

Face masks with clear plastic mouth window

Nathan Johnson <bisondust@icloud.com>

Mon 7/27/2020 3:50 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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I read a very interesting article explaining why face masks with clear mouth windows are a necessity for re-opening schools this fall. We all understand these masks with clear mouth windows are so important to allow the hearing impaired to read lips and thus communicate effectively. The article explains how dependent we as human beings are on reading the entire facial expression of those we are communicating with. The key elements are not only what the eyes are saying, but also the physical signals mouth is sending. They are the essence of successful human communication. I think it is essential that all teachers in the school district wear these mouth window masks. The school district should purchase these for all students. They are not that expensive, would make all students feel part of the group (even those who might not be able to afford them or not think mask wearing is important) and help get the "mask" message out to families and all of Missoula. Thanks, Nate Johnson, 734-693-6538

Return to school decision

Anna Puryear <annalpuryear@gmail.com>

Mon 7/27/2020 7:24 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>; publiccomment@mcpsmt.org
<publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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Good Afternoon,

We just read Dr. Watson's update to parents and are very concerned as professionals and as parents, that there will not be a decision about how we are returning to school at tomorrow's board meeting. Also, that we as parents won't even get a survey until August 3. We do not feel this is responsible for the teachers trying to prepare nor the families trying to do the same.

Is there an explanation about why this is taking so long and when a final decision will be made?

We have 1 daughter at Hellgate Elementary and we knew the decision last week about the plan. These parents have the benefit of knowing the district's decision, making a choice, and moving forward planning how they will make life work based on their choice.

I understand the need to look at data, but if the board and Dr. Watson feel like the hybrid model is the best option right now, please make this the decision tomorrow, Tuesday 27 July. There really just needs a decision made now so that all people involved can plan accordingly.

Thank you,
Anna and Jeb Puryear

Fwd: MCPS 2020-2021 - middle school start time

Carin Pugh Hansen <cpugh99@hotmail.com>

Mon 7/27/2020 9:11 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Hello,

I am wondering if there would be consideration to start Middle School at 8:30 or 9 instead of the proposed earlier 8am. I know a later start time would be best for my 6th grader for many reasons. While we don't bus to school, I think about how early middle schoolers will have to get up to catch a bus and boy, they are starting to need even more sleep! Additionally, consistent sleep schedules are key and with the proposed Hybrid schedule (that we might fall back into at other times throughout the year) I don't think many middle schoolers will be waking up and ready by 8am on their remote learning days which thus will make for an inconsistent schedule which isn't supporting them to be the most healthy.

One reference though I know you are probably familiar with the data.

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/students-sleep/index.html>

Thanks for considering!

Carin P. Hansen

Why kids need to go back to school. PERIOD.

The Gathers <gatherfamily@gmail.com>

Mon 7/27/2020 1:18 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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"Joseph G. Allen is an assistant professor of exposure assessment science, director of the Healthy Buildings program at Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and co-author of "Healthy Buildings: How Indoor Spaces Drive Performance and Productivity."

I've spent more than 10 years as a forensic investigator of "sick buildings." The stakes were often extraordinarily high: a hospital where four people had died and hundreds were at risk; a factory where workers were at risk of getting an irreversible respiratory disease called "Popcorn Lung"; a military base where housing was suspected in the deaths of 11 infants.

In all of these investigations, I was asked, "Is it safe to go back in the building?" If, after the appropriate controls were in place, my answer was "yes," I always paused for one final gut-check question: Would my answer be any different if my family was involved?

When people ask me whether schools are safe during the coronavirus pandemic, I ask the same question: Would I let my kids go back to school in the fall? The answer is **yes**.

Let's first acknowledge a hard truth: Widespread school closures come with devastating costs.

First, school closures are creating "virtual dropouts." Twenty percent of Boston high school students didn't log into class in May, and only half of the elementary school children in Philadelphia made daily contact. Even those with access to

computers who do check in are not learning in the same way. This will increase our country's education gap and exacerbate racial and social inequalities — with impacts that will persist for years.

