - I have not written a single discipline referral since August. Not one -- and that's in a middle school. Many days, our behavior intervention room is dark and empty for the entirety of the day. I continue to see kids shine that were unable to thrive in the traditional setting, and I'm still hearing each learner's voice each and every day. I'm also seeing students arrive prepared and on time for classes. This environment, when we're together, is closer to what education could (and should) look like, if we as a society were more intentional about our design and funding. The time we used to lose to passing periods, locker shuffling, behavior redirection, and supply finding is staggering when you stop to think about it. The number of students we couldn't truly see, hear, or connect with in that fast paced and crowded environment is even more concerning. So yes, while we don't have the schedule we want for ourselves right now, we do have things to both celebrate and work to preserve.

My students are engaged and learning all period when they are with me. We are not just learning Spanish -- we are laughing together and supporting each other with our social emotional well-being. Being together in person is important for all of us. Do we want more of that time together? Absolutely. But do we want to prematurely push for it in a way that ultimately leads to LESS time together? No. I would think we probably all agree on that.

We are about to head into two major vacations. The entire country is anticipating spikes in numbers due to upcoming travel and gatherings. It seems like it would be wise to wait until we see the impact of the holidays and reevaluate again at semester.

Thank you again for all of the time and energy you've been putting into keeping everyone safe, healthy, and learning. We all appreciate your consideration and leadership.

Respectfully,

Jackie Vosler
Spanish Teacher
Meadow Hill Middle School



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

What We are Doing is Working

Dianne McBride <diannemcbride@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 11:49 AM

Dear Trustees,

I understand that you are under a lot of pressure right now from some elements in the community that are urging you to bring back all students full time. They theorize that if other school districts can do it, why can't we? Other districts are indeed back with all students in school for 6 or 7 periods. Those school districts are facing emergency closures because of lack of staffing and mass exposures to COVID 19. Students in those districts lack much needed consistency as they are jerked in and out of remote learning as cases rise sharply in Montana and more school-aged children and school staff are exposed to the virus. Their parents cannot plan ahead and get work responsibilities and child care covered with unpredictable school closures.

Missoula County Public Schools, on the other hand, have been able to remain relatively consistent. Teachers and staff at school are able to adequately socially distance students because of the hybrid schedule. When a case does happen that affects schools, chances are better that the infected student or staff member hasn't been attending school while they were infectious because of the hybrid schedule. If they were at school during the infectious period, fewer students and staff are exposed and quarantined because of fewer classes taking place. Instead of contact tracing 7 different full classes, we are contact-tracing only 2 classes (and only half of each of those classes.) This has allowed Missoula County Public Schools to avoid going fully remote unlike some of our neighbors in adjoining counties.

I urge the board of trustees to vote to remain in the current hybrid schedule as long as the health department will allow. None of us wants to move to the fully remote learning model that we dealt with this past spring if we can possibly help it. That model wasn't good for students or teachers. Student learning and mental health suffered. Teachers struggled. We have learned a lot about how to adequately educate children and young adults using a remote model since last spring but no one asserts that it's a substitute for face to face contact with teachers and interaction with peers. While the hybrid model isn't ideal, it IS preferable to a fully remote model. If all students are brought back full-time, I fully expect that we will have to move to full-time remote learning sooner rather than later, and that's not what's best for kids or teachers.

Thank you!
Dianne McBride

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

School pandemic response

William Merritt <weatherington.merritt@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 12:00 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

I live in a household with a public school educator. Your apparent ambition to stay open, or even open up further seems like gross negligence. Your definitions of close contacts seem loose and your priorities seem like they put our ENTIRE community at risk. I know there is no perfect answer. And no matter what, some people will suffer and struggle as a result of any decision you make. But I implore you to see reason and recognize the severity of the current situation. Moving beyond the current hybrid model would be catastrophic. Taking steps back and moving more remote seems like the best option.

