
The choices MCPS forces students to make.

Adriel (Ezra) Shearer <aeshearer@mcpsmt.org>

Wed, Dec 16, 2020 at 12:52 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org
Cc: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Good afternoon,

As members of the Board of Trustees you have the ability to apply appropriate pressure and ask relevant questions on behalf of all stakeholders. Thank you for continuing to do so. I write to you with a concern that has troubled me for months.

There were dozens of viable solutions that could have been implemented to ensure all MCPS high school students were able to have access to the same educational opportunities regardless of the health risks they or their families faced during this Pandemic. Rather than implement any of these solutions the MCPS administration choose a path that forced students and families to choose between an increased risk to contract COVID and the educational opportunities our community funds. The Missoula Online Academy, at the High School level, does not offer equivalent classes nor experiences as our in person high schools. The MOA is a solution for a dire need but it needlessly creates fundamental inequities in the educational experiences of our students. Inequities that we must solve for. Some students choose to remain in person knowing that they would lose the educational programming offerings if they moved to full remote. These students were forced to weigh the pros of have access to their academic plan and the increased risk of contracting COVID. For other students the risk was too high to have the luxury of prioritizing education over health and safety. Students and families did not have to make this choice and it is fundamentally immoral that MCPS forced them to do so.

I would like the public and the Board of Trustees to know that there are still solutions that would negate this awful choice for the 2nd semester. These solutions could leave MOA intact and would increase all students access to the diverse, varied and irreplaceable educational opportunities that tax payers have generously funded year after year. Unfortunately, the status quo is scheduled to prevail and many of our students will once again lose another semester of educational opportunity through no fault of their own. The easiest solution to implement would be to align the MOA class and bell schedule with that of HHS and SHS so that students can access all educational programs of each high school. This simple decision would dramatically increase the number of viable solutions. Specialized classes could live stream instruction to all students each day or, if class size permits, the in person instructor could offer an entirely virtual section of the class that all MOA students could take. Finally, a student could also evaluate the risk of taking one class in person versus six in person and mitigate that risk as they seek out the greatest educational opportunities MCPS offers. Aligning schedules is just one of many possible solutions to expand educational opportunities for all students.

My conscious compels me to record this for the public record and bring it to the attention of the Trustees. This should be a stain on our record as this failure is inexcusable. It is a failing of MCPS to meet the needs of all students during the time of highest need. It is morally indefensible that we forced students to make this choice. As the virus expands its reach in our community it is further inexcusable that administration continues to dismiss viable solutions so that students continue to be faced with this choice. I am embarrassed and I hope that in the future we never force families to choose between their health and their education when solutions abound to negate that choice.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this or any other issue you are facing or decision you are evaluating.

Ezra Shearer
Sentinel High School
406-728-2401 ext 7607
aeshearer@mcpsmt.org



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

all kids BACK TO SCHOOL!

Katie Kutz <katie.m.kutz@gmail.com>

Wed, Dec 16, 2020 at 8:57 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS trustees,

I am writing this letter out of desperation. I am desperate to have our kids learning in the classroom, where they are staying up on their grade level work. Desperate to have kids in a structured environment where masking is known to be working to keep cases in schools low. Desperate to follow science and what months and months of having kids in school has shown us through studies of various school districts around the world. What we now know (without dispute!) is that kids NEED to be in school and can be in school safely. Science has undisputedly shown us that cases aren't spreading in schools like we had originally feared, and on the contrary our kids are safer being in schools than in less structured day programs and unmasked "pod" options.

I'm very thankful we have had the option of at least 2 days in person since the beginning of the year and I am thankful for your voting to keep that an option through our surge the past month. With case numbers now half of what they were at thanksgiving (despite the dreaded Thanksgiving case jump -that did not happen). NOW is the time to get back to school 4-5 days a week, for ALL students. Our teachers have done a great job and proven that we can have kids in the classroom without unchecked spread amongst those classrooms.

I am writing from a place of concern for our future generations. As an ER nurse I once held the fear of getting covid and bringing it home to my family. What I found is that ER nurses and staff are NOT getting it at work! Thanks to proper PPE strategies... HORRAY! The same is happening in our classrooms...HORRAY! The CDC, WHO and American Academy of Pediatrics have all said that kids need to be in school. What happened to listening to science and our experts about policy formation?

There are a million (well known) reasons why kids need to be in school more than just 2 days a week. We have all heard of the reasons: mental health, abusive homes, drug use, neglect, falling grades, etc. Did you know these are all happening at unprecedented rates in OUR community? As an ER nurse I can tell you that the amount of young children (as well as older children) seeking psychiatric care during this time is staggering. Yes, in our community, yes elementary aged children. These kids need school, they need structure and support that many families cannot or do not provide, sadly.

Now is the time to listen to the experts, get our children back in school. With our second semester starting a few weeks after Christmas break, we have time to "shake out" all the new cases from holiday gathering to start semester 2 full time. Now is the time to show up for our community and our children.

Can we take this to public vote just out of curiosity? I would highly suspect a vast majority would vote to get our kids back in school. Let's listen to experts and our community in making that decision.

Sincerely,
A desperate mom, tired ER nurse, and a science follower
Katie Kutz



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Kids in School

Casey Cline <caseybcline@hotmail.com>

Fri, Dec 18, 2020 at 3:05 PM

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

Cc: Casey Cline <caseybcline@hotmail.com>, Jamie Cline <bugfuzz24@gmail.com>

Dear Board,

I am concerned my three children are falling behind due to the abbreviated 2-day on site and additional online day learning schedule. I have already seen each of them experience reductions in STAR standardized testing results since last fall. Best case, they are getting the must know bare minimum of education. But they are missing out on the additional should know and nice to know educational concepts. Within the Missoula area, I believe MCPS schools are the only schools not doing 5 days of in-class learning. This includes the local Hellgate, Target Range and DeSmet districts, St. Joseph's, Loyola, all Bitterroot schools, Frenchtown, etc. We truly are behind our local peers and this concerns me we are falling behind in academics.

The kids need structure in their lives and they need their friends and teachers and athletic activities as well. They need to go back to fully attending in-class school. This current model is too difficult on parents and grandparents which are forced to be teachers at home. We are fortunate to have many caring families and great teachers in Jeanette Rankin but I can't imagine how difficult this is for less affluent areas such as Franklin and Hawthorne. Students will continue to fall behind until they are all back in school full time.

Dr. Fauci has stated that very little of this virus occurs as a result of the children. The cases in Montana and, especially, in Missoula are trending in the right direction. It is time to get our kids back to school to resume as normal of lives as possible. Please make this happen in January. Once all in school, we can deal with a setback, but we can't stand to let them fall further behind as is.

Sincerely,

Casey and Jamie Cline

Hybrid school

Kallie Smith <kallie.smith@outlook.com>

Sun, Dec 20, 2020 at 6:58 PM

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

To whom it may concern,

I am incredibly disappointed in the way MCPS has handled COVID. All the surrounding area schools have been able to find a way to get all their kids in school full time safely. Instead MCPS has elected to have kids with working parents go to day camps and have much higher exposure risk being around different kids and counselors all the time.

Kids are suffering greatly academically, and socially with the hybrid model. There is no way that kids are getting an adequate education from parents such as myself who have to work full time. I have three kids in three different grades K-3. Trying to accomplish three days worth of remote learning is horrific for our home life. My children are noticeably stressed out compared to last year. They loved school in the past, even small amounts of homework and reading every night was enjoyable and a positive part of our life. Remote learning is overwhelming for kids and for parents.

For the well being of my children, and the rest of MCPS children, I beg you to reevaluate and resume full time learning.

Respectfully,

Kallie Smith

Sent from my iPhone



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Let our kids return to school

Cari Kaptur <cari.kaptur@yahoo.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Dec 29, 2020 at 12:31 PM

Dear MCPS trustees,

The time for our kids to go back to school is now. If not all kids, then at least all elementary school children. Study after study has shown that schools are not significant spreaders of Covid-19. Schools all around us are open full time and being successful at keeping cases to a minimum. The local pediatricians are in support of increased schooling and saying it is safe.

The statistics from the superintendent's latest email should be shocking to all of us, and a call to action. 40% of K-5 students in Title 1 schools, and 28% of students in non Title 1 schools being 2 or more years below grade level for reading is unacceptable! The need for increased instruction is clearly not only for students in K-2 grades. We need to help all of these children across all grades by giving them the education they deserve. Two days a week of teaching is clearly not cutting it, and the "remote learning" days are nothing but busy work.

The data clearly shows that children need to be in school, and our school (Hawthorne Elementary) has stated they are confident they can go full time in a safe and effective manner. Please get our kids back in school as soon as possible and stop punishing our children for this pandemic. Some may never recover from the academic harm that is being done.

Thank you,
Cari Kaptur

Winter Sports

Jennifer Iverson <jenniverson@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Dec 29, 2020 at 8:21 AM

Dear Supt. Watson and MCPS School Board:

I am writing to show my displeasure at the way the winter sports are being handled. I'm not sure if it was a board decision or purely administration, but what a crummy way to treat the kids. They have been working so hard to get ready for the season. **We** as their parents have made the decision that it's safe for them to play, that **we** are willing to take the risks of them playing and being together. And now you're taking away a third of their season! What is that telling our kids? Coaches try to build up programs that will be successful. You want "sub-varsity" teams that are motivated and excited so that eventually you'll have varsity kids who are excited and successful. Taking away their games isn't very motivating! How much more are we going to take away from our kids? They're only kids for so long and they don't get any of these wasted years back.

I've been supportive of you guys through this whole Covid ordeal. It's all new and none of us knew how to handle these uncharted waters. You were making decisions the best way you knew how. However, things are becoming more and more disappointing. School this year has been a waste of time. The kids are so far behind now! At first it was a great way to begin the year and to figure out how to handle all of the uncertainty. But by now these kids need to get back. When does their educational, mental, and emotional well-being become just as important as their physical well-being? If we are worried about Covid, we have the option to keep our kids home. We have the option not to do activities. However, for those of us that have chosen to keep our kids in school and to let them play, that's a risk we're willing to take! Please let us have that option. I'm an educator. I'm also a person with a compromised immune system from a transplant. However, keeping people like me safe shouldn't be the kids' responsibilities! They're kids! If I'm scared of Covid, I have the option to stay home, to keep my self safe. I'm not going to make them give up themselves to protect me! Plus the email talks about rising numbers. They've been going down! We kept getting threatened with the big "after Thanksgiving numbers." That didn't happen! Numbers have gone down. Before you take away games and activities because of the big "holiday rise in numbers", why don't you wait and see first? We haven't even gone back to school yet. If the numbers were rising and out of control, then I might be more supportive. But you haven't even given them a chance! It's one thing to cancel a game or two because of actual covid cases on the team, but don't cancel games when there isn't a reason to!

It's not just our kids you're hurting. You're hurting the other schools that are going to lose out on competitions. If the MHSA ignored your request, there's a reason! LET THEM PLAY! Please. At least give them a chance. If the teams are starting to come down with the virus, THEN yes, by all means, cancel some competitions. But don't jump the gun before you've even given it a chance. If it's "safe" for the varsity teams to play, shouldn't the "sub" teams be given the same opportunity? Please give it a thought. You've got some very disappointed athletes in your district.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Iverson
Big Sky Basketball mom

Please send our kids back to school full time!

Stacey Brown <sedenbrown@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Dec 30, 2020 at 8:41 AM

Dear MCPS School Board of Trustees,

As a parent of two children attending MCPS, I implore the task force to find the path that gets our kids immediately back in school full time.

Please leverage the data and information available to you, including but not limited to the updated Harvard guidance (which you had been relying on), the CDC information, and the schools within our very own state and city that have been full time since fall.

https://globalepidemics.org/2020/12/18/schools-and-the-path-to-zero-strategies-for-pandemic-resilience-in-the-face-of-high-community-spread/?fbclid=IwAR07m9IsTcOz3jXO5NUnNrNwnZNbpcvRjFTsg_z7GD8Qjov4BI7JRog_dps

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6950e3.htm?s_cid=mm6950e3_x&fbclid=IwAR2xHdfFcyMg7IsyNZxi2Y5_0ZvPy9KScFqbHyoj7EvBJRWcS41gemlLzCU

Sincerely,

Stacey Brown
406.207.1022

Hybrid- board meeting

Lindsey Schultz <Linz123_83@yahoo.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Dec 30, 2020 at 4:14 PM

Good afternoon! I know the board meeting is coming up and I have been thinking a lot about the hybrid schedule. So I would like to start by commending you all and how you have guided us through this first semester. You made sure it was working for everyone and safe for everyone before throwing us into a full week. As we approach the new year though I am seeing a need to add some more time at school if possible. I know there is a lot to consider and we are a very cautious family who has very much limited our every move this year. However I am feeling a void in our kids lives. Two days isn't enough now. I think that we are at a point where because of the safety precautions you all have put in place our kids would be safe to be in the school more. They need it educationally and they need it socially/emotionally. I think that having the kids together would actually be safer than having some floating the other 3 days a week. There is more exposure when they are in a daycare or in various homes than if they are clustered together in school. Even for a family like ours with flexibility- school at home is becoming more and more challenging. Not for me- but for my daughter. She is quickly losing interest and motivation. I'm working extra to keep her engaged and challenged but that isn't getting it done most days. What about the families who don't have a setup like us? How must they be falling behind and struggling. I trust you all and support you- but I do think it's time to try adding in another day or two. Thanks for your time!

Lindsey Schultz

Sent from my iPhone

Return to School

Leslie Thompson <l_hall77@hotmail.com>

Thu, Dec 31, 2020 at 4:47 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "kmercer@mcpsmt.org" <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, "gdecker@mcpsmt.org" <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "nhobbins@mcpsmt.org" <nhobbins@mcpsmt.org>, "ssterbis@mcpsmt.org" <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, "mholland@mcpsmt.org" <mholland@mcpsmt.org>, "jvogel@mcpsmt.org" <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, "dlorenzo@mcpsmt.org" <dlorenzo@mcpsmt.org>, "awake@mcpsmt.org" <awake@mcpsmt.org>, "vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org" <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, "rwatson@mcpsmt.org" <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, JULIE ROBITAILLE <jrobitaille@mcpsmt.org>

I respectfully ask the BOD to move **all our schools** into the Phase 2 Hybrid at the beginning of second semester. I have 3rd and 4th grade students at Paxson who need more in person instruction. Families have been given the option to do online learning if they do not feel comfortable with in person learning. The option of bringing back only K-2 or special populations is an unequitable solution to those that don't fit those categories. Please give the administration and staff the ability to plan for in person instruction 4 days a week for the second semester.

Leslie Thompson



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Comment on elementary school schedule

Melanie Brock <brock.melanie@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 3, 2021 at 6:29 PM

Continuing with two days a week of in-person instruction is incredibly hard on full time working parents and our kids. Temporarily this Fall, we made it work with spending a lot of money and extra coordination. Now it's getting harder as people -and frankly my kids - are burned out by the scramble for the other three days a week coverage. Meanwhile my friends with kids at Hellgate and local private schools have been going in-person 5 days a week without cases spiking and I'm getting frustrated. Can we please give 5 days a week a try? Our kids will thrive and frankly so will our businesses. Thank you for your work.

--

Melanie Brock
406.370.8816

Please Follow Current Guidelines and Recommend More In-Person School Urgently

Oakland Jennifer <jenniferloakland@gmail.com>

Sun, Jan 3, 2021 at 6:57 PM

To: jhallmt@gmail.com, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, jccourtney@mcpsmt.org, kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org, cfarr@missoulacounty.us, vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org, vjhaines@mcpsmt.org, barnes.fam@hotmail.com, bkrininger@mcpsmt.org, kllaslovich@mcpsmt.org, eleahy@missoulacounty.us, djrossberg@mcpsmt.org, jbserviss@mcpsmt.org, avshattuck@mcpsmt.org, nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org, g_padgetslote@yahoo.com, brucetribbensee@submittable.com, awake@mcpsmt.org, Pam Wright <pcwright@mcpsmt.org>, rwatson@mcpsmt.org, emmamerle@gmail.com, brfrank@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org
Cc: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Covid Taskforce:

Thank you for the commitment you have made to provide covid response information to trustees as they make decisions about school functions amidst the covid-19 pandemic. Today, I write to urge you to use current, up-to-date, consensus-derived metrics by the scientific community to create metrics and make a recommendation that the board of trustees move beyond the current hybrid school model, and move toward a complete opening of all MCPS schools as soon as possible.

Through ten months of data collection, institutions such as Harvard, the Policylab/Childrens Hospital of Philadelphia, WHO, and the CDC has assessed the risks that covid presents, and has developed consensus recommendations for safe and sustainable school openings. This data can and should be followed with a goal of offering the most essential service in a community: in-person public school. It's time for the MCPS covid taskforce to make recommendations based on this data, and address barriers and problem-solve urgently: MCPS owns several school buildings that could be opened and used immediately for increased classroom space if a barrier exists in meeting social distance guidelines. School gymnasiums could be used as ad-hoc classrooms to create larger-sized classrooms/improve social distancing, especially for higher grades. If more substitutes are needed, a hazard-pay scale should be adopted to encourage more substitutes to sign up, as well as a public announcement regarding this urgent need.

In MCPS meetings, the metrics presented by MCPS leadership present a dim picture of how children on our community are faring in the hybrid model: vast numbers of children are falling far behind benchmark academically and many lack mental health support services. I hear desperate parents, like myself, who are not educators, trying to educate their children on the three off-school days with little to no school support. I also hear motivated school principals who are excited to creatively find solutions to safely allow more children to be in schools more days per week, and can use their intimate knowledge of their schools on how best to trudge forward.

The data shows that there is a way- it is past time that this taskforce creates a scientifically-endorsed path forward for all MCPS schools and recommends that the

board of trustees vote to move to five-day-per-week in-person school. Most countries, states, districts, and schools have successfully developed and implemented safety measures to successfully offer in-person childhood education- which is an essential service in our community. Missoula is a creative, progressive community. Please follow the wealth of scientific data and guidelines that model that schools can be opened safely, and implement science-approved strategies accordingly to allow public schools to open five days per week, urgently.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Oakland

Parent of two K-5 students at Rattlesnake Elementary School

No To Hybrid Learning

Theresa Cole <supert3030@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 3, 2021 at 8:29 PM

My daughter attends MCPS and is struggling a great deal with hybrid learning. She has had serious mental health issues and is doing very poorly in school. This child used to be a honor roll student and is now failing classes. She used to have friends over and laugh but tonight we spent the evening in the Emergency Room due to her ever declining mental health. Please send our kids back to school five days a week. Our children are suffering mentally and educationally. They need routine and interaction. Please, for the sake of my sweet daughter, let our kids go to school.

Theresa Cole

Public Comment for Covid Task Force

Kathleen Kennedy <kkennedy@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Jan 4, 2021 at 8:19 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Jennifer Courtney <jccourtney@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, mholland@mcpsmt.org, Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Sharon Sterbis <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, Jen Vogel <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, Vincent Giammona <vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org>, Brooke Krininger <bkrininger@mcpsmt.org>, Virginia Haines <vjhaines@mcpsmt.org>, Kacie Laslovich <kllaslovich@mcpsmt.org>, Douglas Rossberg <djrossberg@mcpsmt.org>, Jeffrey Serviss <jbserviss@mcpsmt.org>, Alexandria Sobin <asobin@mcpsmt.org>, Amy Shattuck <avshattuck@mcpsmt.org>, Pam Wright <pcwright@mcpsmt.org>, Kathryn KaCee Ballou <kcballou@mcpsmt.org>

Dear Dr. Watson, MCPS Board of Trustees and COVID Task Force Committee Members:

Thank you for your service in guiding MCPS through this very challenging time. It was with great interest that I read the guidance briefing that will be discussed during the January 4th COVID Task Force meeting. I wish to comment on my experience of this school year and my thoughts about how to view this updated (December 18th) guidance in order to maximize student learning while keeping all involved parties involved safe. I write to you as both a classroom teacher and the parent of a high school senior whose father is in a high-risk category. As a family, we feel MCPS has done a good job to provide options and we are comfortable with the hybrid model for the balanced approach it provides. I recognize that not every family has had the same ability to make decisions based on comfort and that the district must continue to work to meet the needs of all families. As a classroom teacher, I appreciate that MCPS continues to explore options and ways to improve what we are offering as the school year and the pandemic evolves. I also know that any change requires a period of adjustment and has its own consequences. It is only after the distance and rest afforded by winter break that I have been able to reflect on the year thus far and compose my thoughts. The briefing, *Schools and the Path to Zero*, makes the statement that, "Generally, only trust and infection control are matters that schools themselves can have a significant impact on independently of other actors." I'd like you to keep this statement in mind as you read my comments.