Second, school closures impact kids' health. Students who are out of school are more likely to be sedentary and experience weight gain. Many also lose access to hot meals; millions of children rely on federal programs for free or reduced-price meals.

Third, a disproportionate burden of working from home is falling on women. Many are now working two extra jobs: household manager and home-schooling supervisor. This widens another gap in our society, as working women risk either dropping out of the workplace or face career advancement challenges that many men, and those without children, won't have.

Finally, lockdowns put children at greater risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

Now for the good news: Kids are at lower risk from complications of covid-19, and basic risk-reduction control measures are working.

On children, a study in Switzerland confirms what we have known for some time: School-age kids have extremely low infection fatality rates. Of the thousands of children found to have been infected, not a single one died.

On prevention, we are seeing that in many hospitals, the number of infections of front-line doctors and nurses has dropped way down. Why? Strict controls are in place focusing on just three things: mask-wearing, hand-washing and air-cleaning.

To get our kids back to school in the fall, we can start with similar strategies and then build in additional controls. My team at Harvard put together a report on risk-reduction strategies that can keep kids safe. A few important recommendations:

- **Create a culture of health, safety and shared responsibility.** No single control strategy alone is sufficient, and no single individual is solely responsible. Reopening schools safely will require changing culture to a “health-first” mind-set with everyone playing a role.
- **Stay home if sick.** Students with symptoms should be sent home immediately or quarantined in an open and well-ventilated space.
- **Wear masks, with breaks built into the day.** Students, teachers and administrators should wear masks to and from school, in common areas and in classrooms when physical distancing is not possible. Schools should create “mask-free” time to reduce fatigue.
- **Wash hands frequently.** Cleaning and disinfecting all surfaces all day long is impractical. The better approach is frequent hand-washing and the use of hand sanitizer.
- **Clean the air indoors.** Start working on air-cleaning now. Schools should find out how much fresh air they can bring into their building. Increase the ventilation rate if you have a mechanical system and open windows if you don’t. Supplement that with higher-level filters and consider getting portable air purifiers for your classrooms.
- **Physically distance to protect individual health.** Do your best to maintain six feet of separation in classrooms, **but don’t keep kids out of the classroom just because there isn’t enough space** (remember, hospitals don’t physically distance; they rely on other controls).
- **Socially distance to slow transmission chains.** Keep classes operating as subgroups and separate these groups as much as possible. This can help prevent mini-outbreaks from infecting the whole school.

Make no mistake, there will be outbreaks in some schools even with these measures. Whether we open schools will be determined by our risk tolerance as a society. **What will we accept for schools?** If the answer is “zero cases,” that will require us shutting schools for another year. The costs of that approach

are too great, especially when there are proven risk-reduction strategies at hand."

I obviously did not write this but I feel that every point I wanted to make is covered in this. We must forge a path forward with the reality we have and do right for our children and community!

School opening comment

Rachel Kantor <patteecanyonoutdoorschool@gmail.com>

Mon 7/27/2020 3:32 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Hello,

Here are my thoughts, ideas, and what I want to see for school reopening. Some of them are a reiteration of the current plan.

~ Open air classrooms (see New York during the flu epidemic)- outside as much as possible and windows open while inside. Warm clothes and layers during cold weather to allow for this. Reduce or eliminate air conditioning and heat given the dangers of recirculated air. Clipboards and cut up yoga mats to sit on while outside are what I use for my students when outside and it works well.

~ Please maintain small classes throughout the entire year in order to minimize risk and maintain 6 feet distancing. 3 feet is not enough. Move to a reduced, in-person schedule for the whole year.

~ Masks while inside.

~ Sanitation plan.

~ Focus on social/emotional rather than academic achievement. No standardized tests for this year.

~ Health/safety checks two times a day to catch those coming down with something during the day, as well as those children who have been medicated to cover symptoms.

~ Hourly hand washing.

~ Stay home if sick, regardless of how minor an illness, including colds, stuffy nose and cough.