Thanks,

Will

Closing schools through the holidays

Suzanne Demarinis <dsuzluk@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 12:02 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Trustees,

I am writing to implore MCPS to close school through the Holidays. We are in a CRISIS... Covid-19 is spreading rampantly and we need to listen to the pandemic experts. Dr. Fauci says we are in for a dark winter. This is coming true in Montana. We've even made the national news with our spike of COVID cases. We have between 900-1600 plus cases a day. So far 543 deaths, 456 hospitalizations and 19,750 active cases. Our state has almost hit 50,000 confirmed cases. Tomorrow's numbers will have surpassed that. We are at 78 new cases per 100,000 people which is not meeting the Harvard model's standard for having students in hybrid learning.

Schools are closing. Schools in Helena, Great Falls, Belgrade, Lockwood, Browning and probably more... Missoula and Ravalli county have had closures as well. Florence has just had an emergency closure today (11/17.) All kids and staff are to leave by 1:00 p.m. due to COVID exposure that affects the entire school.

Children can spread and catch COVID. Over 1 million kids in the U.S. have caught COVID. Probably more but that is what has been documented.

We cannot give in to COVID burnout. We must be diligent as COVID needs us to let our guard down in order to survive.

There are still many COVID deniers and non mask wearing citizens. That is the reason for these spikes!

The schools are short staffed. Teachers and Paras are doing their best. Often going above and beyond. I for one am so grateful that we've made it this far.

People will be gathering and letting their guard down during the holidays. People are not paying attention to restrictions now. The holidays are potential super spreaders. Let's stay safe!

Sincerely,

Suzanne

Suzanne Demarinis <dsuzluk@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 2:12 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Trustees,

Here is an alarming story out of the White House in regards to Montana COVID:

<https://nbcmontana.com/news/local/white-house-report-shows-mt-ranks-worst-in-nation-for-positivity-rates>

Sincerely,

Suzanne Demarinis

MCPS MOA experience

Erin Edge <mtnrin1@gmail.com>

Tue, Nov 17, 2020 at 3:57 PM

To: Publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Board Members,

I wanted to let you know that our family has greatly appreciated the ability to have my daughter attend MOA this year vs. going to school in-person. While recognizing that MOA is not the same as in-person learning our experience has been good. Our daughter is engaged and her teacher has been very willing to answer questions and adjust things as possible to make her experience valuable. This choice has also given us consistency throughout the semester which is important. We would like the ability to continue with MOA through the remainder of the year.

Thank you for your time,
Erin Edge

hybrid model feedback

Annie Florin <annieflorin78@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Nov 18, 2020 at 1:05 PM

Hello,

I wanted to share my thoughts on the phased reopening. One of my kids is at Lewis and Clark, the other at Washington. Overall, the hybrid model has worked well for us, though it is still a less than ideal situation. Particularly challenging is the overall lack of stimulation and socialization, as well as the decreased opportunity for dynamic, experiential learning. In addition, the cost burden for our family to employ a caregiver 3 days a week adds strain in an already stressful time. (We recognize we are fortunate to be able to choose to employ a caregiver and avoid group care.)

That said, my husband and I worry a great deal about the long term effects of this social and academic isolation, particularly for our 1st grader who now does a ton of pencil and paper busy-work. (This is not, in any way, a criticism of the teachers. I think this is the most manageable option for all involved - working families and teachers.) However, the effect of this paperwork is that my young learner now dreads schoolwork at home and has begun to dread going to school because it is so outside of his regular homebound lifestyle.

I would really like to see the schools remain open or expand their opening. From my understanding, the data from MCCHD shows that COVID spread is not happening in the schools (just goes to show -- teachers run the world!). Where the spread is happening is in office spaces, social gatherings between households, in restaurants/bars, and retail settings.