Trust is an area that feels very tenuous right now. Some people want to snap their fingers and have us get back to full time instruction, but the reality of having full classrooms where distancing can't occur is incredibly concerning. Trying to disinfect surfaces and monitor the hallways (let alone use the restroom) during passing periods would be impossible. The result? Risk will increase. Stress will increase. Morale will decline. Teachers are doing the best they can in an unprecedented situation. We are each doing our personal best to ensure learning continues in whatever model we are handed. We are not the decision makers, yet we are the ones who are both blamed and charged with making things work in our classrooms. None of us is fully satisfied with the hybrid model, but we are in the midst of a global pandemic! The stress and uncertainty that accompanies this reality as our nation's infection rates and death toll rises cannot be ignored. We know our community is not an island and that things can change rapidly. We are all tired of this, but that does not make it go away.

To add to our stress, many seem to have adopted a fear-based mindset over learning loss and student mental health. While we absolutely need to be concerned about these issues, I'm concerned that our focus and discussions only perpetuate a stunted outlook of what school can be right now under any model of instruction. Try as we might, we can't shield students from this difficult time. Our reaction seems to be to try to get things back to normal, but that may not be possible given what our county has experienced. Remember that the old normal didn't work for all students either. Are we actively acknowledging all the ways students are rising to meet this moment? If we tell students this year has been a failure we will undermine those accomplishments. Are we working with students to build resilience? We all know that life will be filled with things students will need to overcome. Let's acknowledge and grieve the loss of the way things used to be to make space for something better to emerge. This moment offers us an opportunity to continue to grow and innovate as a district. I hope we can use this experience to do this important work. I look forward to participating in it.

It is reassuring that we are using data to make decisions, but we must remember that the data reflects what we have experienced over less than one full continuous school year. It is the best basis for guidance, but it cannot perfectly forecast the future in such a rapidly changing situation. The areas I ask you to consider as we move forward are as follows:

1. We have yet to experience school following a two-week break when families may have travelled and gathered indoors with wider circles.
2. We have yet to experience school during the close contact indoor sports seasons of wrestling and basketball.
3. We do not know how the spread of Covid-19 will or won't change in schools with the emergence of new variants especially variant B.1.1.7. which is thought to be more easily transmitted.

From the standpoint of infection control, what we have been doing has been working. The hybrid model has been a key reason for our success in this area. It has been integral in allowing us to implement and enforce the important elements of infection control. As you discuss the coming semester, remember that in some classrooms even 3 feet of distancing is not possible without the reduced density afforded by the hybrid model. Universal masking is an essential expectation that has been well-adopted, but there are still students who let their masks fall below their noses and need reminders. This expectation must not be relaxed! Increased bathroom and hallway traffic with the addition of classes during the day will present challenges with sanitation. Those would be further exacerbated if we have all students in the building. While some may see the lack of school transmission as a reason to move away from current measures and bring students back full time, I see them as a reason to continue the hybrid model because it is working to keep people safe.

This brings me to the topic of vaccination. We are so close to having a protection that can truly advance us down the, "Path to Zero." While our risk under existing infection control measures is low, it is not zero. As human beings (not the instruction robots some seem to think we are) we can contract and spread this virus. We still do not know the long-term health effects of Covid-19. No one can predict how a Covid-19 infection will affect them. Personally, I have sacrificed travel, seeing family and socializing in order to protect myself and be responsible to others. I do not want to get Covid-19. Access to a rapid test for symptomatic staff does little to allay my concerns. Yes, reducing the chain of transmission is important, but I also don't know of any colleague who would show up to school symptomatic. Surveillance testing would be far more meaningful, but the current effort is a commendable first step.

Still, it is hard for me to reconcile that we are so close to being able to substantially reduce our risk via vaccination, yet we are committing to increase risk by increasing daily student contacts and the associated infection control challenges before vaccination occurs. This decision does not engender trust. Hopefully, Governor Gianforte will continue the DPHHS's current vaccination plan, but group 1b is large and predicted timelines haven't panned out nationally. Further, there is a difference between being able to get the vaccine and actually getting it. We will need MCPS, as our employer, to be actively working to ensure that staff are vaccinated as soon and as easily as possible by organizing vaccination clinics. Realize that teachers will be busy planning and adjusting to another shift in how we deliver instruction, while working to support our students as they adjust as well.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my comments.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kennedy
Big Sky High School

The rest of the school year

Michelle Hoffman <Hoffman942@outlook.com>

Mon, Jan 4, 2021 at 12:48 PM

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

Mr. Watson & Missoula County School Board Members,

I just received the new school schedule for the high school. Will this schedule remain for the rest of the school year or will the board look at it again if our numbers are within range?

I do appreciate all the hard work you and the Missoula county staff/ teachers have been doing through all of this and I am thankful that they will be doing 4 classes a day instead of 2.

I have one in high school and one in middle school and I can say they have both regressed dramatically since March of last year. Doing math for a few weeks and then not touching it for another 4 to 6 weeks is not helpful or educational for them. By the time they start again most of what they learned is forgotten. There are school districts around us that have been able to go to school full time. For 2 weeks my son did work study and made wreaths before Christmas. The lack of education he is receiving is extremely concerning and I am hoping that he will be able to go back to school soon. I do understand scheduling is more difficult for the high schools. Is there any way the middle school and elementary could go to a full-time schedule soon? I have a 6th grader that now feels like going to school or getting online to do his schooling is a waste of time and it's a constant fight. He used to love school and now thinks it is a waste of time and unfortunately it is hard not to agree with him since he isn't retaining very much. I do not fault the teachers for this, I know they are doing what they can with the current situation.

I did see that Missoula County is getting closer to their goal of 25 new cases per 100,000. If we reach this goal will the school board consider going to a different phase? The more education we can give them the better. Will there be summer school programs available to help make up the difference?

Please don't take this email as anger but as immense concern for my children's education and their future. I understand there is frustration in this for all concerned.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Michelle



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

I support a return of in-person learning for elementary school

Dawn Serra <dawnserra@icloud.com>

Mon, Jan 4, 2021 at 1:35 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

My two children attend Lewis and Clark (K/3) and I fully support a return to in-person learning. I like the proposal for four days/week. Please do extend that to at least third grade though. It's not easy for third grade to remotely learn.

I feel like it would be better for students academically and socially. While the childcare we are using is wonderful, it's not the same as in-person learning.

Thanks for considering my input.

Best,
Dawn Serra
Sent from my iPad

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Re: MCPS Full Time

Katie O'Reilly <koreillymt@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 4, 2021 at 7:30 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, kevinsoireilly@gmail.com, Christina Stevens <cmstevens@mcps.k12.mt.us>, tasolberg@mcpsmt.org

Hello Board of Trustees,

As the New Year begins, I wanted to reach out again to show my support of MCPS going back to school full time! All of my concerns from my previous email remain, as well as new ones that have transpired every week over the last few months. My family and I have loved MCPS over the last eight years and have never questioned our decision in enrolling our three children there. The education our children have received, going full time, exceeds our expectations. However, the hybrid model falls short. Our children are falling behind further and further every week from other school districts around the state and even within Missoula County.

The data is clear that elementary and middle school aged kids are not the spreaders of the COVID-19 virus! It is so frustrating, however, that these are the same kids that are suffering and sacrificing their education and future. To be clear, this is not a "child care" issue by any means. Our family had made adjustments for the fall semester. That is NOT our cause. We strongly feel that all kids, at MCPS, are being forgotten about amidst the conversations of COVID-19. There are plenty of other school districts, within Missoula and the State of Montana, that are successfully attending full time school...Missoula is capable of doing the same!

My hope is that you all can come to the next Board meeting without a preconceived vote and listen to the parents and caregivers of children in MCPS. The data speaks for itself. These kids are not physically in harm's way. Teachers and staff are capable of protecting themselves and taking the correct precautions and social distancing procedures. WE CAN DO THIS! The kids deserve to have us adults looking out for their best interest! Full time school is in their best interest!

Thank you for your time...I am sure it has been an extra stressful time on you all as well.

Katie O'Reilly
406.396.7734

On Tue, Oct 27, 2020 at 9:38 AM Katie O'Reilly <koreillymt@gmail.com> wrote:

Hello Board of Trustees,

I am writing to you today to express my vote in returning to school full time for MCPS! I have three children in 7th, 5th and 3rd grade. They are all good students and have always enjoyed school, so even for them calling the current hybrid model challenging would be an understatement. Every week I fear they are falling further behind, both academically and emotionally. My 2nd grader is now associating homework with tears and anxiety as she struggles to get through every piece of remote learning! We do our best to complete all remote learning assignments and know that their teachers are putting in extra effort and doing the best they can. However, it just is not up to the standards that we hold as a part of MCPS. Our kids are the ones losing during this pandemic.

Other major concerns about the current hybrid school schedule include providing a safe, effective learning environment for kids living in households with no technology or internet available. The burden and extra stress the hybrid models puts on working families. The COVID exposure to the community as families need extra child care and need to go outside their immediate family to find. Just to name a few...

For me and my family, the concerns related with the hybrid school model far outway the concerns of elementary and middle school kids transmitting the coronavirus. I know you, as a board, try your best to make decisions based on what's best for the community. As a whole, I strongly believe full time education for the kids of MCPS is the best decision.

Thank you for your time in reading my email, as well as your time devoted to the Board of Trustees for MCPS.

Sincerely,
Katie O'Reilly

Return to in-person education

Travis Grutsch <travisgrutsch@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 5, 2021 at 1:07 PM

It is clear that neither remote learning via MOA nor in-person learning at only 2 days a week is providing a sufficient level of education. It is clear that kids are falling behind. It appears your own standardized test data supports my claim.

Data supports the claim that children do not appear to be significant spreaders of COVID. Data shows that cleaning surfaces is relatively unimportant for COVID. Data shows that wearing masks significantly reduces transmission. Most significantly, data also shows that lapses in children's education can cause real, lasting damage. Kids not attending in-person school face worse physical and mental health outcomes, decreased education outcomes, lower lifetime earnings, some may go hungry, some may even get hurt. These are **not** speculative harms, they are well-established.

Please reorganize your thinking on this matter - from past meetings and discussions, it is clear to me that the board is not considering/weighing factors appropriately. To choose to remain at a 2 days/week schedule is simultaneously a choice to accept the harms to children listed above. We should weigh potential harms from moving to a 5 days/week schedule to the known harms caused by a 2 day/week schedule. I do not believe you can justify the harms caused by a shortened in-person school schedule.

Teacher and staff risk can be mitigated with PPE. This claim can also be supported with data. Please note other professions have addressed COVID risk in the workplace successfully.

Finally, please note that other school systems in our immediate area have been operating at a higher level of service with success.

Please return students to 5 days/week of in-person education. Maintain the MOA for those families that remain uncomfortable with in-person attendance.

Please help our kiddos!

Molly Beth Grutsch <mollybee2@hotmail.com>

Tue, Jan 5, 2021 at 1:38 PM

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

It is clear that neither remote learning via MOA nor in-person learning at only 2 days a week is providing a sufficient level of education. It is clear that kids are falling behind. It appears your own standardized test data supports my claim.

Data supports the claim that children do not appear to be significant spreaders of COVID. Data shows that cleaning surfaces is relatively unimportant for COVID. Data shows that wearing masks significantly reduces transmission. Most significantly, data also shows that lapses in children's education can cause real, lasting damage. Kids not attending in-person school face worse physical and mental health outcomes, decreased education outcomes, lower lifetime earnings, some may go hungry, some may even get hurt. These are **not** speculative harms, they are well-established.

Please reorganize your thinking on this matter - from past meetings and discussions, it is clear to me that the board is not considering/weighing factors appropriately. To choose to remain at a 2 days/week schedule is simultaneously a choice to accept the harms to children listed above. We should weigh potential harms from moving to a 5 days/week schedule to the known harms caused by a 2 day/week schedule. I do not believe you can justify the harms caused by a shortened in-person school schedule.

Teacher and staff risk can be mitigated with PPE. This claim can also be supported with data. Please note other professions have addressed COVID risk in the workplace successfully.

Finally, please note that other school systems in our immediate area have been operating at a higher level of service with success.

Please return students to 5 days/week of in-person education. Maintain the MOA for those families that remain uncomfortable with in-person attendance.



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

I am in favor of a return to in-person education

Rob Becker <robrbecker@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 5, 2021 at 3:46 PM

I support a return to full 5 day a week in-person school. Here's how I think it should work. Teachers and school staff can and should be vaccinated ASAP as part of Phase 1b. Keep a mask rule for in-person students and teachers. I feel that this would make it safe for them and remove concerns from the teachers union about workplace safety. Families or teachers with safety concerns after that can take the MOA option.

--
Rob Becker



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

comment in support of more school for young students

Sarah Richey <richey.montana@gmail.com>

Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 9:58 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Board of Trustees,

I'm writing in support of efforts to bring younger students in the hybrid-model back to school more in the next semester. I appreciate the board's awareness of our youngest students' unique needs and struggles with remote learning, and I think it makes good sense to be focusing resources and effort on providing more schooling to these kids in a safe manner. Thank you all for thinking along those lines. I know it's a tough balance to keep our teachers and staff and students safe, while also providing the education and support our students need.

I have two kids at Lewis and Clark Elementary, both attending school 2 days a week in the hybrid model. While both would benefit from more in-person schooling, there is a big difference between the needs of my 4th grader and my 1st grader. My 4th grader is reasonably motivated and well-equipped on his remote learning days, in part because his skilled teacher really sets up those remote days well. On the other hand, my 1st grader struggles to do anything on his remote learning days. He loves in-person school and seems to thrive in the classroom, but lacks the ability to keep up any learning remotely. Without some sort of in-home help like a tutor, I can't imagine any 1st grader being able to effectively learn at home. I worry about him and his peers and all that they miss on their remote days. They all need the structure of school. Many need the security of school. They need mentors and peers and a good learning environment to even learn how to learn. These younger grades provide the critical foundations for learning and these kids are slipping.

I support any MCPS efforts to focus resources on getting the younger kids back to more schooling in a safe manner. Please let me know how parents can assist in this effort. And thanks for all you are doing for MCPS students and staff during these hard times. I know it weighs heavy on each of you.

Best,

Sarah Richey
406-223-7171



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

January 2021

jamesandwhitney2@gmail.com <jamesandwhitney2@gmail.com>
To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 10:01 AM

Hello to everyone- Thanks for taking the time to read this.

My name is Whitney Guthrie, mom to 2 children within MCPS and an MCPS employee working along side an incredible team. First, I am outraged at the people who think we should just bring back every student everyday to "see what happens". The consequences to not being successful is that many employees will contract Covid and possibly die. The number one priority right now is NOT your or my children's education, it is keeping everyone safe and healthy as we move through this incredibly crazy time while also providing an education. Not once have I had the thought that my children's teachers should all just go back and risk their lives to teach my children. Shame on you to anyone saying that!

I strongly feel nothing should change with our schedule until teachers and staff within the district have been given both doses of the vaccine and that enough time has passed for the vaccines to start working. Up until today I was thinking teachers would be next in line after health care workers to receive the vaccine but with the recent change in governorship it looks like teachers are no longer a priority. This decision was made by an elected official so you can thank your peers for this sudden change and pushing teachers down on the list. If you want things to get back to normal fight for teachers and school district employees to receive the vaccination.

Just to be clear- nothing should change with our schedule until teachers are vaccinated or Covid is gone.

Thanks for your time.

Whitney Guthrie

Sent from Mail for Windows



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

School Schedule

Linda Wham <plwham@bresnan.net>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 10:12 AM

Board of Trustees,

Please get these school children back to a regular schedule for next semester. Schools all over Montana have been in regular session and have continued to operate with little interruptions. The burden of loss school time on children and on parents is unconscionable. Thank you.

Linda Wham
Concerned Grandparent

In-person Instruction

Rob Duff <duff.rob@gmail.com>

Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 10:37 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Manon Damboise <manondamboise@gmail.com>

My name is Rob Duff. I am the Parent of a kindergarten and 2nd grade student at Rattlesnake. I wanted to voice my opinion that we should move forward with more in-person instruction for the younger grades. I believe the data has shown that the spread of COVID is controllable at those grade levels. I also feel we have reached a point where concerns about social and academic health override the risks. Our kids have maintained well so far. But I feel we will not be as successful moving forward. Our mental health as a family is proving more and more difficult to maintain, and staying in this state indefinitely will be a challenge.

I am not an expert in teaching or health. So I will defer to and stand by the difficult decisions to be made. I also understand that any decision made will be imperfect.

Good luck! We support you.

Rob Duff
435.659.1004

Missoula Current Guest Editorial: MCPS falls short with current schedule, failure to consider parents

Jill MH Taber <jill.michal@gmail.com>

Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 3:49 PM

To: Me <jill.michal@gmail.com>

Cc: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, Kathryn KaCee Ballou <kcballou@mcpsmt.org>, barnes.fam@hotmail.com, Jennifer Courtney <jccourtney@mcpsmt.org>, kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org, Cindy Farr <cfarr@missoulacounty.us>, bfrank@mcpsmt.org, Vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org, vjhaines@mcpsmt.org, Brooke Krininger <Bkrininger@mcpsmt.org>, Amy Shattuck <avshattuck@mcpsmt.org>, Kacie Laslovich <Klaslovich@mcpsmt.org>, Nicholas Shepherd <nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org>, Pcwright@mcpsmt.org, Emma Merle Hunter <Emmamerle@gmail.com>, Brucetribbensee@submittable.com, g_padgetslote@yahoo.com, djrossberg@mcpsmt.org, jbserviss@mcpsmt.org, eleahy@missoulacounty.us

<https://missoulacurrent.com/opinion/2021/01/opinion-mcps-schedule/>

Below are the names of over 100 fellow Missoula parents who have signed their support to the guest editorial run in the Missoula Current today:

Nick and Jill Taber
 Faith Meusey
 Jenny Lavey
 Patrick and Heather Carls
 Noah and Lisa Castle
 Jason and Alana Schaefer
 Greg and Jaclyn Sundberg
 Jenn Kirscher
 David and Torrie Tschan
 Mike and Cari Kaptur
 Cory Hafliger
 Zeb and Lacey Harrington
 Emma Merle Hunter
 Renae Hill
 Jess and Heather Ramos
 Vicki Shotwell
 Jamie Cline
 Staci Nugent
 Mike and Ren Regan
 Amanda Lavoie-Pesek
 Riley and Jennifer McGiboney
 Colt and Erika Palmer
 Brittany Simanton
 Kristin Williams
 Peter and Debi Hicks
 Bryan and Sarah Hickey
 Erin and Tyler Gilder
 Jennifer Gustafson
 Lesley Templeton
 Tiara Knowles
 Sharon Kolb
 Larry J Kolb
 Kathy Cotner
 Judy Kolb
 Larry R Kolb
 Craig Hayden
 Kellie Wright

Jay and Olivia Jegelski
Niccole Ostrom
Julie Johnson
April Pratt
Heather Weldon
Kevin R Noland
Jesse Johnson
Kelly Frick
Jamie McCorkle
Chad McCorkle
Doug Turner
Kendra Peterson-Richardson
Ben and Kristy Tripp
Scott and Tina Potter
Ryan and Kelsey Dick
Given and Katie Kutz
Jenn Ogren
Ann Lake Rausch
Amanda Vitale
Paul Greenwood
Carole Haidle
Gena Burke
Kari Stewart
Ashley Hinton
Courtney L White
Gena Stevens
Lonnie Stevens
Mike and Rachel Smith
Michelle and Kenny Gather
Leslie and Dan Finch
Stephen Crass
Scott and Paula Crews
Raelynn Rice
Michelle Banbury
Julene Shea and Shaun Shea
Trisha Thorson
Stacey Brown
Josh Green
Leigh McHood
Heather Holbrook
Sarah Newman
Melanie Langel
Lindsey Green
Bobi Grensten
Jami Bay
Kalynn McDaniel
Nelly Lynn
Erica Prentice
Natasha Bucklin
John Schroeder
Robin Rose-Rice
Michelle Williamson
Jennifer and Jarrad Klumph

-

Jill MH Taber

Opinion: MCPS falls short with current schedule, failure to consider parents

As Missoula families, committed to supporting our children and MCPS staff and faculty – we find ourselves at a loss. Throughout this pandemic, the school board has appeared to only represent a minority of teachers. The needs – and difficult realities – of parents and children are not represented.