~ Plan for teacher/student safety taking into account ongoing research and current case numbers and testing numbers not dependent on current phase as it is not reflective of safety and risk as it has become political.

~ Quarantine/shut down plan for positive cases exposure of individuals within a school and policy about open communication to families about exposures with in the school.

~ Plan for substitutes. Will there be enough subs to cover increased teacher absences? What will happen if a sub is not found? Currently classes sometimes double up with another class if a sub cannot be found, but this should no longer be allowed, so there needs to be a back up plan when there is a lack of subs.

~ Idea- MS and HS move to mostly distance learning and move the younger kids into those spaces. Rotate them in groups. Academics in their reg classrooms and special classes in the HS/MS space- music, art, PE, etc. Allow the older grades to attend in person 1 day a week to touch base with teachers.

Thank you for your hard work!

Rachel Kantor

School Reopening Plan

Graham Meng <graham@mtmengs.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 12:10 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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MCPS District 1 Trustees,

I write in to voice my questions and concerns about the current MCPS reopening plans for the 2020/21 school year. Unfortunately our world is facing difficult times, further muddled by significant opinions and misinformation spreading throughout our society and media that has led to significant anxiety and loss of reality in our country. We can talk about the COVID-19 pandemic, the health and safety of our students and teachers, and many other things I will assume others have commented. What we fail to continue to evaluate is that in Montana, and especially in Missoula county, we are in a very positive position that favors reopening schools and more of our economy.

Our case rate per capita continues to be one of the lowest in the nation, especially in Missoula county, and continues to fall in the "test and contact trace" category. This means we have adequate virus control and lack of significant community spread. This bodes incredibly well for school reopening.

As the husband of a kindergarten teacher at Hawthorne, as well as a medical professional, I don't feel that the current recommendations are in the best interest of the youth of our society. Online education, especially in lower socioeconomic statuses, is 100% inadequate and ineffective. The hybrid models proposed, with no concrete plan or evidence to get back to the "phase 4" reopening are very troubling.

We need leadership, and not a "wait and see" approach that has been proposed by Mr. Watson. It is unfair to the students of Missoula to be worried about Bozeman and Billings rather than focusing on our community. We are hundreds of miles away from these places and their environment is much different than ours. Please reconsider your plans for the primary grades.

Sincerely,

Graham Meng

--

Graham K Meng DDS, MS, FACP
Prosthodontics, Implant, and Reconstructive Dentistry

Public school reopening comment

Isaac Kantor <isaac@kantorlawmt.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 3:04 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Dear School Board,

I have three children in MCPS (two at Washington Middle School, one at Hellgate High School). I support many aspects of your reopening plan, especially keeping it tied to conditions in Missoula County, rather than "phases" the state or nation may be in, which appear to be primarily political rather than scientific. I would encourage you to consider adding the following:

- Sanitation plan for the schools, extra sanitation for children (ie mandatory hourly hand sanitation)
- Ventilation – we know that outside air is helpful, and stagnant or recirculated indoor air is responsible for spread
- What is your plan when/if a student or staff tests positive at a school
- Do health checks with students when they arrive. Parents cannot be trusted to do this adequately
- Although it's a good idea to remain responsive to conditions and I support reevaluating every two weeks as you propose, as a practical matter, this is incredibly hard for working parents to plan around. **The single most helpful thing you could do would be to make a Phase 1 type option will be available all quarter or semester for families (unless school is shut down entirely).** We just cannot plan for the possibility of schedule changes every two weeks, and it will drive many folks to home school or online options instead.

Thanks for your consideration, and good luck!

Isaac Kantor
Kantor Law, PLLC
406.529.6787
www.kantorlawmt.com

Comments re Reopening Plan

Jori Quinlan <jori.quinlan@gmail.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 4:22 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Vincent M. Giammona
<vmgiammona@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Dear Board of Trustees,

Thank you for your diligent and thoughtful work as we all navigate the challenges created by Covid-19.