I believe that the leadership of MCPS has an obligation to urge MCCHD about the need for tighter community restrictions so that the schools can remain open or expand their opening. And MCCHD, an obligation to urge the state leadership to tighten restrictions and provide stimulus. And the state, the obligation to urge federal leadership for restrictions and stimulus. The schools cannot wait for the help to trickle down to our kids. If we continue to let our community (both locally and nationally) prioritize economics over education, we are figuratively throwing our kids under the school bus.

Be well,
Annie Florin

Fwd: School Rankings: Framing (Slightly) Differently

toni matlock <tonimatlock@gmail.com>

Wed, Nov 18, 2020 at 2:58 PM

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

Cc: Alanna Vaneps <amvaneps@mcpsmt.org>, John Engen <EngenJ@ci.missoula.mt.us>, "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hello all,

Please read the following by economist Emily Oster on the opening/closing of schools and the relationship to the community where those schools are. I find her analysis to be very helpful. Then please consider her suggestions for how to illustrate our priorities to the community. I appreciate all the work you do and hope we can work together to make things better.

Stay safe,
Toni

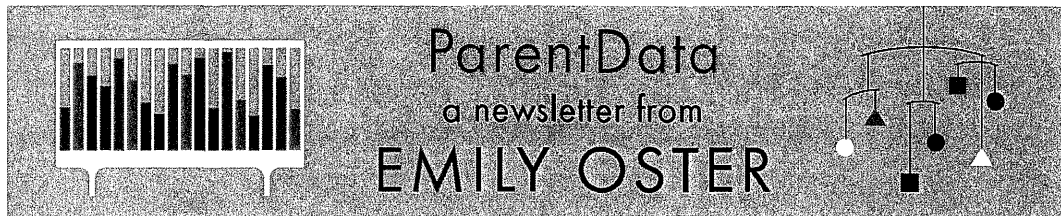
----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Emily Oster from ParentData** <emilyoster@substack.com>

Date: Mon, Nov 16, 2020 at 3:10 AM

Subject: School Rankings: Framing (Slightly) Differently

To: <tonimatlock@gmail.com>



School Rankings: Framing (Slightly) Differently



Emily Oster

Nov 16   

You might have thought it would be settled by now, but the school reopening debate is far from over. In a sense, we are in no different a place than we were in September. Schools are open in some places and not in others, and the correlations are odd. If anything we see more open schools in places with higher COVID-19 rates ([see a tracker here](#)). Some districts which planned to open (i.e. Boston) have pushed their openings back, but others have opened *more* despite increases in rates (i.e. places in Pennsylvania).

There is broader agreement — although by no means universal — that schools themselves are not locations with a lot of COVID-19 spread. But this doesn't mean there is no possibility of spread, and there is little agreement on what is an acceptable level of risk.

This has become even more complicated as community rates have gone up. Many people — even some who have advocated for school openings — have suggested we may need to take a pause between Thanksgiving and Christmas. It may not be the fault of schools, but community rates may make school impossible. As I've been reading and thinking about this, I see three main threads of public discussion.

1. There is much focus on the question of what is the community rate “threshold” for closing schools. Is it 3%, as DeBlasio has said in NY? Is it 20%, as some Iowa districts had been told back in August? Should this depend on testing positivity or case rates or a combination of the two? Is there *any* community threshold at which schools should be closed?
2. There is a rallying cry among those who want schools open. “Schools before Bars” (or indoor dining). Frustration has bubbled up, especially in (relatively) low prevalence areas when restaurants and gyms are open but not schools.
3. Where schools *are* open, especially in high prevalence areas, school leaders are frustrated at logistical challenges. Too many teachers and students out in quarantine — often based on cases acquired elsewhere. Even when there has been little spread within schools themselves, these logical details have meant some move to remote learning. Children's Hospital of Philadelphia has walked back some of their in-person learning recommendations, based largely on issues associated with community spread.

I think all three of these points are swirling around the same basic issue, which requires us to think about how we rank schools. This framing — more below — helped me think through (2) and (3) above, and maybe make some progress on (1).