This spring, remote learning, coupled with abundance of caution, was justified. As we have learned, this is a novel Coronavirus, and we have adjusted as new science emerges. However, over the past 10 months, fear of anecdotal “what ifs” have dominated discussions and decision-making regarding school planning.

The MCPS board, as well as MCPS administration, have overlooked current data and recommendations of experts that point to the critical necessity of public schools remaining open. Our children and community are worse for this oversight.

Children are suffering and their families – many with two working parents – are feeling the stress. Missoula County is one of the only districts in the state currently in a hybrid structure. Across Montana, public school students and teachers have returned to school and progressed with their education.

Meanwhile, MCPS students stand still or fall behind, as most recently reported in an email from MCPS superintendent Rob Watson stating that 40% of K-5 students in Title 1 schools are two or more grade years below grade level for reading, and 28% of K-5 students in non-Title 1 schools are in the same boat.

We now know that districts with full-time schedules have not seen an increase in cases. Research continues to show that schools are not super-spreaders. Further absence of full-time students in MCPS schools results in learning loss (among many other community social health markers).

The hybrid model is insufficient in advancing concepts and curriculum as would normally be expected. Missoula students deserve to return to school full-time.

Across America, school districts respond and adapt to issues as they arise; making a commitment to fully-functioning schools – to serve their students and their communities as mandated. MCPS should join suit – concerns can be addressed on a school-by-school basis, instead of a blanket response for the entire district.

As parents, our fears and ‘what ifs’ have become daily realities. What if my child goes almost an entire year without a formal education? What if our children fall behind? What if the test scores demonstrate a damaging impact? What if limited social interaction leads to lasting emotional and mental health problems? What if I must quit my job to ensure childcare and remote learning are adequately delivered?

Sadly, these concerns are no longer ‘what ifs’ – they are issues facing many Missoula families. We must address these realities not only as families, but as the larger Missoula community. Other area schools are experiencing success with full-time school. We hear a lot of MCPS rhetoric about innovation and a focus on graduation, but the discussion to return to full-time school always seems to fall flat.

Why won't MCPS consider and adopt the full-time models working for other Montana schools – some in communities with higher numbers of COVID-19 cases?

We are sacrificing our children and their futures. We call on the MCPS board of trustees to return our students to school full-time, now.

Return our kids to school

Renaë Hill <renaeh16@hotmail.com>

Wed, Jan 6, 2021 at 5:34 PM

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

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees and Superintendent Dr. Rob Watson,

Thank you for all of your hard work during this unprecedented time.

I'd like to put forth my support for a full return to in person learning. I am the parent of a 2nd grader at Chief Charlo. I just want to say first and foremost, Chief Charlo has done an amazing job keeping our kids safe. I have never had any apprehension in sending my child to school, they have done an outstanding job putting in place standards to keep our kids safe, and I know that they will continue as we send kids back full time.

I am not going to put forth research-based evidence for a full return to school, as I'm sure you are all well aware of the numerous studies that point in that direction as the best path forward for children regarding their education. Instead, I'm going to give a glimpse into my personal daily life with the struggles my family is enduring with this hybrid schedule. This is my personal experience, but by no means I am alone in this experience, as I've come to learn.

My child is struggling. The work that is sent home on remote learning days is busy work, I often find little to no educational value in it. Yet, it is a constant struggle to get my child to complete it. Our days are filled with tears, anger, anxiety and as a result our family relationship is being shattered and torn apart. My child has always struggled with school and I credit the amazing teachers and staff at Chief Charlo for the early intervention that has now finally gotten him into a good place with an IEP that he can start to make real progress. But that can only happen if he is in school. It's as if we take one step forward and two steps back. By keeping our kids out of school you are failing them.

As I'm sure you are aware of the growing support in our community for a full return to school, I implore you to please listen to our voices, because it often feels like we are not being heard. Instead, at each board meeting I listen to with frustration and anger, and sadness, I feel like your minds are already made up. Please listen to us with open minds and compassion. We just want the best for our kids, and right now we don't feel like that is what's driving your decisions.

The time for action is now. Please join the rest of the communities in our state and move our district forward in returning our kids to school.

Thank you for your time,

Renaë Hill

Return to School (Hybrid Plus) Comment from a Middle School Teacher

Molly Norton <msnorton@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Jan 7, 2021 at 7:31 AM

Hello,

My name is Molly Norton and I have the privilege to be a teacher at Washington Middle School. I am writing to let my community know that I wish for my school to return to school 4 days a week (the Hybrid Plus Model) on **January 25th**. I have heard rumors that there may be a roll-out that will be proposed which will begin with K-2 first adapting this model, then a few weeks later possibly followed by 3-5, then followed by 6-8, etc. If these rumors are true, I implore you to reconsider and move the date to the beginning of 2nd semester.

The reason I passionately feel that MCPS middle schools need to return 4 days a week at the 2nd Semester is, of course, the same reason educators and health experts across the nation argue that students should return to school: access to mental health and support services, the improved quality of in-person instruction, the social-emotional health of students, etc. But beyond that, I fear if we don't make this change immediately at the start of the semester change, middle schools will face a major issue of **inequity**.

Because we have designed our schedule into two period rotations each day with 7 rotations a semester, I begin on January 25th with two periods of ELA. That means students who are "unlucky" enough to not have me for those classes, (under the current system of hybrid and two days remote each week) will have less days in-person. Students who have ELA in other class periods and in a later rotation and will have ELA in February or March, may have in-class instruction 4-days a week if we have adapted a Hybrid Plus Model by then. Those students therefore have won the "student lottery", so to speak, because they have received a higher quality education and have received more class time with their teacher, and no doubt, a better education. This is unjust and inequitable.

One last issue I'd like to address is that I would like the district to be completely transparent that if we are to move forward and have all students back at school as would be necessitated in a Hybrid Plus Model (with students A-Z in building), it is physically impossible to socially distance in our buildings. I have measured my two-person tables, and I have no ability to seat students three feet apart. I don't want to lie or present a false promise to parents or the communities. If families want schools to return to 4 days a week, they must know the truth: **schools will enforce masks, we will sanitize, and we will hand wash frequently, but we can not maintain 3 feet of social distance.**

Thank you,
Molly Norton
Washington Middle School

--

Molly Norton
8th grade teacher
Washington Middle School

Support of staying in current hybrid/ MCPS is not your daycare

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

Thu, Jan 7, 2021 at 11:38 AM

I am in complete support of staying in the current hybrid schedule. It looks as though many of the letters DO NOT care about the health and safety of MCPS teachers!

They have been downgraded from 1B to 1C for getting the vaccine. Clearly teachers do not matter... You want your kids back in school then insist teachers be leveled back up to 1B. The current hybrid is WORKING! That is why our numbers are low and things seem safe! We are taking the proper precautions. Sending all kids back at once is asking too much of our underpaid and according to most of these letters, underappreciated teachers and support staff. EVERYONE is trying their best to educate your children as safely as possible...

MCPS is not a daycare facility....EVERYBODY is tired of this pandemic but it is a reality. Kids are resilient. A year's worth of learning and some isolation is not the end for these kids.... It does seem like parents are burned out but guess what? Teachers have children too... We are all burned out.

Be grateful you do not live in a war torn country where there is no school. Children may not show symptoms, but definitely can spread COVID. Now there is an even more transmissible version of COVID being spread. We are fighting a war, people! Act like it... Do you want to end up like California where they cannot even accept patients, their morgues are full and the healthcare personnel and facilities are overflowing. The U.K completely shut down.

We haven't seen the fallout yet from the holidays....4000 people in the U.S. died yesterday...Be grateful your children are in a safe environment at school. This pandemic requires sacrifice. Deal with it. We have no choice.

What we are doing right now is working, MCPS is not your daycare, right now we are able to keep kids and staff safe in school. This current hybrid should not change until all MCPS staff can be vaccinated.

Suzanne DeMarinis

Return to In-Person Instruction

Britney Tuman <btuman_22@hotmail.com>

Fri, Jan 8, 2021 at 8:02 AM

To: "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "kmercerc@mcpsmt.org" <kmercerc@mcpsmt.org>, "gdecker@mcpsmt.org" <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "nhobbins@mcpsmt.org" <nhobbins@mcpsmt.org>, "ssterbis@mcpsmt.org" <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, "mholland@mcpsmt.org" <mholland@mcpsmt.org>, "jvogel@mcpsmt.org" <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, "dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org" <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, "awake@mcpsmt.org" <awake@mcpsmt.org>, "vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org" <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, "rwatson@mcpsmt.org" <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>
Cc: Matt Fregerio <mfregerio@hotmail.com>

To the Board of Trustees,

Thank you all for your hard work during these challenging times. We are the parents of a kindergartner at Chief Charlo Elementary School. This is our first year with a child in the school and we could not be happier with how the teachers and leaders of the school have handled COVID-19 and kept our kids safe. Our child loves her time at Chief Charlo, but she doesn't understand why she only gets to attend two days while the other three days of the week she has to go to daycare. The daycare she attends has done an amazing job handling all the added burdens of COVID as well and has seen minimal impact in terms of infections.

We read the recent Missoula Current News guest editorial "MCPS Falls Short with Current Schedule, Failure to Consider Parents" article and support the comments in article. Data and science show our kids should be in school. We strongly believe that more harm is being done to our kids and community by kids attending school part time versus full time. Those families not comfortable with in-person learning have the option for their kids to attend the MOA. Schools within the state and within our own community here in Missoula are attending full-time and have not seen significant impacts to case counts. We strongly encourage the board to vote to return to full time instruction.

Sincerely,

Matt and Britney Fregerio



Fwd: Students Must Return To School Full Time

Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>

Fri, Jan 8, 2021 at 10:06 AM

Public comment to Board

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

From: **Erin Gilder** <eringilder@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Jan 8, 2021 at 9:36 AM

Subject: Students Must Return To School Full Time

To: <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, <nhobbins@mcpsmt.org>, <mholland@mcpsmt.org>, <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, <kmercerc@mcpsmt.org>, <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, <awake@mcpsmt.org>, <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>

Good morning,

I have written numerous emails so I will keep this short. I am writing today in support of ALL students returning to school at the start of the next semester. I would like to see an actual date set for return and not just a commit to return eventually with no specifics. The time is NOW, the research supports this, and Missoula families are beyond frustrated with the current situation.

Thank you for your time,
Erin and Tyler Gilder

--

School Board - Comments/Considerations

Kerry Herndon <collaborative.effort@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcpsmt.org
Cc: Becky Sorenson <bsorenson@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Fri, Jan 8, 2021 at 10:52 AM

Please see the attached letter regarding remote vs. in-person learning. Feel free to reach out if you have any questions.

--

Kerry N. Herndon, LCSW, LAC

Collaborative Effort, PLLC
1600 North Avenue West, Suite 106
Missoula, MT 59801
(406) 552-5327



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EFFORT

www.facebook.com/collaborativeeffort

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1 attachments**MCPS School Board Letter Remote Learning.pdf**

170K



Collaborative Effort, PLLC

800 Kensington Ave, Suite LL2, Missoula, MT 59801

Phone: 406.552.5327 Fax: 406.926.3117

To: Missoula County School Board
From: Kerry N. Herndon, LCSW, LAC
RE: In-Person vs. Remote Learning
Date: January 7, 2020

I would first like to introduce myself. Professionally, I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Licensed Addiction Counselor. I primarily work with youth ages 12 and up, but also work with parents and families. Prior to my work in Private Practice, I worked within educational institutions providing academic advising, retention efforts, focusing on student success and as a substance use prevention specialist.

On a personal note, I am a mother of 3 children (7th grade at C.S. Porter and twins in 3rd grade at Hawthorne). Two of my children (7th and 3rd grades) have IEPs. As a family, we are fortunate enough that I have been able to maintain a flexible schedule to provide educational assistance to my children during this time. However, my adjusted schedule has created a significant loss of income (making only about half my income) since March of 2020.

I strongly support all grade levels returning to school on a normal school schedule. Below I have outlined these reasons.

Academic

I can only speak from personal experience for K-5. I have 3rd grade twins. One of my girls has an IEP with accommodation needs which have not been fully met during this remote learning or hybrid model despite the school's best efforts. We have been thankful enough to have access to outside speech therapy and occupational therapy to supplement what the school can provide; however, this year (2021) we are looking at having to spend \$200-250 per week out-of-pocket to continue those services. With my loss of income to be available to my kids on remote learning days, this may not be sustainable.

I see my third graders drastically losing interest in learning and education. Prior to COVID, they loved school and now they complain about everything related to education. All the fun parts, the relationships with teachers and other staff, the excitement about learning dramatically decreased when they stopped going regularly. On average, my girls spend 1-2 hours in tears each remote learning morning because they are frustrated, they are not in school learning from a teacher. This has impacted their interest in reading, artistic interests, questioning how things work and all the things kids at this age should be curious about.

I can speak to grades 6-8 from a professional and personal experience. In some ways, my 7th grader has developed some great independence in managing her own learning, but I also know she feels really disconnected from the school and does not feel as comfortable asking for support when she needs it. She also has an IEP. March 2020-June 2020 she was very isolated, and her mood was far more depressed than ever. It was not until we allowed her to re-enroll in extra-curricular activities we saw her mood improve. It is these social interactions and participation in something as a group which has sustained her motivation for achievement.

My clients in the middle school age group are struggling. These are important developmental years in transitioning between early childhood and adolescents. Shifting learning experiences and routines to



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prepare for High School. In my interactions with middle schoolers, most are doing the minimum educational requirements necessary and not driven to do more to please teachers or other adults at school. Many are struggling to find motivation, a sense of belonging or purpose, and have difficulty setting personal goals.

The High School Students I interact with are struggling with both the social impact and the lack of experience developed in the classroom. There are many missed opportunities for academic growth due to lack of availability, access, transportation to or from activities, and many have had to get jobs to help support their families since parents are struggling financially. All these things are pulling their focus away from academics and increasing anxiety while at school. Motivation for school seems to be decreasing and many I have interacted with are questioning the necessity of higher education. The lack of motivation for higher education seems to be stemming from anxiety about preparedness. I have had many express worry about not being prepared academically, not having completed application requirements or lack of extra-curriculars that give them advantages.

Social/Emotional

Each grade level consists of different social/emotional needs. Looking at Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory we see youth ages 6-12 in the developmental stage of Industry vs. Inferiority. This is a phase where children develop the first areas of individuality by comparing themselves to peers. They begin recognizing similarities and differences. Additionally, they begin developing pride in their accomplishments, learning and abilities. This is also tied to experimentation with new hobbies, sports, and interests. Learning where they excel and building resiliency set the foundation for self-esteem, confidence, motivation and self-compassion.

According to Erikson, Ages 12-18 are in the Identity vs. Role Confusion phase of development. This is the phase of development in which youth transition to adolescents. They question their identity, seek autonomy, build confidence/self-esteem, learn sympathy or apathy, and work to establish how they fit within society.

Additionally, youth neurologically are going through many changes which shape emotion identification and regulation, risk-taking behaviors, impulse control, cognitive processing, and many other things. These neurological connections are largely formed through experience. When youth are not in school routinely, they are neurologically being harmed by inconsistencies in routine, lack of relationships, sense of structure, support and repetition of academic concepts.

Looking at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, I see many family's struggling with meeting their physiological needs, fear of safety/security (health and financial primarily) and questioning where they fit with love & belonging. This lends itself to a population of youth who will struggle with meeting self-esteem and self-actualization.

As a result I am observing increased substance use among youth, more risk-taking, less supervision by adults, lack of motivation/interest, increased anxiety, increased depression, hyperactivity or lack of energy and decreased social skills. Their futures are likely to be impacted by these unhealthy behavioral health consequences.

Life Skills

Since COVID-19 restrictions were initiated over half of my conversations with clients have shifted to conversations about setting academic routines, sleep routines, being overwhelmed, time management and other basic life skills typically learned while in the classroom. This also includes anxiety about what to expect for their academic futures.



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Phone: 406.552.5327 Fax: 406.926.3117

With parents or families, conversations include childcare concerns, work/home life balance, feelings of being overwhelmed, uncertainty about what school/work will look like week-to-week, strained relationships, financial hardship, limited support networks, and limited resources.

Safety

I am conducting far more screenings for suicidal ideology, self-harm and substance use than previous to COVID-19. Clients have reported feeling unsafe or uncomfortable at home with their families. Clients have reported fear for friends or others who are home with unsafe families. One client recently stated, "School was my safe place when home was not predictable or stable".

Lack of Supervision & Positive Adult Interaction

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) Study indicates that having one healthy, trusted adult in the life of a youth can significantly impact their resiliency and future health outcomes. In a time where things are very unpredictable, many rely on teachers and other school staff to be that interaction when they are unable to get support at home.

With remote learning & hybrid learning, we are reverting back to a culture of "latch key kids" with youth not having sufficient supervision or guidance. Parents are being stretched thin between work obligations, lack of childcare and other responsibilities. Kids are being left to care for themselves or their younger siblings.

It has changed my relationship with my children since I have had to stop being just mom and started playing the role of teacher. When I am not teaching them, I am on hours of telehealth calls for work trying to maintain some income. Thankfully I live in a neighborhood with several amazing mom's and we rotate who is watching the kids while we are all working. Not everyone has this network of support or flexibility to work from home.

In the field of substance use prevention, it is known that families who communicate, set healthy boundaries, provide adequate supervision and clear expectations are less likely to have youth who abuse substances and go on to develop addictions in their lifetime. We are not providing the guidance necessary to help our youth make healthy decisions.

COVID Concerns

Nearly every case of COVID-19 I have encountered was not contracted while attending school. In fact, it seems as though the schools who have returned to full in-school learning have lower numbers. This would likely be because kids are going into many other environments while they are not in school. I, myself, have had to take the kids with me to run errands or to stop at my office. I have had to leave them with family or friends while I am at work. They are being exposed via multiple facets when not in school.

With the right precautions, the risk of COVID exposure while at school is low.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my lengthy letter. I am happy to speak with you or answer any questions you may have. I strongly encourage you to consider sending our youth back to school. They truly do need the routine and consistency school provides alongside the academic benefit.



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

In person learning

Manon Damboise <manondamboise@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sat, Jan 9, 2021 at 11:28 AM

My name is Manon Damboise. I am a parent of a kindergartner and 2nd grader at Rattlesnake. I am in favor of more in person learning for our younger grades. I believe a considerable amount of data has shown that it is possible to reopen elementary schools safely. I also feel we have reached a point where concerns about social and academic health override the risks. The structure that schools provide is essential to the well being of young kids. We are now starting to see behavior issues at home and on-line learning is getting more and more challenging. In other words, our mental health as a family is proving more difficult to maintain.

I appreciate all MCPS efforts in this matter. And hope that my comment is helpful in this decision making process.

Manon Damboise

Support for return to in-person instruction

Alana Jones <alanajones@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sat, Jan 9, 2021 at 11:45 AM

Dear MCPS Covid Committee,

First, I would like to thank all of those on this committee for your work and dedication to the safety and well-being of our students, staff and faculty. These times are difficult and there are many things to consider and I appreciate the depth and commitment to analyzing and considering all the factors involved.