I am writing this comment in regards to the most recent iteration of the District's proposed reopening plan. My daughter is going into 1st grade at Chief Charlo, and my husband is a teacher at Willard. Both love MCPS.

I have two primary requests. First, please put the health of our kids, school staff, and all those they interact with first. Second, please focus on simplicity and stability so that kids, parents, and school staff can plan their lives.

1. Please put the health of our kids, school staff, and all those they interact with first. Please be cautious about reopening. I would far rather take a longer, more conservative approach early on than yo-yo back and forth between phases for a year because we were too eager to get back to normal. After five months of social distancing and purposeful, careful decision-making in order to keep our bubble small, the reopening of schools will multiply the number of contacts my own family has, and this of course will be repeated for every child and every family. Until we are more certain the virus is under control, please focus on maintaining small in-person class sizes, even though this creates enormous difficulty for all of us in trying to navigate work schedules, child care, and remote learning.

I appreciate that the current reopening plan ties the implementation of new phases to local data. As different measures may be more or less important/telling at different phases in our fight against the virus, I encourage you to leave some wiggle room in what measures MCPS will rely on to make these decisions in cooperation with the health department.

2. Please focus on simplicity and stability so that kids, parents, and school staff can plan their lives with less stress. The current plan is far too complex and uncertain, with two modified reopening phases (Phase I and II), re-assessment occurring every 16 days, and

the staggered shortened school days. This is totally unworkable for parents, kids, and school staff.

- Please extend the reassessment periods. We need more ability and forewarning to plan our lives, schedule meetings, arrange child care, etc. Further, testing is not immediate enough at this point to reassess so frequently. The data is behind and more time is needed to understand where we actually are. Even if data is looking good (improving or staying stable), we need to know that we can sustain that before expanding the reopening. Please consider adopting a single phase for the first quarter and then reassessing for the second quarter.
- Please consider staying in Phase 1 until the virus is well under control. Phase 1 limits the number of students our kids and school staff will be exposed to and allows for more social distancing as well as some in-person learning. Plus, it is actually easier in some cases (like mine) to plan for a full day of remote learning than leaving work in the middle of the day every day.
- For ease of planning, please consider eliminating Phase 2 or just incorporating its protective measures into Phase 3 reopening since we likely will not be returning to what used to be normal for a long time.
- PLEASE reconsider the shortened and staggered scheduling for school days in both Phase 1 and 2. I understand the schedule is intended to allow for more bus routes in order to reduce the number of kids on each bus. This is obviously important. However, ending the school day in the middle of the day forces working parents to expose their children to yet another group of children in child care. (How on earth are parents of middle schoolers to leave work at 1 and parents of elementary schoolers to leave work at 1:30 in order to pick up their kids?) If the safety of kids/families/school staff is really a priority during Phase I and Phase II, the plan should not require that parents place their kids in a separate child care setting. Further, I don't know how we will afford having to purchase twice the amount of child care as we usually need during the regular school year. And for families like mine where one parent is an MCPS employee on a totally different shift from their child's, all the burden of this staggered, shortened schedule falls on one parent.
 - If busing requires that the formal school day end early for bussed children, please work with child care providers to provide **substantive**, productive, educational socially-distanced learning opportunities at school, at least through the typical end of the school day. Can the groups be limited by grade? Or in some other way that reduces the cross-over between classes? The providers will need more spaces on site so that they can provide care to smaller groups. The groups will also need more structure since children may need to be in child care for twice the amount of time.

Again, thank you for your hard work and creative thinking during these difficult times. May you and yours stay safe and healthy,

Jori Quinlan

A note from the facebook group "Homeschool & Remote Learning Pods for Missoula"

Jess Matthiae <jess2breathe@gmail.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 5:09 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Hello - if there is still time for public comment, I'd love to weigh in.

I own a small preschool and have so many graduates in town whose families are so overwhelmed about this coming school year. I created a facebook group for people to communicate about alternative possibilities, or at least supplemental learning (social, art, nature, physical, etc).