I will say, as a side note: independent of the issue of schooling between Thanksgiving and Christmas, these issues will not be gone in January.

Widespread vaccines are, at best, a late spring option. But this holiday break and new semester may afford us a (last) opportunity to change our thinking.

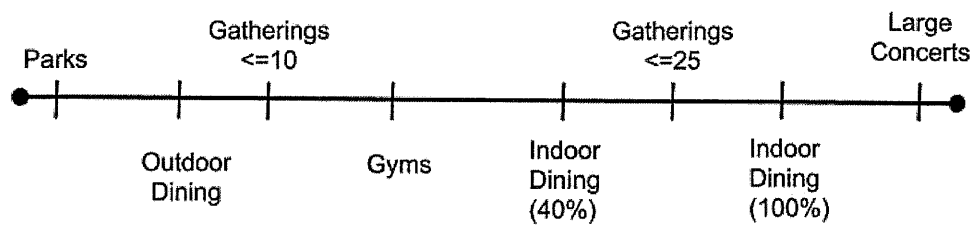
Risk/Benefits Matrix, Redux

Many months ago, I talked about the idea of a risk-benefits matrix for deciding which activities you should engage in. ([You can see the post here](#)). The idea in that post was to highlight that every activity has a COVID-19 risk, but also an associated benefit. By placing them on a matrix with one axis for risk and one for benefit, we can think about which activities make sense to do. This applies to individual choices, but also to policy choices. Although that post was back in July, I was already talking about schools there and arguing that they had high value.

(As a side note, one of my amazing former colleagues at Booth, Eric Budish, has an academic paper out on this same idea, but much more complete. [Check it out here](#). One of his big points, which I will echo here, is that there are some precautions we can take which allow us to do more of everything. SPECIFICALLY WHAT HE MEANS IS WEARING MASKS, THANK YOU FOR WEARING YOUR MASK EVERYONE.)

I want to suggest, now, that we might even further simplify this matrix into...a line. I want to narrow in here on policy choices. Let's imagine we're the Governor of a state, and facing decisions about what activities to allow. In most states and cities policy-makers have some control over parks, schools, dining and bars, gyms and store capacity. Policy-makers can make statements about expected gathering sizes although it's hard to control what people do.

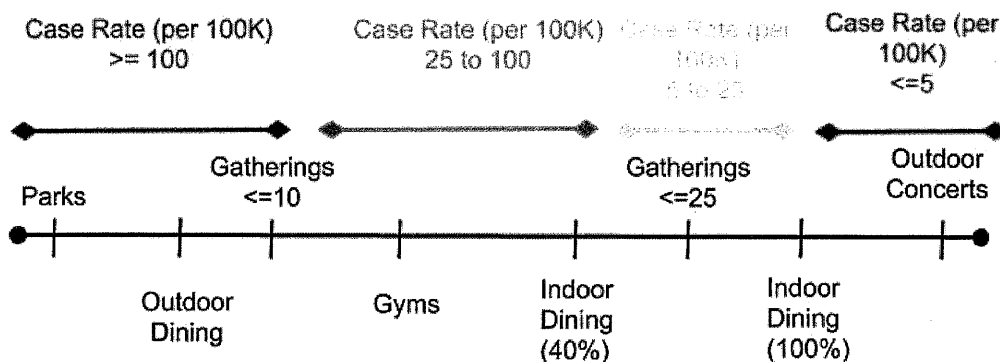
Each of these activities entail some risk, and some benefits. The key decision for the policy-maker is to combine these risks and benefits, and generate some kind of ranking. I have an example below, with a few policy decisions (note I've left off schools here).



You open the things furthest to the left first. State parks — low risk (outdoors safer), high benefit (people need something to do) — should be among the first things open. Outdoor dining before de-densified indoor dining before dense indoor dining. Smaller gatherings before larger gatherings, and so on.