I have two children, a 7th grader at CS Porter and a 4th grader at Lowell Elementary. There hasn't been a day that I have felt my children were at a great risk for covid exposure. The precautions and due diligence of the schools and faculty have gone above and beyond and have made my children feel very safe. Missoula County in general has done an amazing job with keeping our cases in check across the board compared to other cities in the state and the country.

I am also a frontline essential worker, with no option from working from home. I'm fortunate to work in an environment that has gone above and beyond in keeping us safe and feeling protected. Financially our family wasn't able to exist on a one person income in order to stay home with our children for remote or online learning. It has been a challenge to say the least in so many ways in regards to keeping our jobs and maintaining social, mental and academic health for our children and family. I realize that this comes from a place of huge privilege. But with that privilege comes responsibility.

My biggest concern is that we have had to piece together many different childcare options for the days they are not in school. We've used after school programs, Parks and Rec, and soccer programs. We are grateful for these options as a majority have been free of charge. I feel however that my children are at greater risk for covid utilizing these other programs mixing with many other children and families where if they were in school 4-5 days a week their risk would be much lower given the lesser number of others they'd be mixing with. They'd be learning at a level closer to pre-covid times and their social needs would also be closer to "normal," since their social interactions currently are limited outside of school and childcare.

This is my plea and request to please consider returning to school 4-5 days a week. I realize there's many moving parts and many things to consider and I thank you all for considering my plea.

Sincerely,
Alana Jones
Missoula Northside resident

Sent from my iPhone



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Reopening schools

Pat <dptmsla@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sat, Jan 9, 2021 at 10:23 PM

As a 39 year veteran teaching in MCPS schools, I feel that the most important responsibility of the District, even before education, is the health and safety of the students and the staff. I feel it would be very unwise to leave the current hybrid model until the entire staff has been vaccinated against COVID-19. We owe the students and staff that much. So far we have been lucky, but I hate to envision the moral and legal repercussions if our schools become super spreaders.

Sincerely,
Denis P. Thane

Sent from my iPad



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Return to 4 days

Katherine Rosen <katherinehrosen@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 4:02 PM

Hello MCPS board,

I am in favor of our schools opening back up in a modified hybrid model of 4 days a week, with the existing "block scheduling" at the high school level. I would think that continuing to offer the MOA option for the next semester would help decrease the full number of students back in school, thus allowing for physical distancing.

Our two kids are in grades K at Lewis and Clark and 9th at Hellgate High. They would both greatly benefit from the increase in their days at school. For our daughter in Kindergarten, the increased school hours would positively impact her social development as well as her academic needs. From our observation of COVID safety precautions in place at her school, the COVID bubble would remain more consistent if the classmates were also at school, rather than attending other child care facilities during the days they are not. Also for our son at Hellgate High School, the school would have more control and consistency in COVID precautions if the kids are under the school guidelines.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

--

Katherine Rosen



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Kids in School

Brandy Gillespie <406realestateguide@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 4:09 PM

This has been a trying year to say the least. Our children desperately need the consistency and routine of being in school more days a week than not. My 5th grader said to me, "Mom why do they care about getting the little kids back to school to learn but they don't care about us?" Please have all students return to school for as many days as possible. Many schools near and far have been in school 5 days a week successfully and so can we!

Sincerely,
Brandy Gillespie

Brandy Gillespie
406-218-8893
Glacier Sotheby's
bgillespie@glaciersir.com

Return to School for 2nd Semester

Jennifer McGiboney <rileyandjen@hotmail.com>

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 8:44 PM

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

Dear Respected MCPS Board Members,

I am a parent to a high school student at Sentinel High School. I am advocating for a return, full time, to school. With all of the science presented to date, there is no valid reason for them to continue with remote learning. My daughter, who is not alone, is struggling academically. She wants to be back in class! I truly believe the mental health of these students is in great distress. With other schools... Loyola, Hellgate Elementary and Frenchtown specifically, .. currently attending full time, we are certainly able to return. I believe we should be looking to these schools as examples of how it can be done, and done safely for students and staff.

I thank you for your time, I realize this has been challenging for all teachers and staff of MCPS. We all greatly appreciate you and your efforts... I know it may not feel like that, as frustrations have reached an all time high... so I truly thank you for working towards an acceptable resolution.

Sincerely,

Jen McGiboney

Sent from my iPhone



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

4 days a week for every child

Catherine H <kathafliger@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 8:52 PM

Dear Members of the Board,

Please consider extending all students' school schedule to 4 days per week. We have a 9th and 6th grader and from what I have heard the school staff are great with ensuring the school is safe and clean. Schools have put procedures in place that have secured the safety of children and staff thus far.

Our children struggled in their schooling last March - June and still struggle on their remote days. We have invested in a private tutor to ensure their schooling is at the highest quality. My husband and I both work and it is very difficult to ensure that my children have completed their work to their best ability.

On another note, I am a social worker and I know that the pandemic has put many many children at risk for abuse and neglect. In so many cases, their school grounds and are their safe places and their teachers are their mentors.

For all of these reasons, all children must return to a 4 day school schedule.

Thank you for your consideration,
Catherine and Cory Hafliger

Sent from my iPhone



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Middle and high school 4 days a week

2 messages

Estella Anderson <anderson4mt@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 8:57 PM

Please move all students to 4 day a week school. It is time to move all students back to regular schedules. Hellgate elementary/middle school has been doing it with a lot of success. Educators that I know are ready. Please move students back to 4 day a week schedules.

Estella Anderson

Sent from my iPhone

return to full classes

Dunn Ryan <Ryan.Dunn@lpnt.net>

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 9:01 PM

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

Hello,

First, I want to thank you for helping our kids navigate these hard times. This can't be easy on the board, staff, or teachers.

Safety must be our number one priority when it comes to our children and families when discussing a decision like this. We feel that the schools have done an amazing job the first half of the year. There has been great communications from our kid's teachers, staff, and principals during these times. I think we need to start looking at getting the kids back to full time in school learning.

My wife and I are lucky, we both have been able to work from home and share the remote learning duties. During parent teacher conferences, both our kids had great scores on their tests and both teachers said they were confident they were learning what was expected of them. This is great, for us... but that doesn't account for the other kids in the class. Some families haven't been as lucky, they have had to leave the home during the day to work. We know this puts stress on not only them but more importantly their children. We are fearful that kids will start falling behind and not feeling school is important. We feel we are at a tipping point of kids really falling behind, not only in schoolwork but socially and in their confidence. Kids need the interactions with their teachers. Parents can tell them all day long they are doing good, but it really means so much more coming from a teacher. We have a 4th grader and a Kindergartener, we think both of their teachers are amazing, both kids talk about their teachers when they come home and how they make learning fun. The hardest part for them this year is not spending more time with their teacher's and their friends. They aren't getting as much time to get to know their teacher, trusting them, and enjoying learning.

The hardest part for us as parents this year has been juggling work and school. We am 100% happy with the remote learning plans, we have asked the teachers if they could provide our kids with more work. My wife and I totally understand that this isn't possible for every family. We both work from home, that makes it easier for us but the trend I am seeing is our kids are getting their work done but our workday isn't over. This leads to more screen time because that is the easy distraction to let us finish our work. We have tried other idea's, outdoor time, quiet reading time but it seems as our workdays get busier, we find it easier to let them have a screen. I am not asking the school to be a daycare so we can work, I truly believe that teachers are amazing at helping develop key foundational building blocks for kids as they grow and go through school. Some of the things I learned from school growing up, because I had amazing teachers, have stuck with me the rest of my life. Things like structure, a routine or schedule to follow, working as a team, work ethic, and responsibility. These things take repetitive training to learn and in person learning is important for them to develop them.. The kids get two days a week right now, it is like two steps forward and then one step back not having more time in class.

My dad was a teacher for over 40 years, most of those for Missoula County Public Schools. I grew up watching him make a difference in kids' lives. My family always makes the joke that we can't take my dad anywhere, usually because we run into a former student that comes up and talks with him. I have had two of my brothers go on to be teachers. I think it takes a special person to be a teacher. In teaching your goal

is to make someone else better, your satisfaction is knowing you made a difference. I think we need to let our teachers do what they are passionate about. Teaching our kids in person and making a difference.

These are my family's opinions; I agree this doesn't fit everyone's views during this time. We understand each family is different and has different reasons for their views. I agree that families with risk factors need to take more precautions than our family. It has been half the year; we should let families re-evaluate how they need their kids to learn. We should let families that aren't comfortable with more days a week have the option to look at the online academy or keep their children at 2 days for now. I know with staffing models this will be almost impossible to shift kids around middle of the year. These are hard times, the board adapted to the times when this started about a year ago. They came up with a great plan to start this school year and gave families multiple options. We are at another turning point, I think it is something that should be evaluated to see what the options are. Our everyday lives have changed over the last year. We must keep adjusting and adapting, I think this is no different. There is no one plan that fits every family. I believe there are some online academy families wanting to send their kids back to in person learning and there are in person learning families that want to do online.

We back the school's decision, that is why our family choose this year to keep sending our kids to school instead of the online academy. We believe in the Board, Principals, and Teachers, knowing they have our kid's best interests in mind when deciding on how to handle this year.

Thank you for all your hard work and your time you have invested in our kids.

Ryan Dunn
Technical Architect - Networking
LifePoint Health
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Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Back to School

crz4taz <crz4taz@yahoo.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 9:05 PM

I am writing in support of getting our kids back to school. High school kids especially need the normalcy of the schedule and interaction. My son has struggled though doing better academically this year but getting the extra help for his IEP is hard. I am not able to be home like many other parents to the schooling with him and he isn't self motivated. Increasing the class load will make it more difficult for him to keep up on remote days.

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

All Kids back to school safely

Patrick Carls <patrick@montanaburgersinc.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 9:05 PM

I wrote this out for talking points during the Zoom meeting but I figured I might as well get it out there for all to read who cannot attend.

I want to thank teachers, staff, board members. Our World has been turned upside down and we are facing challenges we've never seen or experienced in our life, nor were we expected to.

-82 billion funding for schools. Do we have a plan for that funding? Are we applying for that funding? If so let's use it for portable sinks, sanitizer, makeshift classrooms with dividers, and transportation. How about staff incentives? Paying more than \$11/hr for subs?

I say with this funding, the push for vaccines, immunity, and following the science; let's make a motion to get our kids back in school. Everyone on this call knows how important education is. Regardless of where you sit on the election, or on current politics we need to come together, work as a whole, after all "divided we fall" right, and get a plan with compromise for both sides. I would like to ask a member of the board to motion we start with 3 days a week of full time learning at all levels k-12, call it T-W-Th and use the other days to clean, make sure there is no illnesses, and get your planning together for the next week. After 2 weeks let's see where things are and hopefully go to 4 days a week of full time learning, try it for a couple weeks and then either stay where we are move forward or take a step back if we need to. We already now how our current model works, we haven't tried anything else so we have no data to go on. Other districts in our town and state have made it work and their covid numbers are not much worse than ours, and they've been open full time, all classes, all year.

Some will ask, what about the consequences of older or underlying conditions. Good question and it definitely needs to be discussed. Obviously you can look online and find an article that fits whatever narrative or agenda you want it to. That being said though, let's look at the science according to the CDC.

-Average age of teacher in MCPS is 43, according to (site source). Death rate for that same age is 99.54%. Children are even lower at 99.98%. Don't get me wrong, I don't want anyone to die from Covid at the expense of my children's education. But I feel if we have the correct systems in place and we as parents are doing our jobs to make sure our children stay healthy and keep them home when not, we can get our kids back in school full time by March. Now that's a plan!

Patrick Carls

MCPS high schooler- get rid of hybrid

Kristy Tripp <kristytripp4@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 9:06 PM

As parents of 2 high school girls I am asking that you please consider lifting the hybrid model and put in place regular FT school. We have large schools around us doing this with success (hellgate Elem, and frenchtown) and for the life of me cannot understand why our kids are not being given the same fair education friends and neighbors are being provided.

Our girls are failing miserably, they are actually begging for us to just withdraw them and put them into an online home school program. They miss their friends, they miss teen interaction, and they miss getting taught. They are good students but have lost interest, and feel the education they are receiving with online, and then hybrid is more of a waste of time then benefit. One daughter has been into the dr on a few occasions with stomach issues, and anxiety attacks over the instability within her schooling (also no doubt the state of the world at this time as well) These kids need school, and deserve the right to a public education as the others schools are offering.

Thank you for your consideration is assisting this request.

Kristy & Ben Tripp



On bringing K-2 students back four days a week

Jordan K <jmnttrails@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 9:17 PM

To the MCPS Board of Trustees,

First of all, I want to thank you for your service to our community by serving on this board. You undoubtedly did not expect to be serving during a time of pandemic any more than any of us expected to live during such a time. The issues brought to you at this year exceed the scope of what is normally expected of such a body. Your role is not an easy one, and I thank you for your effort.

As a teacher, I want nothing more than to be in my classroom helping my students to grow as learners and young people. Although I have concerns about returning to full classes (especially amid the introduction of the UK variant of COVID-19, which is showing to affect young people (especially those under the age of 16) more than previous strains), I get the feeling from conversations in the district and the loudest voices of a group of parents rallying on Facebook that it is all but determined at this point. That said, I am not going to spend my time on my personal worries and concerns, but instead give you a sense of my classroom in hybrid and how I plan to adjust in order to bring back kids as safely as possible. I only ask that you consider putting precautions in place to ensure the safety of our staff, as well as time to adequately gather necessary materials and staff for a smooth and lasting transition.

Currently, my kindergarteners receive two days of in person instruction per week. While this is not ideal, I have been so proud of and amazed by the growth they are making. 77% of my students are scoring as "proficient" on their STAR Early Literacy tests, with an additional 15% likely to move into that category when we reassess this week. I am able to sit and read with them one on one every day they are in class (sometimes twice a day), providing direct, individualized support to them at their level and helping them to progress in our IRLA curriculum reading goals. They are doing well in math (we don't have a formal math assessment in Kindergarten, or I would provide specific data there, too), and I have the time to reteach specific skills to kids who need them one on one or in a group of two as needed. My room has a fairly flexible layout because my class is small, so kids are able to walk across the room to share work (at a distance, with masks on) to friends at different tables. They have three learning spots: two floor spots (a circle spot and a spot in front of our projector) and a table spot. They are good about wearing their masks, washing hands when asked, and "scooting back" away from peers when reminded.

When MCPS returns to full classes, I will take significantly different precautions in my classroom. For example, I have rolled up and stored my carpet, which served as our circle time location. I will spread out the velcro-marked student floor spots so that all students can fit as safely as possible at the floor. Their floor spots will be next to their table. Their table spots and floor spots will be the only learning areas they will have access to throughout the day. There will be limited movement in the classroom to minimize accidental interactions between table groups. The students at a particular table will not be able to socially distance. If one gets sick, the whole table will need to quarantine since they will eat breakfast and lunch together at their table. Some of my students will be far away from my projector, which is attached to the wall but not centered in the room itself. I will be working with the kids to provide differentiated support, but it will come in the form of small-group instruction instead of one on one. We will be relying more heavily on hand sanitizer

for the sake of time, focusing on hand washing only before they eat or after using the bathroom. Students will no longer be allowed to work with kids outside their table groups (except during outside recess). If I were to test positive, it is likely my entire class would need to quarantine because of how much small-group work we do in kindergarten and how close we have to be to the students to support the skills they are working on. I am concerned about the decreased opportunity to move about the classroom which is not developmentally appropriate for five and six-year-olds.

I am sharing this information with you because I, like many in my position, have spent hours brainstorming what it will take to bring back kids safely. I realize that some in our community may not realize that "bringing all kids back" will not look the same as "bringing all kids back during a normal year." We are not in a normal year, and I want to be transparent with the families and community I serve. Educators are working tirelessly to adjust, readjust, reinvent, and readjust again to support our kids as we all live, learn, and teach through this unprecedented pandemic year.

My request to you is to set parameters which will allow this shift to be successful. Give us time to hire the positions that were not filled before school started. Allow us to get necessary materials from the new Federal funding coming our way as we do not currently have enough devices to support the needs of student assessment and curriculum learning. Please, please reach out to our new governor and push for education professionals to be vaccinated as soon as possible. The news of our vaccines being pushed back against CDC recommendation truly felt like a gut-punch. We want to open, but we must do so safely and with the necessary materials and supports in place.

When MCPS educators voice their concerns regarding moving into the next phase of reopening, we are simply asking to do so safely so we can focus on what we do best: teaching. We want to be present for our students and their families. We can only transition in a smooth and lasting way if we have the materials and supports in place to meet our students' needs. And we can only be present for our kids if we are healthy ourselves.

Thank you again for your time and service to our community.

Kindly,
Jordan Krause
MCPS Kindergarten teacher

GO with Harvards Recommendations!

Adriel (Ezra) Shearer <aeshearer@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 9:19 PM

Which of those below does MCPS do?

NOT MANY.

Use ALL of Harvard's recommendations and ALL of their precautions.

From Harvard:

What Are Universal Precautions?

Infection control measures are categorized as individual, environmental, and systemic. Individual controls are those that every individual must be responsible for enacting for the good of self and others. Environmental controls are those that can be built into the physical environment. Systemic controls are those that require changes in organizational practice and process.

Contrary to common practice, in which personal protective equipment is characterized as the last infection control measure to be layered in, and is expected to be added only when the hazard cannot be eliminated and engineering efforts have not sufficed, safety in contexts of community spread during the COVID-19 pandemic requires holistic risk reduction, with masks as a critical and necessary strategy. The hazard has not been eliminated in the broader community, and it is not possible to fully reduce risk indoors through engineering controls alone. Therefore, masks are an essential and required control strategy. An exception is those situations where schools can rely extensively on outdoor classrooms.

Below is a chart of the individual, environmental, and systemic controls that pertain to Covid-19. "Universal precautions" are those for which every single individual has responsibility and the fall in the column labeled "individual."

INFECTION CONTROLS

Individual

- Stay home when sick
- Hand hygiene
- Bathroom hygiene, including de-densification of bathroom use if ventilation falls short of standard code requirements
- Masking, including continuous masking while speaking
- Self - Distancing in hallways; classrooms; shared spaces
- Robust guidance for out of school socializing

Environmental

- Ventilation/Filtration (with masking): >4 to >6 ACH
- Clear rules for PPE use, space movement, airflow control, and contaminated zones
- Effective and succinct communication about rules and protocols
- Outdoor Classrooms

Systemic

- School-level Infection Control Teams
- Infection control training
- Testing
- Contact tracing
- Isolation and Quarantine Protocols
- Classroom Pods, where feasible (mainly in lower grades)
- Programming changes (to athletics and other congregate co-curricular activities)
 - De-densification through optional remote only
 - Attestation/screeners
 - Cafeteria and dining protocols
 - Contact surfaces hygiene
 - Mandated Distancing in hallways, classrooms; shared spaces
 - Protocols for interactions among adult educators and staff.
 - Mental health supports and other supports for those carrying out an activity deemed an essential function.
 - Protocol for transportation - ex. distancing/ventilation/masking on school buses
 - Attention to building a culture of adherence to guidance among kids and families

1/11/2021

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - GO with Harvards Recommendations!

Ezra Shearer
Sentinel High School
406-728-2401 ext 7607
aeshearer@mcpsmt.org

Returning to school

Lindsey Schultz <Linz123_83@yahoo.com>

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 10:07 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Good evening! I know tomorrow you are meeting as a task force to discuss the plan for moving forward with school. I beg you to visit the numbers and science that is showing covid isn't being transmitted in schools. The schools are safe and I know that has taken considerable time and care by all the staff you monitor and clean constantly. But our kids, of all ages, are struggling. School is one the the safe places they can be- and be safe. We have been a very cautious family through this whole process, but we are struggling to keep our daughter engaged, motivated and honestly happy. She is a sweet and easy girl, but she is struggling. She is like a different person the two days she gets to go to schools and the other days are a constant struggle. She dreads home learning now which wasn't the case in the fall. I know we have to constantly monitor how the process goes and if it can continue but on behalf of our youth I beg - let's try. We entered cautiously and it had worked well- so let's give our kids more of possible. We are here to support our school and staff however possible. Thank you for your time!

Lindsey Schultz

Sent from my iPhone

return to full time school if the metrics indicate safety.