We can argue (and will!) about where things fall on this line. Should indoor dining come before, or after, gyms? Indoor dining is probably less safe (harder to wear a mask) but the benefits are higher. We may need to argue about what we value in terms of keeping people employed and sustaining mental health versus illness risk.

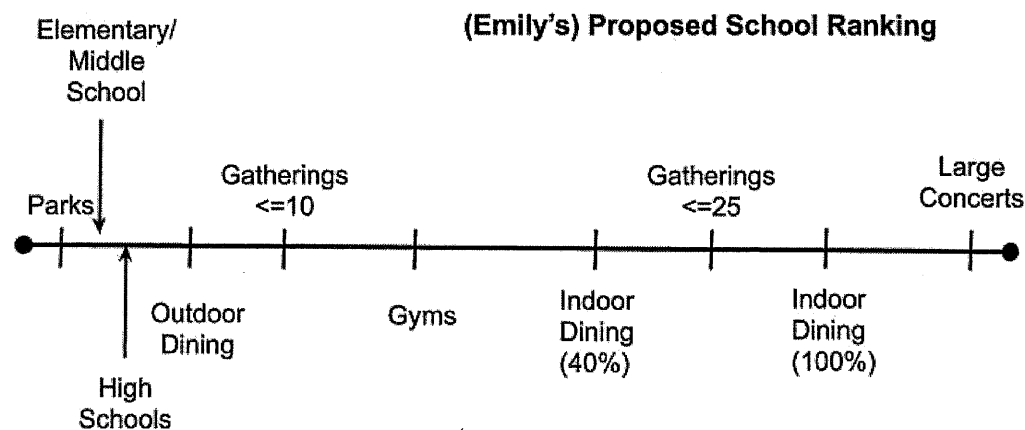
But once we've agreed on the ranking, all that's left is to draw a cutoff. To decide, based on some notion of community rates, what is open and what is not. I've illustrated one example below. A key point is that even with the same ranking, different policy-makers will draw their lines differently. Some states in the US have been more conservative than others around COVID. A difference in these cutoffs is one way to visualize, say, the difference between South Dakota and Maine. They may agree on rankings and disagree on where to draw the colored lines.



By ranking places in this way we can also recognize, even more strongly, the value of restrictions at the top. Part of the reason for putting some things “first” on this list is the recognition that they have high value for risk. Limiting the things at the top of the line — say, concerts or dense indoor dining — is important *because it lets us do the things at the bottom*. If we allow the high-risk, lower-benefit items at the top of the list, we run the risk of increasing COVID-19 rates so much we have to limit the items at the bottom.

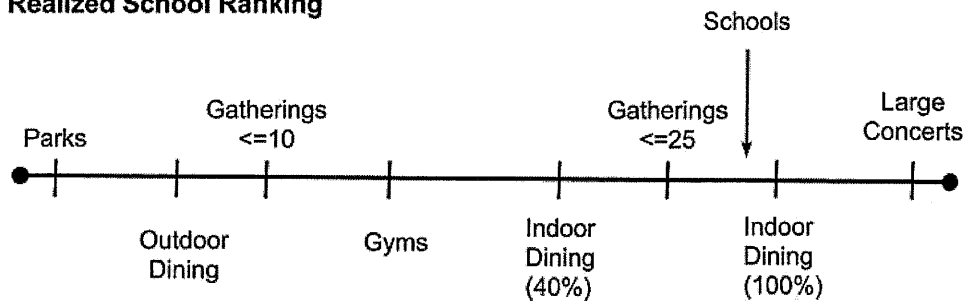
What about Schools?

The data is showing schools themselves are low risk; not everyone agrees with this, I understand, but it is the premise for what I will say below. Beyond this, I think we mostly *do agree* that in person learning has large benefits. For the youngest learners, the risks are lowest and benefits highest. If you asked me, I’d put schools in the ranking as below (note I’ve separated out age group). (I *might* put high schools above outdoor dining; it depends a bit on the dining restrictions and the presence of sports in high schools).