Polly Becker <pollyrbecker@gmail.com>

Sun, Jan 10, 2021 at 10:47 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, jccourtney@mcpsmt.org, kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org, jhallmt@gmail.com, vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org, vjhaines@mcpsmt.org, "Kylie Barnes (barnes.fam@hotmail.com)" <barnes.fam@hotmail.com>, bkrininger@mcpsmt.org, kllaslovich@mcpsmt.org, djrossberg@mcpsmt.org, jbserviss@mcpsmt.org, avshattuck@mcpsmt.org, nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org, g_padgetslote@yahoo.com, brucetribbensee@submittable.com, awake@mcpsmt.org, pcwright@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcpsmt.org, emmamerle@gmail.com, bfrank@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

Thank you to everyone working so diligently to make the best decisions for school when presented with no ideal choices. Thank you to the teachers who are trying to educate with unknowns and uncertainty; I hope you know that every letter sent supporting a return to full time school also means that we trust you, we respect you and we very much need your expertise as educators!

I am asking that you share with us the metrics about how MCPS hybrid schedule schools compare to other local public and private schools that are in-person 4 or 5 days a week.

What are the percentages of teachers and students (separately) who have tested positive in MCPS vs. surrounding schools? Of the positive cases, what percent are known to have been acquired in MCPS classrooms vs the percent acquired in the classrooms of surrounding schools? If the rates are similar, I am curious what the reasoning would be that we are choosing to remain in Hybrid Plus? If full time schools have a significant amount of in school transmission, is there anything we could do to further mitigate risk other than remain at two days per week?

I am also wondering if you have compared the reading and math STAR test scores for MCPS kids from this time last year until now? I know as parents many of us *feel* our kids are losing ground; is this actually the case when you look at the numbers? If our kids are losing ground, how much loss can we tolerate?

Obviously the test scores and infection rates don't even start to consider the emotional and psychosocial consequences of remaining in hybrid plus. If you choose to remain in Hybrid Plus, how much lower would our positivity rates need to be compared to other local full time schools to justify the educational and social expense of remaining in school 2 days a week?

As others have said, this is an excellent time to make a change to phase 2 as the semester presents a natural time to change schedules, especially for our middle and high school students. It also allows a time for families who are currently attending in person learning to switch to the MOA if they are uncomfortable with the increased class size.

I believe making the above mentioned data public will help families and teachers understand, trust and accept whatever outcome is decided. Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully,

Polly Becker

Parent of three MCPS students (5th, 5th, 8th)

We hope you consider parent comments before you decide...

Lindsey Green <lindseyisrunning@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 12:16 AM

Dear Board of Trustees,

On the MCPS website under the Board of Trustees tab it states:

"The committee will discuss current district and community COVID data as well as feedback from the county health department. The committee will also receive updates regarding other district operations as they relate to COVID and in-person learning. The purpose of the committee will be to provide feedback to the administration regarding COVID response and provide information to the Board of Trustees as they consider future recommendations."

I really hope the committee is looking around at other districts and taking note on how they are able to be in school 4-5 days a week. I am concerned that this committee is making decisions on what they will recommend before hearing what parents have to say on the matter. After all, we are the ones who see what *doesn't* happen on remote learning days, and that is only for those of us fortunate to be home with our kids. Many families are not so fortunate. This hybrid schedule was necessary in the beginning and perhaps even into the Fall for a time. However, now we have bigger problems on our hands. We are seeing a drastic rise in depression and anxiety in our children. I see this first hand because I worry about such things with my own kids who were happy, thriving students at one time. I can't pretend there isn't a connection. Our kids need structure, they need in-person learning and they need our top priority right now, to figure out a plan to return them to school. Nobody wants to put teachers in an unsafe environment. I believe we can do this and we can do it safely. Please consider the parent's public comment and not just the Teacher's Union. I would assume teachers want to get back to it as well, right? I feel like we are getting to a point where if a teacher feels unsafe being in the classroom, maybe we need to make some staff changes. Maybe we move teachers who are high-risk or uncomfortable with in-person instruction to MOA. Let other teachers take over the in-class instruction. I don't want to sound negative towards the Union, but they are not the only group to consider here, are they? I know plenty of teachers who want to return with safe practices in place. Our Governor has also been contacted in hopes for teachers to get the vaccine earlier than planned. We are parents TRYING to give our children a voice in this too. Their future depends on it and frankly, so does our future. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Lindsey Green

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

2nd semester

guymtelhunter <guymtelhunter@aol.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 5:28 AM

Dear Board,
I strongly believe our high schools need to go back to full time in person school.
Sincerely, Guy Kempthorne

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

Please increase in person learning

Sandy Shepherd <sandy@sovereignhope.church>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 6:18 AM

Dear MCPS Board members,

I am writing to notify you of my support for return to full time in-person learning for K-8 students in MCPS schools.

My 5th grade child has been doing assignments as they come, but he is not being challenged and is not learning as much as he should. To be honest, I am appalled at how little work he has been asked to complete. He finishes his at home learning requirements in 2-3 hours. That is the extent of his learning for 3 days of the week.

In our family, both parents are essential workers. This has meant that our child is home for a good portion of the time by himself. His academic requirements take 3 hours of those 3 days he is home alone. The school district owes it to our child (and all students) to prepare him better than this for his future.

I have read the new Harvard/Brown Public health guidelines for school closures. Our current community spread for Covid-19 should not keep our students from returning to full time in-person learning.

The school district has already done a very good job of creating a safe school environment for my children. Hygiene practices, masking, limiting cohorts and ensuring 3 foot social distances are all reasonable requirements for our students. I believe the schools have already demonstrated that this can be consistently achieved. It's time to stop disproportionally burdening our children and asking them to sacrifice their emotional, academic, physical, and social needs.

Medical literature does not indicate that when kids are in full time in-person learning that teachers are at any higher risk of severe Covid infection than a general community member.

If you are looking for additional bodies to help contact trace when needed or if you need further medical assistance to establish particular protocols, I would be willing to volunteer my expertise and time to best care for our children in the public school system. I suspect that there are many parents who would be willing to volunteer several hours weekly if that means our children can be back in the classroom.

Thank you for considering.

Sandy Shepherd, MD

Mother of 3 MCPS students (5th grade, 9th and 12th grade)

Family physician

Sandy Shepherd
Sent from my iPhone



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

return to school

TJ and LESLEY TEMPLETON <lesandtj@msn.com>
To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 6:31 AM

I have 3 boys in MCPS schools. 2nd, 7th and 10th grades. I feel very strongly that they all need to go back to school 5 days a week.

Kids of all ages are still out and about the days they are not in school and having exposure to others. I don't think we are accomplishing anything by reducing their time in the school building.

I also would like to share that some teachers have done great with our hybrid schedule and some haven't. I don't think my kids have learned anything new this year at all. It feels like they have been given busy work that is review.

Other schools in Missoula have been going 5 days a week with very little disruption. MCPS can do it too.

Thanks
Lesley Templeton

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S10e, an AT&T 5G Evolution capable smartphone



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

School

Kalynn McDaniel <kalynnm@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 6:47 AM

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

Good morning,

I am a parent of a second and fourth grader. I'm a stay at home mom, we have access to computers, internet, and have all the thing we need. But mentally my children are struggling. Especially my fourth grader. He cries himself to sleep without knowing why, and is starting to show other signs of anxiety. He deserves the chance to go back to school. I believe all the evidence shows that kids should be back in school, and I also believe the kids themselves have proven to teachers and staff how responsible they can be with masks on, hand washing and in general following the rules that the schools have put in place. Covid has been so hard on kids and we as adult overlook that. Their world has been turned upside down for close to a year. No matter what, this school year and last will leave a mark on their lives forever. We need to start getting them back to school, and not just the younger kids. My 4th grader also deserves a chance to go back to school 4 days a week. Please don't make me try to explain to him why his second grade brother gets priority in going back to school, because I quite honestly don't understand it. I know multiple families in the same situation with elementary aged students who would be split up. Please think about the students and let K-5 go back at once.

Thank you

Kalynn McDaniel

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
Get Outlook for Android

Children need to be in school

James Marquardt <jimandhideyo@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 7:40 AM

To whom it may concern:

I looked on with dismay and concern last spring as public school classes and activities were abruptly cancelled with little regard for the social, psychological, and physical health consequences that were certain to arise from the removal of our children from school. While I appreciate the efforts of the administration and especially the teachers to adapt to this over reaction, it has been a predictable failure. Summarily:

Children, especially teenagers, need structure. They need to learn to get up, get prepared, organize their day, and launch from the house. For almost a year now, this is not happening in many homes around Missoula.

For their bodies to be strong, and *resistant to disease*, they need proper nutrition. Sadly, many of them get one or possibly two somewhat healthy meals a day. At school.

For limitation of *risk factors that contribute to morbidity and mortality of Covid*, like obesity and diabetes, they need exercise. The only place many of them get any form of exercise is through school PE programs and school sports.

In order for children to become active, informed members of a functional society, they need to be capable of at least a limited amount of critical thinking. They need to be educated. The events at our capital last week put on full display the hazards of ignorance, and the inability of people to do even some basic fact checking and reality based thinking. In short, stupid hurts all of us. Many of our children are struggling and failing with the online model. For their safety, and the safety of society in general, they need to be in school.

Children under the age of 18 are not at any statistically significant risk of death from Covid. Both of my children have had it, it was essentially a cold, and a mild one at that. Wash your hands, rest a few days, and stay away from grandma for the quarantine period.

Please carefully consider the possibility of harm that sending children to school may cause vs. **the certainty of harm** that will result from continuing with this online model.

It is my hope that cooler heads will prevail in this debate, and our children will return to school where they are safe, vs leaving them to the uncontrolled environments of their homes, where often times they are not.

Kindest Regards,

James Marquardt
109 Addie Court
Missoula, MT 59803
406-544-0255



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

(no subject)

Beth Copenhaver <arscay@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 7:53 AM

I am a parent of three high school kids at Hellgate. I am in support of kids going back to school on a daily basis. My children's mental health has suffered with this current schedule. Further the education they are receiving is lacking. I completely support the teachers and feel like they are doing the best job that they can with what options they have. It's not enough.

As adults, as a community we are failing our children. We need to have the option for our children to be in the classroom more than two days a week.

I have three children also attending the Potomac school, two of them are middle school age. They have been going to a school on a regular daily schedule. They are thriving and have remained healthy.

I support kids going back full time and very much want my older kids in the classroom learning.

With Best Regards,
Beth Copenhaver

Hybrid +

Steve Mauer <mauer.power@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 8:08 AM

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

Cc: Natalie Mauer <doterranatalie@gmail.com>

Good morning.

One of the beautiful things about living in Missoula is the concentration of well-educated and well-intentioned citizens. To that point, I am sure that by now you have been availed every possible configuration of what a school day should look like, with some ideas emanating from pure emotion and others from the scientific method.

One of the fabulous things about the scientific method is that outcomes can be analyzed to gain perspective and insight. The analysis can, and I'll argue, should be used to further refine our thinking. In the context of our kids and MCPS, this means to better the educational experience/ outcome for children.

As a parent I am witness to the hypothesis our community can slow the dispersion of viral infection by reducing classroom experiences by 60% and the children will still experience a quality educational outcome by way of content delivery under MCPS' "hybrid model." My immediate sample size is one child, not a statistically significant number when applying generally accepted analytical principles of the scientific method. I get another limited data set communicating with other parents and observing the neighborhood children running amok. Regardless, what I witness is my reality.

Here is what I see resulting from implementation of the current-form hybrid model. I see children so starved for peer-level social interaction they acquiesce to bullying and other self-destructive behaviors just to be with other children. I see kids watching a two-dimensional screen instead of experiencing three-dimensional life. I see kids deprived of opportunities to develop social skills. I see kids deprived of opportunities to meaningfully engage in the arts, music, and organized physical education.

My kid received straight A's on his report card, but his standardized test scores regressed relative to last year. To me this data point alone supports the notion that in its current form, the hybrid model is deficient in addressing educational needs of our children. I understand children's test scores vary across a wide array of variables and that maybe my kid was having an off-day when the tests were administered. Possible, but unlikely.

Here is what I do not see. I do not observe a reduced number of children with colds, the flu, etc. I do not observe my child increasing his skill sets in mathematics, reading, music, the arts, and maybe the most important skill, in social interactions and problem solving.

Please note, there is no judgement from me concerning how you arrived at your response to an historically improbable event. I believe you were responding with the best of intentions and converged your considerable talents on the circumstance.

You implemented a hypothesis and the outcomes bear scrutiny. That scrutiny needs to guide future actions. It is my observation the unintended consequences of the hybrid model are far more pernicious and with dire long-term prognoses.

As fiduciaries of our society's educated future you are to act in the best interests of MPCS students. Please return to a 5 days a week in-school model. Statistics from around the country support this as the highest and best outcome for our children and our Nation's future. Above all, our children need it.

Best,
Steve

Full time school

Jami Bay <ajbay4@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:05 AM

I am writing to express the need to bring our kids back to school full time. I have a freshman and a senior. I am mostly concerned with my freshman falling behind, and the stress involved with trying to keep up with the current block style teaching method. Take Algebra for example, he struggles through 3 weeks of multiple worksheets, computer work and in class work, just trying to absorb what he can. The stress and frustration is so difficult to watch. When he goes back to that class, 3 weeks later, it feels like he's starting over.

I commend the teachers for all they are doing to help these students navigate this schedule, but I feel like my child is not doing well with this ongoing hybrid method.

Other schools in our state are full time, and it is working!! Our kids need to be in the classroom.

We chose to keep our kids in school vs. the online academy. So please, consider the mental and educational needs of our kids and allow them back in the classroom full time.

Sincerely,
Jami Bay

Sent from my iPhone

Be our Advocates

S <marquardt.stella@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:11 AM

To whom it may concern:

I understand the board is debating return to live school for students.

As a senior last year, I was fortunate to have only the last few months of my school year taken from me. My sister Maya, however, is unfortunately only a junior this year.

I am now a Freshman STEM student at MSU. I can't imagine trying to hack this science curriculum without the solid base of math and science that I received at Sentinel High School. Long story short, in spite of the best efforts by her teachers to execute the curriculum, there is no substitute for live learning. In conversations with my sister, it is obvious she is not getting the education she will need in the near future. My parents have worked hard and value education, and although it is a poor substitute for live learning, we can afford outside tutoring and help. However it is my concern that many student's parents are not able to, or are not organized enough, to arrange for this sort of additional help. They rely on the public school system.

I was surprised how quickly the administration rolled over last year and shut down the school, as if they didn't understand or were afraid to advocate for our education. There are no perfect solutions for this situation, however you are the only voice for students, and you need to advocate for their needs. You are the people who understand the most how important attendance, education, and live learning is. It is your professional responsibility to advocate for the needs of students that are currently not being met.

Thank you,

Stella Marquardt



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Return the kids to school

Kelsey Dick <kelsey@bigskymedical.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:20 AM

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

My husband and I have 4 kids in MCPS schools (5th grader at Paxson, 7th grader at Washington MS and 10th and 11th graders at Hellgate). We are in support of progressing forward toward full in-person school. Science supports this, all other schools in Missoula County are full-time and the kids and families are excelling. My children are all straight A students and are highly involved in their school athletics and activities. They are well-adjusted and have rolled with the punches thus far, but I am very concerned about their well being, emotionally, socially and intellectually. The longer this continues, the more long-term negative impacts this will have on kids. I know there is a lot to consider for the task force, and we respect and trust our leadership. We felt it was important to communicate where we stand on this issue.

Thank you,
Kelsey and Ryan Dick

Sent from my iPhone

Montana Constitution Article X-Section 1

Joe Johnston <jiggers20@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:22 AM

MCPS board members -

Montana Constitution Article X Section 1. Educational goals and duties:

(1) It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person. Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state. If we compare Missoula County public schools current approach to hybrid learning of other peer districts, it is abundantly clear, these goals, duties and obligations are not being met.

If families are making the choice to send their children to the MOA, you have provided them that opportunity. But as the parent of a high school junior (with far too much time on her hands), losing the past year of in-person instruction, has been extremely difficult to watch. Teachers are burning out, and sadly, students are becoming less-engaged by the day. I plead to you, please get our students back in the class-room for the final semester of classes.

I appreciate your time.

Joe Johnston



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Return to full-time school: high school

Mary Thompson <tmbthomp@msn.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:40 AM

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

Dear Task Force,

My name is Mary Thompson and I am a teacher at Lolo School. Since day one this year, Lolo school has maintained in person, five day a week learning for all students. Prior to school beginning, our administration made a decision to offer parents a choice between fully online and fully in-person. They adjusted teachers accordingly once this data was obtained. This obviously alleviated crowded classrooms, as some students/families opted to learn at home. It has definitely been touch and go at times (due to staffing), but Lolo School has never had to shut their doors even once this year.

I also have a high school senior at Sentinel. He has always been a very good student and is currently taking three college level courses as a result of his hard work and determination as a student over the years. This year has been the hardest year of his entire life academically. He needs to be back in school in a full-time setting! He is seriously lacking in motivation, and is most definitely not getting the education he deserves this year. He is not only suffering academically, he is suffering emotionally, socially, and mentally. I believe returning to a full-time schedule can be done safely and I strongly encourage you to make this decision quickly. Thank you.

Mary Thompson

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

(no subject)

Jolene Linneman <jolene.linneman64@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:44 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Task Force,

Please allow children back in school full time there is already an option for those who do not want in person. My husband and I work outside of the home, as essential workers, as do many other parents. Our kids are safest in school in a controlled environment keeping within the same group of kids in their classrooms. Otherwise we are gambling their health with babysitter's or huge daycare center's and unnecessarily exposing them to a huge contact number defeating the whole purpose of keeping them safe. Hellgate elementary is 5 days a week and is doing great as well as all the Bitterroot. Other cities in Montana who have worst Covid case numbers are in school successfully 5 days a week. My children are in 1st grade and 4th grade, and have been given the benefit of a private tutor/nannie and parents who are involved in their learning. Yet they still are falling behind grade level! No matter all the extra help and diligently following assigned at home work it doesn't equate to the 3 days which is hours of education they are missing and falling so far behind, unnecessarily. I commend the teachers for having to do two jobs simultaneously and the stress of producing at home and in-person instruction when we could simplify and they could just focus on in-person. This is a disservice to our children and I have serious concerns about my children's education and the entire future for this generation of children. The longer we keep them from going full time the farther behind they are becoming. How are they going to get caught up? Why aren't we following the advice of Pediatricians, like Dr. Hall who said kids need to be in school and are in such a low risk category. The sooner they can get back to school the sooner we can gap this education loss.

Best,

Jolene Linneman

**Public Comment** <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Please consider!

Brooke Summerfield <shortcakesm@icloud.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:53 AM

Please vote to move to hybrid + (4 days of in-person school) for all grades!! We know so much more now than we did when the board decided to offer the learning options at the beginning of the school year. If parents don't want their kids in school that much, they can opt for the online academy. And with the diligence that our teachers and kids are displaying with masking and social distancing - it seems to me that there are very few covid cases linked to schools. I am extremely concerned about kiddos who don't have enough food at home and/or instability in their at home dynamics. Kids flourish with routine, structure, positive influences/interactions and regular meals! I also feel like my daughter's education is suffering- and she'll be better prepared for college and life after with increased in-person learning. Again, we know better, so let's do better and get these kids back in school more days a week!! Thank you for your service on the Board, and for your consideration!

Brooke Summerfield

Sent from my iPhone

Bring our children back full time

Torrie Tschan <t_shotwell24@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 10:05 AM

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

Cc: "Javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <Javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "jccourtney@mcpsmt.org" <jccourtney@mcpsmt.org>, "kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org" <kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org>, "Cfarr@missoulacounty.us" <Cfarr@missoulacounty.us>, "vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org" <vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org>, "vjhaines@mcpsmt.org" <vjhaines@mcpsmt.org>, Kylie Barnes <barnes.fam@hotmail.com>, "bkrininger@mcpsmt.org" <bkrininger@mcpsmt.org>, "kllaslovich@mcpsmt" <kllaslovich@mcpsmt>, "eleahy@missoulacounty.us" <eleahy@missoulacounty.us>, "djrossberg@mcpsmt.org" <djrossberg@mcpsmt.org>, "jbserviss@mcpsmt.org" <jbserviss@mcpsmt.org>, "avshattuck@mcpsmt.org" <avshattuck@mcpsmt.org>, "nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org" <nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org>, "g_padgetslote@yahoo.com" <g_padgetslote@yahoo.com>, "Brucetribbensee@submittable.com" <Brucetribbensee@submittable.com>, "awake@mcpsmt.org" <awake@mcpsmt.org>, "pcwright@mcpsmt.org" <pcwright@mcpsmt.org>, "rwatson@mcpsmt.org" <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, "emmamerle@gmail.com" <emmamerle@gmail.com>, "bfrank@mcpsmt.org" <bfrank@mcpsmt.org>, "gdecker@mcpsmt.org" <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, "asobin@mcpsmt.org" <asobin@mcpsmt.org>

To Whom it may concern,

I would like to voice my concern about our children not going to school full time. As a parent to three children in grades Kindergarten, fourth, and sixth, I am continually concerned for their lack of education. I completely understood back in March when everything shut down. We had no idea what we were dealing with, how would this illness impact our children? No one knew and we needed to keep them safe. However, almost a year later, there has been several studies that have shown children are impacted the least out of any population, and yet, here we are, barely educating our children to "keep them safe." I understand we need the school staff to be safe as well, again contact tracing has proven Covid is being spread outside of school. I am a registered nurse at a hospital in Missoula. Since last March we have been asked to not travel and keep our socializing to a minimum to reduce our chances of needing to quarantine or becoming sick so we can staff our hospital. I would expect no less from the staff in schools. We are all making sacrifices to help keep ourselves and our community as safe as possible. We have had several nurses sick or quarantining due to family members being exposed, yet we still manage to keep the hospital running. It is not an option to shut down, it should not be an option for schools either. Education should be considered essential!! The option for families that work full time (like myself) is to put our children into camps/daycare on the days they do not go to school. How is this any safer?! They can go to daycare all day, but not school? This is completely baffling to me.

My frustrations also stem from schools in our community that have somehow managed to offer 4-5 days/week in person education to their students, and here all of Missoula County schools sit for **months** in a two-day hybrid schedule. There is a wait list to try to get into Valley Christen and St. Joe's, all due to the fact they have been in school 4 days/week this entire year. Lolo, Florence, and Hellgate elementary have been full time as well. I am aware of some cases where the schools had to temporally close due to staffing issues/exposure, however it was temporary, and they were able to get back to school.

We as parents were asked to take a survey last summer asking if we wanted our kids back in school or not. The majority was YES!! Get them back to school! The parents that have kids or they themselves have underlying risk factors were given the great option of MOU. So why are the families that choose the option for in person learning still not given that option?! Two days a week is not enough time to properly educate our kids. I have seen it firsthand with all of my children. My Kindergartner is far behind where they would usually be this time of the school year. This is the foundation to build their whole academic career, and we are fumbling! My fourth grader is two reading levels behind his age. He has an amazing teacher that is giving us extra work at home to hopefully get him caught up. My sixth grader has been in tears over his

1/11/2021

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - Bring our children back full time

online homework, confused on what classes he is even supposed to be in with the "block schedules." This hybrid schedule is causing anxiety for my children. They are suffering, mentally and with their education. I hate to even think about all of the children in this community that do not have support at home. What is happening to those kids? They do not have a voice or parents that will help them! That is your job as the board, to help the children! The fear and "what ifs" need to end!

I implore you to take all of this into account and get our kids back to school!! You have protocols in place for everyone's safety, so use them! Our children (all ages!!!) need to go back to school now.

Thank you,
Torrie Tschan



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Get ALL kids back in school

maloneyj@in-tch.com <maloneyj@in-tch.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 10:09 AM

Reply-To: maloneyj@in-tch.com

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Please vote on Tuesday to bring ALL kids back to school. ALL ages are falling behind. High school kids are competing with kids that are going full time for college placement. Middle school kids heading into high school are nowhere near where they need to be to be successful in high school. Mental health is a HUGE issue right now. Our kids are failing on so many levels. Get these kids back.
Thank you!

mail2web - Check your email from the web at
<https://link.mail2web.com/mail2web>

Full time schooling

Saralyn Houska <saralyn.marie@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 10:10 AM

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

Hello-

My name is Saralyn Houska and my son is a freshman at Big Sky. I would very much like to see the kids go back to school full time. I have two other kids who attend Hellgate Elementary and they are, and have been, full time all year. There doesn't seem to be any more covid cases at Hellgate with the kids full time then at Big Sky with the kids part time. I myself am not concerned with the virus, or the potential increase in exposure if they do go back full time. I don't think he'd have any more exposure than he does right now, playing travel hockey or going to friends' houses. Right now my son goes to school Tuesdays and Wednesdays, has two periods a day and switches classes every 11 days. It has been extremely stressful for him, to the point he was making himself physically sick. He needs to be in school full time, he needs to see his teachers every day and have that accountability.

Thank you,
Saralyn

Moving to Hybrid+ (4 days per week)

Theresa Floyd <threefloyds96@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 10:55 AM

Hello,

I am the mom of a high school student at Hellgate high school.

While I believe that the teachers are doing an amazing job in these circumstances, I believe that it would be beneficial for high school and middle school students to attend school more frequently, as well as the youngest grade-schoolers.

We have learned that because of the safety precautions taken at schools (for which I applaud MCPS), they are not locations where the spread of the virus is a major concern.

While allowing students to attend school more frequently, which would increase the number of students in school at one time, high schools could maintain the other safety precautions, including mask wearing and the block schedule which aids in limiting spread and contact tracing.

All students, not only younger ones, benefit from being in more frequent contact with their teachers. And friendships and socializing with their peer group are an important part of development for older students.

Therefore, I would like to request that a move to 4 days a week in school be considered for middle and high school students.

Thank you!
Theresa Floyd

phased re-opening

Jessica Wilsey <jbwilsey@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 11:21 AM

Dear School Board Members,

Thank you for your service and time. I appreciate all the time and energy you expend for this position. I would like briefly to share my thoughts with you.

I am not comfortable opening the schools further without access to vaccinations for all school staff. School staff are risking their health and lives (and that of their families that they go home to) being in the school environment. Some classrooms do not have windows to allow fresh and (hopefully) clean air in. To request that we increase that risk without access to vaccinations is unacceptable and should not be an option; it is unsafe. We are all feeling overworked and underappreciated, moving to open the schools further without access to vaccinations will exacerbate those feelings.

Thank you,
Jessica Wilsey, M. Ed.

Thank you to MCPS. I am opposing the argument that we should bring students back fulltime right now.

Kelly McDonald <kpmcdonald@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 11:21 AM

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

Dear MCPS School Board and Superintendent Watson

I have two children in MCPS, 6th grade and 4th grade. I would like to express my gratitude toward MCPS for creating the Missoula Online Academy. I am grateful for all that the MOA teachers and administrators are doing— they are doing excellent work. My family is truly appreciative and in awe of all of their hard work. I also have gratitude for all of the work the in-person MCPS teachers are doing.

I have to say that my children are thriving in MOA. They are thriving much more with distance learning than they ever did in MCPS in-person school. They are excelling in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Also, ironically, through distance learning they are excelling in their socialization skills and getting more positive social interaction than ever before at school. They are active participants during the class sessions, which I believe they have never had the confidence to do in regular school. Also my 6th grader has taken on leadership opportunities that he never had before this. Then, after school, they enjoy virtual playdates in zoom or googlemeet with their classmates. Ironically, in online school my children are getting about 1000 times more opportunities for positive social interaction with their peers than they have ever gotten before through regular school.

Now, I have heard that some parents are expressing dissatisfaction with MCPS for not starting up full time immediately. I think going full time right now would be a terrible mistake, because of the current pandemic. Montana's death numbers have been increasing, and even some children in Montana who had COVID and survived are experiencing serious longterm health problems from it. Everyone knows that schools have always been places where viruses and anything contagious will spread easily. Now is not the time to bring students back full time, unless we want Missoula teachers and families to be at great risk for their safety. Native American families in Montana have been hit hard by coronavirus, accounting for more than 30% of COVID deaths in the state. I would not like to see MCPS cause any increases in case numbers or death numbers for Native Americans or any other minority or vulnerable population.

In addition, I believe the health and safety of teachers is the utmost importance right now. Why would we gamble with anybody's life or health?

Students falling behind in reading,? welcome to the club. My children have been well-below average, in fact, grade levels behind in reading for the last several years, and are finally getting a chance to catch up to their grade levels. Children are resilient and I believe all children will be finding ways to succeed despite the challenges we face.

I have read the parents' recent opinion pieces in the Missoula Current and the Missoulian, and I entirely disagree with their arguments. They provide no specifics or references about a plan, just general statements about other communities they don't bother to name, or they use the word research without adding anything specific. Their arguments that the MCPS school board or administration has not considered the needs of students and parents, are wrong and insulting. My question is, those parents voicing opinion for MCPS to go full time right now, where were they during that important August 11 school board meeting? Where were they during that important October 1 school board meeting?

The MCPS board has done an excellent job at asking questions, raising issues, and has heard from so many concerned parents all along. Where were these voices that are just now trying to join the conversation, but are mostly just complaining about teachers and even mocking teachers? What an outrage, to complain about teachers or the school board at a time like this, these parents should be ashamed. They do not stand for or speak for any students or families except their own, and they are so new to this community discussion that they do not hold credibility. My hope is that you will listen to reasonable, credible arguments and distinguish them from the unreasonable, impatient, selfish, and careless. Thank you for your time and your service! Sincerely,

Kelly McDonald

For MCPS Board meeting of January 12, 2021

Julie Tompkins <naturebroad@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 11:39 AM

Superintendent Watson and MCPS Board Trustees, thank you for the enormous amount of work you have done in this singularly challenging school year. You and all teachers and staff have made concerted, consistent efforts to put the well-being of our children first. Our community owes you our gratitude and support in continuing to adhere to the Phase 1 hybrid learning model.

Your planning has been recently denounced by a group advocating for fully in-person instruction. This group claims that science backs a return to school in direct contradiction to the CDC, Missoula City-County Health Department, and actual scientific research:

1) COVID cases and deaths are increasing nationally far above the percentages in the indicators rubric. Data from the past six months have shown Montana to lag behind national trends and the transmission rate we are currently experiencing is expected to climb. This may be due in part to the COVID variant B117, now identified in 8 states and estimated to be upwards of 50% more contagious than the original strain. B117 has been found to impact children's health more than the original strain.

2) The Harvard-associated hospitals study "Pediatric SARS-CoV-2: Clinical Presentation, Infectivity, and Immune Responses" published August, 2020 in The Journal of Pediatrics found that children of all ages infected with COVID had higher levels of the virus in their airways than hospitalized adults. Similar studies in Germany and India have indicated children presenting asymptotically had greater viral loads than that of symptomatic adults.

3) MCPS has been provided with limited funding for the PPE necessary for a fully in-person instructional environment. There are limited resources to meet the need for increased contact tracing by both the City-County Health Department and MCPS staff. Additionally, HVAC systems in the schools are not designed to limit viral transmission from an increased student population.

4) The newly elected governor and state legislature seek to end the statewide mask mandate as soon as possible. Even if Missoula County and MCPS require mask use, there is no limiting contact with residents of surrounding counties. Furthermore, the governor has put teachers and school personnel in a lower tier for vaccination prioritization, and has said he wants to cut the budget of MT DPHHS. All of this would contribute to increased COVID transmission and reduced capacity to address it.

If MCPS would return to in-person instruction this spring, it would not only contradict its own recommendations, it would place an unfair burden on an already stressed workforce. Teachers and staff are expected to provide core curriculum, socialization, behavioral guidance, nutrition, physical and mental wellness in a "normal" environment. Now we are asking them to do so under a heightened threat to their personal and family welfare. You can be certain that the same group demanding we skip to Phase 3 despite all evidence against it, would be the first to lay blame on MCPS when the inevitable outbreak occurs. Learning loss can be amended by a good education system; the loss of health or life cannot. Please continue to follow the Phase 1 model.

I appreciate your time and consideration,
Julie Tompkins, Hellgate High School parent

**FW: Missoula kids have a Constitutional right to equal educational opportunities;
Give K-12 kids the option to return to in-person learning**

Tasha Jones <npjones@boonekarlberg.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 12:00 PM

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

Hello Missoula School Board:

My son is a sophomore at Sentinel High School. **I urge you to allow ALL Missoula students the option to return to full-time, in-person learning.** Montana's Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to equal educational opportunities. See *MT Const. Art. X, Sec. 1*. Other schools in Montana and across the nation are safely allowing full-time, in-person learning. To deny my child the same opportunity is a violation of his Constitutional educational rights, in addition to harming his physical and mental well-being. The loss of educational opportunities out-weigh the risk of C19 exposure especially given the safety protocols in place and the reported numbers in Missoula County. See *Schools and the Path to Zero: Our Recommendations & Guidance*, globalepidemics.org.

Please allow ALL Missoula kids the opportunity to go back to school!

Respectfully,

Natasha Prinzing Jones

Shareholder

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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

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**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Comment in support of moving to 4-day schoolwork for K-2

Jesse C. Kodadek <jkodadek@wordenthane.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 12:15 PM

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

Hello,

I am writing to support moving K-2 students to the Hybrid + model later this month. We have a first-grader at Lewis and Clark and it is obvious to us that more time in formal school would be a huge help to getting our kid caught up on reading and other skills.

Thank you all for your hard work.

Jesse Kodadek

408 Pattee Creek Drive

Missoula, MT 59801



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

MCPS second semester schedule

Stacey Hargesheimer <slhargesheimer@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 12:52 PM

As a high school Special Ed teacher and parent of an elementary student: if all staff and students continue to wear masks, and my room can remain ventilated with both windows open, and all staff and students get vaccinated, I want all students to return full time, five days a week.--

Stacey Hargesheimer
Sentinel High School-Room 180
728-2400, ext. 7622



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Opinion on tomorrow's recommendation

Nicole Whitescarver <nmwhitescarver@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 1:16 PM

To: Kathryn KaCee Ballou <kcballou@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>

Hello,

As a teacher at Sentinel High School, I recognize that while hybrid is likely the safest choice for preventing the spread of Covid, it is not the most effective educational model.

I would feel comfortable returning to all students 4 or 5 days per week in the extended block with 3, 90 minute classes per day in the classroom if the following were met:

- *limited class sizes (I can accommodate 18 or fewer students with social distancing),
- *cleaning of classrooms nightly (often the floors and trash are not attended to in room 185, the only cleaning of desks and counters is done by myself and my students); cleaning in other areas of the building is better,
- *covid vaccination available to at risk populations of students and staff,
- *following the state or county recommendation for masks,
- *continued availability of rapid testing for staff,
- *continued monitoring of spread of covid in the school and community.

Thank you for considering my opinion,

--

N.M. Whitescarver

Art Educator

Sentinel High School



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

In-person learning

Molly Tingley <mtingley@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 1:44 PM

Hello,

First, thank you for the time, thought, and effort you have put in during this difficult time.

I am writing as a MCPS school counselor and also as a parent of three children who attend five days a week in-person at Hellgate Elementary. I see first hand the disparity between the two learning models. My children **safely** attend school in person five days a week where they experience academic rigor and positive social interactions. They are happy and progressing academically. As a parent, I am grateful beyond measure for this positive experience.

On the other hand, when I meet with struggling students as a part of my role at MCPS, I will ask them if they could change one thing in their life, what would that be. Many of them respond that their life would improve if they could attend school in person. Students experience loneliness and isolation, depression, academic frustration, and non-engagement under the current hybrid schedule.

The opportunity to attend the MOA as a substitute for in-person learning is a safe option for students and families who have underlying health concerns. Attending school four or five days a week in-person is not an experiment, nor is it asking teachers to put their lives at risk as some have argued. We see surrounding school districts offering in-person learning five days a week **safely**. The transmission isn't happening within the school setting in a majority of cases. The precautions taken at school are greater than what some students experience after the school day.

If the school board chooses to move to Phase Two, there are still *numerous* safety protocols in place with the option for students to attend the MOA if they choose. Moving to phase two is a safe, rational, and reasonable response to the harmful social/emotional/academic effects of the hybrid learning model. Please move to phase two of the MCPS Return To School plan.

Thank you,
Molly Tingley

--
Molly Tingley, M.A., NCC
Washington Middle School Counselor
406.728.2400 *2677
mtingley@mcpsmt.org

Teamed For Success!

Full Time Return

Melissa Redmon <melissadunton29@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 2:47 PM

Hello

My son is currently attending C.S. Porter Middle School. I am writing in regards to the current scheduling as it is concerning me. I heard from a fellow friend and teacher that the school board is currently only planning to vote in K-2 go back full time. This is concerning. Our middle school and high school children need the interaction and education just well as all other younger students. I am concerned about my sons education as well as mental and physical health. During our parent teacher conference his home room teacher mentioned that she was a little concerned that he wasn't fitting into a social group or making friends like middle school kids usually do when transitioning to a new school. She said in general this is something she is seeing across the board. Our kids deserve more. He does have two good friends from elementary school that attend on opposite days. When asked if the school could be flexible with our attendance days I was told changes to the alphabet was not an option. Not only has the scheduling caused issues for our social circle but it has put a stop to our ability to work together with a support group we had used and worked with in the past. Our home includes two full time working parents. We have taken on a large financial burden to ensure that our son is taken care of and we are able to assist with his education. All this with what seems to be no end in sight, I am unsure that we can continue with this current schedule and I assure you we cant be the only family having a hard time with this. We have both exhausted our FMLA and our employers are running so short staffed due to the school scheduling that securing our full time employment is no longer guaranteed. Businesses have continued to be open in full capacity leaving the employee stuck with the decision of working or educating.

I was under the impression the schools have received extra funding to help with the return to school. Do we have a plan for this funding, has it been allocated to help get all students back in school or only our younger "high risk" students. My second question is why have all the other schools in our surrounding areas been successful with 5 days of in person learning while we are still stuck in a two day in person schedule. It seem to be working well for other districts and those children are benefiting from a full education while we sit back and settle for a part time education. What is the plan to catch MCPS students up in the long run? All these other districts will be ahead as they have received a full year of education. I find in our home specifically retaining Math, History and English

lessons with 6 to 12 week breaks is a challenge. With two full time working parents, enforcing and navigating thru a remote learning system isn't realistic. We aren't educators, we don't have the training, resources or time to be full time educators, workers and parents. The kids are lacking an education that our public school system should be providing. There has been plenty of scientific evidence stating schools are safe to return full time.

I hope the school board will re-evaluate as all students deserve to be back in school. Our middle school students need to be back full time just as much as our elementary students. Our family, as many other families depend on two full time incomes. We need our kids to be educated and taken care of during the school day, just as they have in the past. This pandemic is not ending anytime soon, yet when all other businesses are conducting "business as usual" it leaves the working families choosing between our kids education and providing housing and food for our families.

Please consider a full time return for all students.

Thank you.

Melissa Redmon



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Fwd: Hybrid + 4 Days Per Week

Jason Prinzing <jeprinzing@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 3:55 PM

Greetings MCPS School Board Members,

My son is in the fourth grade at Lowell Elementary. Let me begin by saying that the staff at Lowell has been amazing in the last 12 months. They have dealt with a situation the likes of which no one could have anticipated. They have done so with professionalism and grace, doing their best to make sure that students like my son know they are valued, cared for, and that students know how important their education is. This is also due to the leadership of MCPS.

As successful as the last 12 months have been, I firmly believe that students need to be in school on a schedule that is closer to normal. While our family has been able to make adjustments in coordination with his teacher to make sure that my son stays on track academically, I believe that he is suffering in other areas. There are many other ways that students benefit from being in school outside of academics. Their development on a social, emotional, and overall mental health level is starting to pay a heavy price under this current system of instruction.