In fact, though, this isn’t where schools are. I think we can organize more or less everything we see by moving schools in the ranking; see below for what I think our *actual* implied ranking is.

Realized School Ranking



It's easy to see how this helps us understand what we see in areas where schools have remained closed while other things are open. If you put schools all the way to the right in the ranking, of course it makes sense to open other things first.

What may be less obvious is that this also organizes the experience of areas which *did* open schools. In most cases it isn't, really, that they prioritized schools. They just opened everything. Open schools are a bi-product of open everything. The fact is that neither decision prioritizes schools, at all.

This mistake, or failure, in ranking schools has led to both sets of frustrations I outlined at the top of this piece. Ranking schools "wrong" in lower prevalence areas led them not to open while other things did. Ranking them "wrong" in higher prevalence areas has led us to having too limited efforts to control community spread in order to help schools.

If we actually made schools a priority, we might better recognize that restrictions on other activities are necessary to keep schools open. As others have recognized, this is precisely what Europe has done as they have moved back toward lockdown. Grocery stores, hospitals, essential services and school remain open.

What about Resources?

Prioritizing schools would also mean providing more resources to open safely. The main way we can help schools is *by controlling community spread*. But making teachers and others feel safe at school is also key. This means requiring masks, yes, but also providing good PPE and, ideally, improving ventilation. It means better testing and screening — both symptomatic and asymptomatic — and money for substitutes. Financial woes

have always been a part of the landscape of public schools in America, partly because this isn't the first time we failed to prioritize them. This has made it worse.

So, What's Your Point?

First: The school reopen debate is extremely contentious. The "More Reopen!" people (sometimes) argue that places which opened in spite of high rates are doing the right thing. The "Less Reopen!" people (sometime) argue that the places that haven't opened in spite of low rates are doing the right thing.

What this framework makes clear, to me at least, is that probably very few, if any, places in the US did the "right thing". Everyone made the same mistake, it just manifested differently in terms of the outcomes. If we can recognize that, I wonder if we can all organize to make the same point that schools should get higher priority. I think we'd be a more powerful voice yelling this together than wasting our breath yelling at each other.

Second: I will renew my call here for transparent stating of priorities by policy-makers. When I wrote about the risk/benefit matrix, I suggested Governors should put a version of this up at a press conference to talk about how they were weighing what to do. But a matrix is maybe too complicated. A line is even easier. Let's have some transparent, public, accounting of how our priorities stack up.

Weigh in!

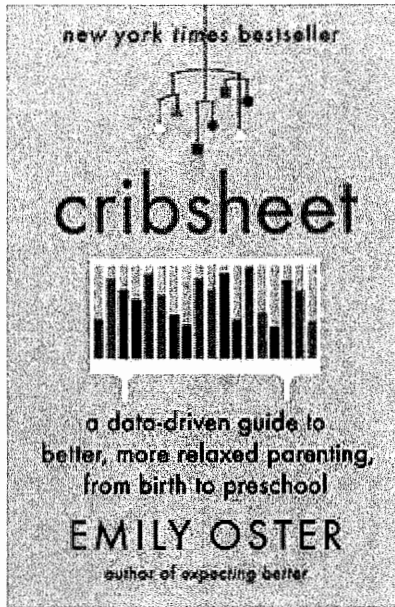
Keep the thoughts coming. I cannot write back to everyone but I do read all of your emails, I promise.

Write to Me!

Where to Find Me

COVID School Dashboard

My Website



Cribsheet



Expecting Better



If you liked this post from [ParentData](#), why not share it?

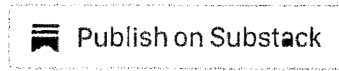
11/19/2020

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - Fwd: School Rankings: Framing (Slightly) Differently



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548 Market Street PMB 72296, San Francisco, CA 94104



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toni matlock
she/her/hers

Second request for reinstitution/prioritization of allocations for on-the-ground janitors

daniel geary <dancgear@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us

Thu, Nov 19, 2020 at 8:56 AM

Hello Again:

As a custodian of the last decade for MCPS, I believe I correctly define "Task Force" as: men and women with buckets, rags and the assignment to remove dirt and grime that play host to life-threatening viral contamination.

As a citizen (which is the capacity in which I write today on my break), I define "Study Group" as a representative body tasked with assessing infection data and response.

A Task Force (by the functional definition of on-the-ground cleaners) can (and has) functioned effectively without a Study Group.

A Covid Study Group, however, cannot function effectively without professional and substitute custodians.

Please proactively direct MCPS administrators to reinstitute payroll allocations (quite, quite a small amount of money) for substitutes and overtime workers covering Mondays (remote learning days) and all holidays/breaks for students. Do continue with an emphasis on Study Groups is contributing to the rising percentage of infections attributed to in-building (MCPS) contact instances.

Thank you! Daniel Geary

Every time I see something terrible, it's like I see it at age 19. I keep a freshness that way.

Ralph Nader

In Person Learning

sarah hickey <sarahchickey@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Nov 19, 2020 at 12:39 PM

Dear Board,

I am writing again to express my opinion that we should keep schools open and pursue in person learning 5 days a week for our elementary students.

I have three kids in elementary school (Lowell), and they need to be in school more than two days a week. Children this young do not learn from packets and computers at home, they need to be in school with their teachers and peers actively engaging in their education. One of my kids has an IEP, and I can assure you, two days a week is not enough for her to get the help that she needs. I am so worried about how far behind she is and the long-term consequences of not getting the education she deserves. I know our teachers are doing their best with the parameters they have been given, but our students are not thriving.

When my kids aren't in school, they are in camps three days a week because both my husband and I work outside of our home. How is it they can be in camp three days a week with counselors and kids from all over Missoula, in groups as large as 20, but they can't be with their same teacher and peers five days a week in similar group sizes? This makes absolutely no sense. The more groups kids are in when not in school increases risks for our classrooms. My preschooler is in school five days a week, elementary school kids should be too. Our families and our schools are being exposed to more people than necessary under this current model. Elementary school is the most controlled environment our kids and teachers can be in. The school case data shows that in person learning can be done safely. The safety measures are working! If you look at the data, cases are not being driven by young kids or schools and we are not seeing spread within the schools. Why are the schools being villainized and our children's education jeopardized?

People were given the option for full remote if they were uncomfortable with in person learning, which is great. A majority of us did not choose that option and it doesn't seem like our voice is being heard. It's almost as if the final decision was made in August for hybrid and nothing (case data within our schools, poor test scores, emotional / social well being, financial strains for childcare) will change this. We are one of the few districts in the state in a hybrid model. We have other schools, in Missoula, successfully doing in person learning 5 days a week. We have daycares and preschools successfully providing childcare 5 days a week. Our kids should be in school, with the same peers and teacher, five days a week. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sarah Hickey

Schools opening

Angie Walker <angiewalker217@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Nov 19, 2020 at 5:28 PM

I am writing to you to please ask that you consider reopening schools for those parents that want their children back in school full time. As one of the few school districts across the state our children are falling behind not just academically but also socially and emotionally. As stated by the director of the CDC today schools are one of the safest places that children can be. Please see the below article or watch his press conference that was released today. Many schools across our state and our city have shown that schools can be open full time without an increase in cluster outbreaks. I have a hard time understanding how we can tell parents that it is not safe to have our children in school but then offer the Parks and Recreation day camps as a viable alternative. We now have children mixing with children from other schools instead of keeping them in their own neighborhood schools and isolated with their classes.

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/school-is-safest-place-for-kids-to-be-cdc-director-says>

Thank you for your time,
Angie Walker