From the very beginning, very low rates for infection have been consistently reported in schools and in age groups under the age of 18 at local, state, and national levels. Also at this point in the school year the possibility of additional exposure is not going to increase if students are together in class four days a week. At this point we know from the science that points of infection, incubation rates, ability to spread the virus, developing symptoms, etc. all take enough time that seeing students only two days a week really doesn't lessen the chances of exposure. If a child has been exposed to COVID-19 and they attend school on a Tuesday, they will have exposed the staff at a school who would then expose the other group of children that attend that school on a Thursday. I don't see how going to school 4 days a week increases the possibility of exposure.

Many in a variety of fields such as psychology and education have speculated that we will not see the full negative impact the last 12 months has had on our children for many years. However right now, in the present, there are many children who are already falling behind and are missing the many benefits that being in school on a full-time basis provides. It is time to return them to some sense of normalcy. I implore you, please send our children back to school.

Thank you,

Jason Prinzing

--
Jason Prinzing
406-239-8000

High school students

Gena Stevens <gstevens@ymcamissoula.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 3:55 PM

I am writing today to ask for strong consideration for high school students to return to school every day. The level of learning they are able to achieve is significantly below where they need to be. I am not a substitute for an Algebra or Chemistry teacher. I think kids may be getting by but grades probably don't reflect whether or not they are where they need to be in order to prepare for college.

They are social creatures and I think the ability to regulate groups (by class) is stronger in the school, than outside the school. Not having them in school is probably not reducing the spread of Covid amongst them, their families or the MCPS staff.

I beg you to put their academic best interests first. They have lost an entire year of quality learning.

--

Thank you,

Gena Stevens
Accountant
GREATER MISSOULA FAMILY YMCA
3000 S. Russell St.
Missoula, MT 59801
(P) 406-721-YMCA (9622) ext 6246 (F) 406-540-5160

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Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Covid Opening Plan

Tyler Bowen <tdbowen@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 4:16 PM

Thank you for your time and consideration in diligently going through the data and making decisions that are in the best interests of our students and our community.

I appreciate that the district is taking into consideration the new advisory from the Harvard study. That being said, I worry that some on the Covid committee are looking at these considerations without ensuring that we are actually meeting the mitigation guidelines laid out by the study. Until we can fully meet the 6 specific strategies laid out by the Harvard study, how can we truly say that fully reopening is safe. I know that we are all anxious to get back to normal and have our students back in a full time capacity, but it's imperative that we do so safely by fulfilling the parameters laid out by the study, rather than simply saying that meeting 4 or 5 out of 6 is good enough. Health and safety should never be considered in the light of "good enough". I know that Dr. Watson stated that "it's on us" to ensure that those other elements are met, but how do we ensure that they are met? What recourse is there if they are not met? Why are we moving forward before we have ensured that they are in fact being met? Now that teachers are unlikely to get vaccinated before the end of the school year they are at a continued risk of putting their own, and their families health and safety at risk.

Another point that I think was important was the 2nd slide that was shared by Ellen Leahy from the Health Department that showed that we are once again in an upward trend of infections. Though we are in the early stages of that upward trend, all of the focus seemed to revolve around the downward trend we were on for the previous month, of which I believe could be largely attributed to college being out of session. Now that they are back in session, and we are seeing a new upswing, I don't know that it is prudent that we move forward before we see what happens with this upswing.

The last thing I found concerning from the discussions in today's Covid task force is, I noticed all of the focus was on moving forward. Even with a focus on moving forward, there also needs to be an exit plan. What is the district going to do if a full reopen shows to be causing a significant increase in spread? What if our community spread has a significant increase again? Have they taken into consideration that the new strain of the virus that is now spreading in several states and will eventually reach us is both more contagious and more likely to affect children?

I understand that we all want to get back to normal, and I myself am anxious to be back in the classroom with all of my students, but I think it's imperative that we are prudent with our decision making and we look at all the different angles and elements before we jump right back into putting all kids back in the classroom at the same time.

Thank you for your time,

--

Tyler Bowen, M.Ed.
Missoula County Public Schools
Sentinel High School
Health and Physical Education

(406) 728-2400 ext. 7083

tdbowen@mcpsmt.org
<http://www.mcpsmt.org/>



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

For allowing schools to fully reopen

Victoria Parks <victoriaparksmt@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 4:37 PM

Missoula County Public School Trustees, Superintendent Watson, and Covid Task Force Members,
I thank all of you for your hard work. I know that you make thoughtful decisions with very difficult scenarios. Today, I urge
you to please let our children go back to school full time.

Thank you,
Victoria Parks



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hybrid Plus Now!

Katrina O'Neil Weckenbrock <katrinaow@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 5:53 PM

I urge the trustees to follow the science and allow for the safe return of ALL K-5 students as soon as possible. It is clear that public health officials and leading researchers believe that this is possible to do safely, and that most of the communities around us have been doing so for quite some time. Please support working families and vulnerable children by voting for the safe return of MCPS students to at least hybrid plus as soon as possible!

Thank you for your time!
Katrina Weckenbrock



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

parent advocate for returning kids to school

amythorpe77 <amythorpe77@yahoo.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 6:29 PM

To whom it may concern

I am a concerned parent of a high school and middle school student.

I see first hand my children struggling without proper instruction and the guidance from their teachers and am completely at a loss for words into why we as a community are allowing this. We are letting our children down when it comes to their education.

Our kids need to be back in school full-time!

All "Essential" workers out in the community are working so then why is it that our teachers and students are not back in school?

School is "Essential" and we should be putting our students education first and foremost.

Many schools are already and have been attending 5 days of school with minimal transmission, so why is the MCPS not following suit?

We strongly support our teachers and want to see our kids back in school full-time.

Our vote is to get our kids back in school 5 days a week.

Sincerely
Amy Thorpe

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

Expanding number of days in school

Ashild Bork <ashildbork8@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 9:40 PM

To: Publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To whom it may concern,

We are writing this email in support of allowing our kids to return to school full-time. We have 3 children at Jeannette Rankin Elementary. We appreciate the measures that have been made in keeping our children and teachers safe. We feel the school has done an exceptional job. While safety is a top priority, we feel academic developments, as well as reduced strain on already stressed out working parents, are also high priorities. We feel all three areas can be supported adequately with continued measures of wearing masks, etc. The vast majority of schools in Montana have been functioning at full capacity without significant problems. Please strongly consider opening up school full-time again.

Thank you in advance for your time.
Adam and Åshild Bork



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

1/12 board meeting public comment

Edward Joy <eddie.m.joy@gmail.com>

Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 10:23 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To concerned parties,

My wife and I wish to add comment with regards to returning to full time in-person learning.

Way back in September, Superintendent Watson thought that we would likely have our kids back full time learning by the end of the month. Now we are nearly half way through this school year and nothing has changed. We certainly understand that evolving case counts in the fall affected the plan to return to school full time. And while we appreciate the need for caution when considering the broad and diverse needs of all MCPS families, students and employees, my wife and I are now asking you, "if not now, when?" Many school districts, both larger and smaller than MCPS, have returned full time and been able to maintain acceptable safety levels. The reality is that in the vacuum that remote and hybrid learning has created, kids are already congregating in increasing numbers with decreasing safety measures. My wife is a nurse and I am a small business owner. We have been forced to use Grandparents, parks and rec camps, and other community resources to bridge the gaps in childcare for our six and three year old children. We are one of many, many Missoula families with this story. How can this scenario, multiplied across our district, not be considered a considerable risk. When individual families are forced to invent their own childcare, often jumping from extended families, to camps, to school, how can this not increase the risk of exposure for all of us? Fortunately, the online academy exists for those families and teachers that are not comfortable with in-person instruction. For the rest of us, please define how we will measure safe, full-time, in-person learning, enact the plan, and begin getting these children back in the classroom full-time. For many of us this is no longer tenable.

Returning to school full time no longer feels like an unacceptable risk. Nor is it a leap of faith. We know how to do this. Safely, our kids need to be back in school.

Thank you for your consideration,
Eddie Joy, Elie Meierbachtol



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Phase Decision

Cassandra Sholey-Larson <csholey-larson@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 8:48 AM

Board of Trustees,

Due to the fact that high-schoolers need to work within the community, increasing their risk of contraction and spread of COVID-19, I would ask that we stay in a hybrid learning model (Phase 1) for our second semester in order to decrease spread throughout the high school and community.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Cassy Sholey
Big Sky Life Skills Para-educator

To build trust please lead by Example

Lindsay Manzo <lmanzo@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 9:10 AM

If the board believes that adults (high school students count the same as you as far as spread and Covid) should be meeting in person in schools in high numbers 3 feet or less apart - then the board needs to as well.

If you believe this is safe for the students in Missoula County who spread like you do (so really, middle school and high school) please show that you mean this, and believe it is safe and meet in person (and sit 3 feet apart from each other).

Right now teachers and students are being told by many adults that are only comfortable meeting remotely, that it is safe for them to return. This is hard to believe when administration, task forces and board members meet remotely for safety.

Please show that you mean what you decide and meet in person after this meeting for the rest of the year. When kids are in school, you are in person (3 feet away from each other) in solidarity. It will make the community and staff feel supported and safe.

IF you do not think you can do this - you should not be approving students coming back fulltime. Teachers DO NOT HAVE OPTIONS to work remotely if they feel unsafe. A small percentage were privileged to work remotely (some with health issues and some without) - the rest are expected to be in person - and at the high school levels, with 75 young adults that sit 3 feet or less near each other, and work in groups and play sports with no masks... or we can quit.

Please start meeting in person so that we know that you mean what you decide - that this is safe. I will ask the same of the district administration.

Thanks for reading. Again, if you don't feel comfortable surrounding yourself with your fellow board members, consider sitting in a room for 4.5 hours with 75 high school students....

Lindsay Manzo
Sentinel High School
Biology/Wildlife Biology
lmanzo@mcps.k12.mt.us

Comment on return to full week of instruction

Filip Panusz <filip.panusz@yahoo.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 9:59 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "jccourtney@mcpsmt.org" <jccourtney@mcpsmt.org>, "kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org" <kedalenberg@mcpsmt.org>, "cfarr@missoulacounty.us" <cfarr@missoulacounty.us>, "vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org" <vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org>, "vjhaines@mcpsmt.org" <vjhaines@mcpsmt.org>, "barnes.fam@hotmail.com" <barnes.fam@hotmail.com>, "bkrininger@mcpsmt.org" <bkrininger@mcpsmt.org>, "kllasovich@mcpsmt.org" <kllasovich@mcpsmt.org>, "eleahy@missoulacounty.us" <eleahy@missoulacounty.us>, "djrossberg@mcpsmt.org" <djrossberg@mcpsmt.org>, "jbserviss@mcpsmt.org" <jbserviss@mcpsmt.org>, "avshattuck@mcpsmt.org" <avshattuck@mcpsmt.org>, "nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org" <nfshepherd@mcpsmt.org>, "g_padgetslote@yahoo.com" <g_padgetslote@yahoo.com>, "brucetribbensee@submittable.com" <brucetribbensee@submittable.com>, "awake@mcpsmt.org" <awake@mcpsmt.org>, "pcwright@mcpsmt.org" <pcwright@mcpsmt.org>, "rwatson@mcpsmt.org" <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, "emmamerle@gmail.com" <emmamerle@gmail.com>, "bfrank@mcpsmt.org" <bfrank@mcpsmt.org>, "gdecker@mcpsmt.org" <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, "asobin@mcpsmt.org" <asobin@mcpsmt.org>, "kcballou@mcpsmt.org" <kcballou@mcpsmt.org>

Respected Covid Task Force Committee:

As parents of a third-grade student who attends Paxson Elementary, and as parents who face high risk of Covid complications due to preexisting conditions, we are writing to stand with many others, including the majority of educators, to oppose the premature return to full time instruction.

We have copied a brief letter (see below) that we submitted to the Superintendent last week, but would like to supplement this with a few timely introductory comments.

It has come to our attention that a well-organized group of advocates for return to full time instruction is coordinating an effort to flood you with comments. This is being done through a Facebook page of which you are surely aware. On this page, many participants have posted threatening and demeaning comments about our teachers in our community. A recent article published on January 6th New Studies Suggest Warning for School Reopening (theintercept.com/2021/01/06/school-reopening-studies-covid/) was posted there recently by someone, and it elicited primarily "laughing" and "angry" reactions. This aggressive, disrespectful, and entitled attitude is extremely disturbing. The studies cited by the advocates use data from several months ago that was gathered in communities distant from our own. The claim that full-time instruction is safer than a hybrid model is disingenuous if it assumes a variety of preconditions that cannot or are not met in our community today. I am sure you've received many comments from teachers expressing concerns over limited space, an imminent new virus strain, the current Covid statistics (compared to all prior months), etc. Safety can be ensured given certain idealized conditions, but we do not live under those conditions. Nor do we live in October 2020. We are faced with the now and cannot escape its dictates.

Setting statistics, generalities, and arguments aside, I'd like to bring this down to a far more personal level. We are not in principle opposed to a return to full time instruction. We desire full time instruction for our daughter, for all of the children, and for the community. We too have struggled financially and emotionally with the new reality (living on one income as a result). The question is simply WHEN. My wife is diagnosed with a weak heart and pre-hypertension, and these two combined conditions put her at great risk of Covid complications. She is doubtless not the only one within our community living in fear. There is no study that can contravene the very simple logical conclusion that doubling classroom capacity and limiting off-days to Saturday and Sunday would significantly increase the likelihood of transmission to families, especially since there is often a delay in the onset of symptoms, and many carriers are asymptomatic. Moreover, we won't receive immunity from vaccinations until a fairly long time from now, and even the teachers are now being told that their vaccination schedule has been delayed.

We are by no means insensitive to the very real difficulties and sufferings many are facing during this crisis. WE know some kids are falling behind. Some are claiming that economically disadvantaged and minority families are feeling the brunt of the hybrid model, but ironically the majority of those families (I've seen cited statistics) oppose a return to full-time instruction. This makes sense, because they are often at higher risk of complications and death than wealthy and privileged families (who, by the way, represent some of the most ardent voices on the Facebook page I referenced earlier). The truth is this: no child will benefit from their mother or father dying or ending up in intensive care, and losing even one parent from our community is too many! Sadly, you are not being asked to consider merely the instructional or nutritional quality for children. This crisis has placed you in the unenviable position of having to weigh quality of life for kids versus LIFE-OR-DEATH of community members.

We beseech you to keep this life-or-death consideration in mind as you make this hugely consequential decision. We are encouraged by the fact that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and vaccines are on the way! We hope patience, wisdom, and sensitivity guide your decision making, so that someone is not killed as a result of your negligence only because we could not wait a little longer for vaccines to reach us.

Finally, I wanted to address one final argument. We have been encouraged to send our child to MOA if we are concerned about personal safety. We made a very tormented decision at the outset (in the last minute) to back our daughter out of MOA and enroll her in the hybrid model. This was a huge compromise for us, knowing that there was some risk, however, she was struggling with that model, and we felt it would be very harmful to her. We decided on the hybrid model as a compromise. This model is already a compromise solution. To scuttle it would place many families in an extremely difficult situation where they would be forced to choose between two black options: either place a family member at grave risk OR do grave harm to their child. This is an impossible decision, which is why the hybrid model has been (and continues to be) such a blessing to many of us. Please don't force us to make an impossible decision.

Here is our brief letter penned earlier:

I wanted to share my deep concern about returning MCPS to full-time instruction in class during the most dangerous time since the Covid crisis struck in March. Some of you may be aware that a well organized group of parents have been pressuring district officials to get kids back in school full-time. For some reason they feel entitled to play Russian roulette with other people's lives. They have their own FB group, where some are posting threats to teachers who "won't do their jobs." Within recent days they are galvanizing a concerted effort to write letters and pressure the school district, the teacher's union, and other officials to end the hybrid model that has protected our families. Their arguments have several major flaws.

First, they have pointed out that statistically schools have contributed least to Covid spread, but I'd suggest this is precisely BECAUSE the hybrid model has worked. This is no argument for getting rid of it. Being away from school for five days each week has given precious time to respond to cases BEFORE exposure, keeping sick kids in quarantine before they return to school and expose others. I could relate several examples just from our own personal experience of having our daughter in school on the two-day schedule.

Secondly, they've pointed out that children are not at high risk from the disease, but these children return home every day and serve as vectors. Parents are not all equal in the face of Covid. Just because you are young and healthy does not mean your neighbor parent doesn't have an underlying condition that puts them at great risk of death from Covid. My wife struggles with two underlying conditions that put her at great risk of Covid complications, so this is a very personal issue for us.

Finally, we understand the impact that remote learning has on children's progress and mental health. We've struggled to find the right balance for our daughter and decided, reluctantly at first, to enroll her in the hybrid model precisely for that reason. But quality of life goes out the window for someone who is dead.

When this crisis hit, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths were dramatically lower than they are today. Back then the country went into lockdown. Meanwhile, today there is a clamoring for a return to normalcy. The incongruity and irrationality are jarring. This doesn't even account for the possibility of a new, far more transmittable virus strain beginning to spread. Nor does it account for the warnings from leading epidemiologists about the impending after-effects of the holidays.

Thank you for your attention.

Filip Panusz
(406) 207-9338

Support for K-2 four day school week

Hillary <hillaryo@gmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 10:22 AM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, nhobbins@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, mholland@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us

Hello -

Thank you for all the work you've done and will continue to do to keep our students safe - I appreciate your dedication to our community.

I would like to go on record as in support of having the Missoula County Public School grades kindergarten through 2nd grade return to school for a minimum of (4) days per week, beginning on January 25th.

I am a parent of three children in MCPS - two go to Lewis & Clark, one is at Washington Middle School. My youngest has been affected the most as far as staying on top of learning and I've witnessed the most backward slide in his learning.

Thank you so much -

- Hillary Ogg
406-370-0137



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Comments supporting additional school days for younger students

Ramey Kodadek <rameykodadek@gmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 11:06 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Board of Trustees,

Thank you for your thoughtfulness, consideration, time and dedication you are each giving to our students, families and community by serving on our school board during this unprecedented time. I appreciate your measured, science driven decisions.

I am writing in support of efforts to bring our younger students in the hybrid model back to school for additional days during the school week.

We have a first grader at Lewis and Clark who would benefit greatly from additional school days. I am very concerned about how much he and his peers are falling behind and the lasting impact this will have on their education moving forward. I worry about the families who aren't able to have a tutor come to their home to help during this time like we are. I support any MCPS effort to focus resources on getting our younger students back to more school days in a safe, practical manner.

Please let me know how parents can assist in this effort. Thank you for all you are doing for MCPS students and families during this incredibly challenging time.

Sincerely,
Ramey Kodadek
531-3410

Students Returning to School

Amy Johnson <luck_johnson88@yahoo.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 12:33 PM

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

Dear School Board Members-

I want to start by thanking you for serving the Missoula school board and our kids and to acknowledge that I don't envy your position of having to make these difficult decisions. I realize it's impossible to keep everyone happy!

I have a daughter who is a sophomore at Big Sky. She is very motivated academically and is in advanced classes in the Health Science Academy. I, sadly, feel that this is virtually a lost year for her. She attends school on Tuesday and Wednesday. Monday, Thursday and Friday she logs onto her classes and answers a random attendance question, unrelated to her coursework. She has had one or two classes where the teacher has assigned a quick assignment for remote days, but I would say 95% of the time that's it. For the entire first semester, 3 out of 5 school days she has nothing to do. This means that she hangs out with her friends, spends too much time on social media or watching TV. All of which we are trying to avoid, right?!?

My younger daughter goes to Hellgate Elementary. I have had a front row seat to a school who has made some necessary safety adjustments and continued to provide a great education to students 5 days a week. Kids quarantine when they are identified as close contacts and everyone moves forward accordingly. We couldn't be more impressed with how well they have done and are so thankful that our daughter has continued to grow academically this year.

I have read that you are deciding either on k-2 or k-8 returning to school 5 days a week. I fail to understand the difference between the younger kids returning to school and the high school kids. So many of these kids are safer at school in so many ways. We must take their mental health into consideration, especially this year. The kids at all ages are struggling and need so desperately to return to a schedule and to their classes full time. The parents who feel very strongly that they don't want their kids in school....The Online Academy is a fantastic option for them.

I know we can all agree that we'll breathe a big sigh of relief when the vaccines are distributed completely and we can put this pandemic behind us. The fact of the matter is that our kids are never getting the vaccines. Teachers who are older or otherwise at risk will have them soon. It's time to let the kids get back.

I appreciate you taking the time to hear my opinion.

Thanks,
Amy Johnson

Please start at least K-2, 4 days

Jenni Rohrbach <jennirohrbach@hotmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 12:35 PM

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

With all respect,

>

> This is just a kind, neutral note, as I think mcps district has done an amazing job navigating throughout this pandemic. Our family will be pleased with whatever ways you'll continue managing our schools and learning, as you have the insights and all details. And you need to do your best to support and listen to administrators and teachers who have the most accurate reasons and facts to help make right decisions.

>

> Having said all above, I feel the need to support a group of parents who are strongly advocating for our schools to open full time;

>

> Sending lower grades K-2 to 4 days seem more doable and important to begin with, as these little kids needs to learn how to read and write. Homeschooling younger grades with homework can be very challenging.

> It seems that lower grades also have a low number of kids enrolled. For instance, Paxson kindergarten classrooms I guess would only have about 10-14 kids in one classroom if extending to 4 days a week. And these teachers are seeing all the kindergarteners during one week anyways. In the end, the kids are being more exposed, in closer contact, but not necessarily the teachers. As research indicates, young kids are not big transmitters of covid.

>

> Overall I feel that school is the safest place for keeping possible exposure networks small. For instance, our family's weekly exposure would be smaller if both my kids would go to 'one place' 5 days a week. Not that we are doing much outside of our home, but generally, for many, there is a greater need to do extra hobbies or daycare type of arrangements during off school weekdays. These arrangements do involve circles to go beyond (Paxson) school classmates and teachers.

>

> Thank you for all your hard work,

> I've been thankful and will continue to be :)

> Best

> Jenni Rohrbach

>

>

> Sent from my iPhone

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

items for tonights meeting

nick taber <nick.taber58@gmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 12:58 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Tracy Long <talong@mcpsmt.org>, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Hello Tracy and Board Members,

Please find the attached youtube link for reference for my public comment this evening: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EeATDWfzubU> . I'll have you reference the 1:02:35 mark for comment. We'll let the video play for 1 min 30 sec.

Further, please find the linked article detailing Mayor De Blasio's reversal on school closures, opening NYC schools fully to those that want it.

<https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/527889-de-blasio-to-reopen-new-york-elementary-schools-in-reversal>

Lastly, I will be discussing evidence from successful districts all around us like Hellgate Elementary.

Thank you,

Nick

Nick Taber
370-0648.

return students to school, K-12

Shannon Ortt <sortt@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 2:00 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Board Members,

I am writing to urge you to return all students, K-12, to in-person learning as soon as possible. As a parent of a high school student and an MCPS employee at both an elementary and a middle school, I have the unique perspective of seeing firsthand all grade levels and how they are affected by hybrid learning.

Based on conversations with my daughter, a junior in high school, she feels she is not being properly prepared for college or whatever her future holds after high school. High school students don't have the time left in their public education to make up for what they have lost in hybrid learning. They are depressed, disconnected, unmotivated and disinterested. The loss of educational opportunities outweigh the risk of Covid transmission in schools when you have the low numbers that we have in Missoula. The precautions that we are taking to keep kids safe in school are working!

The younger kids are falling further behind and they *want* to be in school full time. The leaps and bounds that kindergartners make in a normal school year is huge, but they don't have that opportunity this year! They don't have a routine or repetition. For many of them, school is where they are fed, safe and receive important therapies or counseling that they don't have access to outside of school.

Teachers are working harder than ever and longer hours than ever before. They care so much about their students. They are doing two jobs. They are preparing homework or online lessons for remote learners, which is a full time job. They are also doing their traditional job of coming into the school and teaching full time. They are breaking their backs to make it work for everyone and make everyone happy. They care that their students are not meeting benchmarks. That most likely won't change in the near future.

We have to take a step forward. The unknown creates fear and anxiety with planning and logistics for in-person return to school, however we can not continue this way at our children's educational expense. Please send kids back to school, K-12, in person as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Shannon Ortt
Secretary Lewis & Clark Elementary, ext. 4395 (a.m. only)
Families In Transition/Family Resource Coordinator
Washington Middle School (p.m. only)
(406)728-2400, ext. 2616
sortt@mcpsmt.org

1-12-2021 agenda comment

michael albritton <bombadil23@yahoo.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 2:37 PM

To: publiccomment@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, dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org

MCPS Board of Trustees,

I would like to comment on two items on the agenda tonight (1-12-2021), 8.A.i, and 8.A.ii. I have three children attending MCPS schools, one at Rattlesnake, Washington, and Hellgate. I have had a student in MCPS schools for 10 years now. The Board of Trustees, MCPS administrators, and MCPS staff have done an incredible job navigating COVID and making tough decisions and implementing Phase 1/Hybrid model. Thank you.

I am writing today to support moving from Phase 1/Hybrid to Phase 2/Hybrid Plus at the start of semester 2, January 22, 2021 for several reasons:

The active COVID cases in Missoula County peaked in mid-November and has been slowly going down. Other County wide COVID metrics show a similar trend. COVID numbers have remained very low in our schools since September. COVID mitigations work, it is not spreading in our schools. We now have a 4 months of data that show these COVID trends and numbers. Our children's emotional and social health is incredibly important, and moving to Phase 2/Hybrid Plus will help them in that area. Their education/learning will be greatly improved with more on-site learning.

Thanks for listening and serving on the board,
Michael Albritton

Return to School Comments

josh@rollinsagency.com <josh@rollinsagency.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 3:23 PM

Good Afternoon MCPS Board of Trustees

Thank you for all of the time and thought you are putting into helping make important and informed decisions in our community during this difficult time. You are much appreciated!

I am certain you have received a significant amount of emails and input from our community. The end objective we all seek is the safe return of our children to school.

How and when that return looks like are the questions we ask ourselves. Opinions on these questions vary widely. The health and safety of students and teachers are paramount and the reason there is so much passion involved in these decisions.

My perspective is that of the father of 2 MCPS students (4th grade & 12th grade), the spouse of a MCPS teacher, and a local small businessowner.

I admire everyone's efforts and ability to adapt as we have needed to since the pandemic started last March. There was no "how to" manual that came specific to this situation, but we have all made the best of it. Students, teachers, and parents have all navigated uncharted water and done a remarkable job doing so in my opinion.

It is time to progress from the current hybrid mode we are currently utilizing. It was the appropriate place to test the waters when we started this school year, but it is time to start returning our students to school fulltime.

As I watch, there is no question my 4th & 12th graders are falling behind where they should be academically. There is also no question they are also struggling emotionally and socially. There is simply no substitute for what is accomplished with in person learning in our school systems.

I have also watched my wife work harder than she has her entire career to adapt the challenges and demands being placed on teachers to operate in this hybrid model. I have had to correct several community members who are misinformed and think the teachers "have it easy" or "don't want to have to work". This is simply not the case. Our teachers are stretched thinner than ever with this hybrid model and are burning out, fast!

I do not complain, because I know others who are far less fortunate, but this hybrid model is nightmare for a parent trying to run a small business. It is straining the resources and time from parents and small businesses all over our community. I hear and see it daily from customers and other business owners.

I feel very blessed to be a part of a strong family. I can only imagine how much struggle children and families who are not as fortunate as mine are experiencing right now. My concern for the mental health of our community is greater than it has ever been as we pass the holidays and move into a season notorious for seasonal depression and increased suicide rates. Something Missoula and Montana are already experience statistically higher than average.

Based on the evidence we have seen in recent studies, returning to school full time is the safest place for our children physically, emotionally and developmentally. It is being done in town at Hellgate Elementary and now Target Range. It is being done with school systems nearby and across the State. It is now time for MCPS to move forward and join them.

Thank you for listening to my perspective.

Josh Rollins

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Comments for Tonight's meeting

Melanie Calahan <m.j.calahan@gmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 4:29 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Brett Calahan <Brett.Calahan@fib.com>, Melanie Calahan <m.j.calahan@gmail.com>

Dear School Board Members,

Tonight, you are going to be discussing the possibility of moving into another phase of school attendance, and I don't envy your position. People have strong opinions on how to best manage for the health and safety of the public in the immediate future. This is concerning to me also, but I have equally serious concerns about the impact of a continued hybrid schedule on my children's education and on their emotional well-being, not to mention my own. And I have even greater concerns about how it will impact the most vulnerable children in the community—those living at or below the poverty line, those living in dangerous situations, and those with special education needs that a reliance on learning at home definitely can't accommodate.

I have an 8th grader with an IEP. In the middle of last year, his test scores and academic achievement had improved to a point where we were considering ending his IEP and transitioning to a 504. But with the loss of effective, in-school teaching at the end of the 2019-2020 school year and the hybrid approach we've taken into the 2020-2021 school year, his test scores have dropped drastically, and his academic achievement depends on intensive help from my husband and me. This is problematic for several reasons. 1) We both work full time. 2) We have two other children who also need our assistance. 3) And neither of us are professional educators with the background and training to explain (or sometimes comprehend) the material he is learning. My 5th grader, who doesn't have an IEP, is also falling behind in both math and reading. This concerns me greatly.

I also recognize that I'm one of the lucky ones. I have a spouse who is an essential worker, and I own a business and work from home, so I'm able to be a homeschooling parent without technically sacrificing too much in terms of income. But the reality is that my husband is working a lot of 12-hour days and I'm home with three kids, a brand new "school" structure, and extremely limited social outlets for any of us. My kids miss their friends. They miss their routine. They miss having a teacher who can explain math concepts to them in different ways instead of just saying the same thing louder and slower. I miss my friends. I miss my routine. And I miss having days where I can focus on work (and therefore earn an income) for more than fifteen minutes at a time. Because even though I work from home, very little work is actually getting done, even with two quasi-in-school days. After I spend my day trying to keep the kids at least a little bit on track with school (and trying to prevent them from either watching every last video on YouTube or killing each other), I don't have any energy or mental capacity left to work on my job.

Then, once I'm able to look past my own self-pity, there are families in significantly worse situations. Parents who don't have jobs and now face uncertain housing and food situations. Parents whose choices are to forego having a job (and the food and housing security that comes with it) to be home with their children while there is no place for those children to go or to leave those same children at home alone while the parents work to ensure they can feed the family. Children who are not safe with their parents and who only have a limited escape in school.

I can't help but look at Lolo, Hellgate Elementary, Frenchtown, and Target Range, who are all doing school five days a week on an essentially normal schedule. Why is Missoula different from them? We live in the same county, deal with the same county health requirements, and many of these people probably work right here in Missoula. Added to that, less than 3% of the elementary/middle school student population has been diagnosed with the virus since the tracking began in August. I know one option on the table is to get the K-2 kids back in school more first, but numbers among middle schoolers (35 total cases) has actually been lower than the numbers among elementary kids (58 total cases). Numbers also seem to be trending down since the beginning of December.

Yes, there is an immediate threat to public health and safety in terms of the virus itself, but there is a potentially catastrophic long-term threat that comes with plunging families into poverty and leaving kids in dangerous situations, not to mention allowing children with academic disabilities to continue to fall further and further behind. Getting kids back to school on a regular schedule can help reverse the backsliding that all kids, but especially those with special needs, have experienced since the beginning of the pandemic.

As I said, I don't envy the school board this decision. I'm sure you have thought about all these things, too. This is hard, and there's not an ideal solution, but maintaining the hybrid schedule comes with a different kind of risk, one that we may only truly understand in months and years to come, and one that will take significant resources to correct.

I'd like the school board to strongly consider moving into a fully normal schedule for as many kids as possible.

I understand that there is a public health risk. I know we have teachers and students who are in the high-risk groups for the virus, and I certainly don't want to jeopardize their health and lives. I think it is possible to find a balance between the immediate public health risk and the long-term consequences of continuing to restrict in-school learning.

Thank you for your consideration.

Melanie Calahan

(parent of children at Lewis and Clark Elementary and Washington Middle School)

I Support Full In-Person Return To School

Brian Goulstone <bgoulstone@gmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 4:37 PM

To: publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us, javgeris@mcps.k12.mt.us, gdecker@mcps.k12.mt.us, mjsmith@mcps.k12.mt.us, vmcdonald@mcps.k12.mt.us, kmercer@mcps.k12.mt.us, woldperson@mcps.k12.mt.us, dllorenzen@mcps.k12.mt.us, rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us, eguest@mcps.k12.mt.us

I am writing to support full in-person return to class for MCPS students.

Studies show that schools are a minimal threat to community spread. Schools may even serve to staunch spread by providing a closed and structured environment for students, educators, and staff.

I appreciate and sincerely thank the teachers for their dedication to their students. However, the hybrid schedule is deficient. Public school instruction hours are mandated and tracked for funding purposes. Those hours are NOT being met. Teacher contracts are based on instruction hours. Those hours are NOT being met.

Five hours a day hybrid in-person instruction is only 10 hours a week. Remote learning consists of two classes daily with an estimated 2 hours of student work for some classes.
5 hours x 2 = 10 hours in person
4 hours x 3 = 12 hours remote
Students are receiving only 24 hours of instruction.

Although these levels are also not being met (my 8th grader, for example, has about 45 minutes on average each remote day - less if band is one of the two classes in his rotation).

Remote learning does not work for the most vulnerable or most in need of school services. And it ignores the need for peer-to-peer interaction. This is why a safe return to in-person instruction is promoted by medical doctors, psychologists, and yes, also advocated by Dr. Fauci and the CDC.

I only ask that you advocate for the children. For the students. Thank you for your efforts navigating this flashpoint subject.

Brian Goulstone
4010 Duncan Drive
Missoula, MT 59802
(406) 830-4256
BGoulstone@gmail.com

Re: Superintendent Updates: January 12, 2021

Melissa Boys <mboys@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 4:43 PM

To: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Junell Lawrence <jdlawrence@mcpsmt.org>, "Katherine M. Degrandpre" <kmdegrandpre@mcps.k12.mt.us>, Aaron Fortner <asfortner@mcpsmt.org>, Sarah DeGrandpre <sdegrandpre@mcpsmt.org>

Dear Dr. Watson,

I sincerely wish a speedy and full recovery for you and your family. Thank you for trusting us with your personal experience.

I hope you will use your personal experience to inform your recommendations for how we should move forward as a district. Your experience shows that even cautious, careful people can contract and transmit COVID. Thankfully, your ability to work remotely and to be socially-distanced while working in-person saved you from inadvertently spreading the infection to others. I hope your's is a story of how we can successfully manage and treat this terrible virus.

I also hope any move to re-open our schools with full enrollment will maintain essential protocols for the health of all staff and students, especially those highlighted by the Harvard Global Health Institute. I'll share my personal experience as a cautionary example. My students have done a wonderful job of wearing masks during class time, but many of them also participate in activities such as sports and social events where they do not wear masks. In my classroom (which is one of the larger classrooms at Big Sky High School), my students and I will not be able to socially distance with full enrollment, especially if additional students join my class at the semester break. I fortunately have windows which I look forward to opening whenever weather allows, but most of my colleagues do not. I do not know, but I highly doubt, that our HVAC system supplies the recommended 4 to 6 clean air changes per hour. And, as you acknowledge, our community does not currently have the resources for surveillance testing and screening. In fact, our community's contact tracing resources have been stretched to their limits. In short, I do not see how we can meet the Harvard guidelines.

I love teaching, and I am so grateful for the in-person instruction that I am able to deliver. I recognize the hardship COVID has caused for students and parents, but I am worried that a pre-mature move to re-open with full enrollment could force us to retreat into the full-remote instruction of last spring. That would be terrible for teachers, students and their parents!

Again, I send prayers of healing to you and your family, and I look forward to the day we can return our undivided attention to educating our students.

Melissa

Melissa Boys
Social Studies Teacher
Big Sky High School, Room 10
mboys@mcpsmt.org
406-728-2400 Ext. 8622

Be Responsible - Be Respectful - Be Resilient - Be an Eagle!

Continuing in Hybrid

Thea Varichak <varichak@hotmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 4:51 PM

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

Dear MCPS Trustees,

I am a parent of a 3rd grader at Lewis and Clark Elementary School. I am very impressed by how things have been handled thus far, however I have serious reservations about moving to more classroom time. I understand that people are tired of Covid. I understand that people want their kids in school, however I worry that their desires are overshadowing the reality that we are still in the middle of a pandemic. A pandemic that is killing more than 3,000 of our neighbors and friends a day. We have continued to ask the impossible from our teachers and we are doing it again, and frankly, it breaks my heart that concern seems to be strictly about the children and not our teachers, support staff and their families. Additionally, I think it is terrible that we have decided that test scores are more important than health and safety, or at least that seems to be the general impression from the majority of the public comments. Yeah, math skills are not great, yeah, reading and language comprehension could be better, but right now is a teaching moment for our children. It is a time to teach them how to have compassion and flexibility in tough times. Its also a time to teach them independence and self reliance. It's a time for them to see their parents make decisions that are not easy, but that are in the best interest of the community. Ask yourselves what has changed since last year and you'll find the answer is we're now seeing record numbers of infections and deaths. More, not less. Vaccine optimism, while encouraging, is not a substitute for the reality that we're not even close to being through this. Today the WHO announced we should not expect herd immunity through all of 2021. Sobering, but it should be a reminder that the virus doesn't care when we want to have things back to normal, it does not care about test scores. It will not back down because we feel our children need to be in school more. Patience is hard but necessary.

Based off the most recent Covid Data Dashboard, all Primary Indicators show we should not even been in school. The Secondary Indicators show a mixed bag, with the active number of MCPS cases indicating we are in the correct phase currently. I understand why people want their children in school, we all do, but only when it is safe to do so. When all the teachers and support staff have received their vaccine I will be dancing with joy to send my kiddo back, but until then, we can teach our children patience and compassion. Math can wait.

Thank you for all your hard work and for all you have done during this unbelievably difficult time. I am grateful to be in a community that cares and values input.

Sincerely,

Thea Varichak

School phase

Matthew Johnson <mhjohnson@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 9:10 PM

Hello,

My name is Matt johnson and I am a teacher at Big Sky High School.

First, I would like to say that I have two boys who go to school at Hellgate Elementary. They have been at school 5 days a week the entire year with little to no negatives. If they can do it MCPS can do it.

Second, I have a daughter at Big Sky. We are Lucky she is into school and learning, because what we are doing in school right now is a joke. We are not doing any of these kids a favor in our current state. It has been very discouraging to get as she was very excited to get to high school. She currently sees how the majority of schools are moving to be normal, and her brothers who are going to school full time every day.

There are no more risks than any other day at school.

We need to move forward and go to at least phase 2.

Thank you for your time.

Support for Native American/ minority voices, and need for new & creative solutions

Kelly McDonald <kpmcdonald@hotmail.com>

Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 11:54 PM

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

Hello MCPS Trustees and Superintendent Watson,

Thank you for the meeting this evening. I just wanted to voice my support of Trustee Old Person in being the only trustee to oppose the motions to increase the in-person learning for both K-8 and 9-12. I also support every comment that showed concern for Native American populations and people of color, who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic in many ways. I sympathize with all of the parents and students who want to be caught up in academics and in social aspects including mental health, but Native American populations have a long history of suffering in pandemics, and I believe that their needs should be a priority for you to consider. I feel that there should be more of an effort for the board to listen to minority voices and to prioritize and protect the health and safety of Native American families. I am doubtful about the community realistically following the Harvard recommendations, and I am apprehensive about the new more contagious mutation of COVID-19. In my family we have taken the new social changes and come up with new creative ways to turn many challenges or potential setbacks into positive and amazing experiences, which we would not have experienced otherwise. We as a society need to use new technology or use prior knowledge about survival during pandemics and we should find creative ways to meet the needs of vulnerable populations, without risking the health and safety of those same populations or anyone else. I believe we can meet the needs of all students, teachers, and families, by finding new or creative ways to turn potentially harmful situations into positive and beneficial outcomes, without increasing the risk to people who are already at risk in our communities. Sincerely,

Kelly McDonald