Many of us are uncomfortable with people pulling their kids out of public schools as that will have other consequences. As we were talking about what people want this school year, I kept thinking that the school system could be the one creating, not us. Meaning you have the students, the educators, the administrators and the space. It is not easy of course.... it is taking more creativity than we could have imagined. But just think of the discoveries we may find by doing education differently in the long run.

What we all seem to want: Small pods of children that stay together for the school year. Between 5 and 10 kids. With one educator. In person. Lots of time outside.

I don't know what you could create... but for my preschool I'm trying to buy a large canvas tent to put outside as our outdoor classroom (<https://www.coloradoyurt.com/tents/tent-options/>). They did outside education and large canvas tents for sick people during the 1918 pandemic. Ventilation and outdoor air is key. So much more so than sanitizing.

Could groups of kids be more mobile since space could be an issue? Travel? Spend the day in the woods? Outdoor education (like Forest Schools) has been tested and is very successful on so many levels.

Could it be less expensive in the long run to hire more educators? Let some of the paras take a group of kids with the supervision of a licensed teacher?

I know there are more numerous factors than you can count when you dismantle a huge system. But this approach could benefit our lives more than we realize, and be forward

thinking and actually quite enjoyable instead of just trying to make due with a crappy situation.

I love the work you've done already. You have an impossible task in front of you. I've heard this desire (small groups, lots of time outside, in person) from SO many parents. I wanted to pass it along in case you could figure out how to make it work somehow!

Jess Matthiae

Peaceful Heart Yoga
Peaceful Heart Preschool
725 W. Alder #3, Missoula, MT 59802
(406) 239-9642
PeacefulHeartYogaMissoula.com

2020-21 School Year Comments

Brian Goulstone <bgoulstone@gmail.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 10:02 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Cc: Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Grace McNamee Decker <gdecker@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Michael J. Smith <mjsmith@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Elise Guest <EGuest@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Superintendent Watson, Dr. Guest, and MCPS Trustees,

Regardless which schooling option is chosen, split time in-person or wholly remote, the state, district, and schools must create a comprehensive plan that addresses the shortcomings from last Spring:

You MUST mandate hours of instruction be equal to the amount students would receive from in-class learning. The district Spring mandate of only 10-12 hours total a week was UNACCEPTABLE.

The district MUST create and implement a total remote learning curriculum to be uniformly applied.

Spring teaching varied widely from school, from grade to grade, and even from teacher to teacher. For example, some students received streaming classes, others teacher-recorded lessons, and others none of the above.

Universal remote learning standards MUST be set and adhered to.

Spring learning relied too heavily on third party YouTube videos, copy & pasted worksheets, third party commercial websites (often requiring students sign up with their personal information). Teacher directed instruction should always be the main goal.

Synchronous learning is a MUST.

Real-time streaming classes must be mandated by either the state or the school district. Students should participate as a class using a real-time streaming service which would involve in-class students and, at the same time, any remote learners. Regularly scheduled peer to peer interaction in a teacher directed setting should be the mandated model.

While remote learning was unexpectedly thrust upon everyone last Spring, we now have that experience to build upon in order to create a positive and effective learning experience for all.

Thank you.

Brian Goulstone
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(406) 830-4256
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Question regarding tough political climate

Sarah Fielding <sarah.fielding.counseling@gmail.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 11:04 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Hello,

First, I'd like to express my sincere gratitude for the work you all provide for our community and youth, especially during these difficult times.

As a clinical social worker and a MCPS parent I have been witnessing and hearing some difficult conversations youth are having in regards to the BLM movement and the pandemic. Our country is politically polarized more than ever (information I am sure you all are aware of) and adults are even struggling to have constructive conversations. Youth appear to be engaging on popular social media sites and often insulting one another as a result. I have had nightly conversations with both of my kids, ages 13 & 16 about what they are seeing on their social media accounts as well as young clients I work with. I have concerns about how these conversations will manifest in the schools once kids are back together whether online or in person.

I am curious if teachers and staff have expressed any concerns about how to navigate these conversations and if they have, do you all have the resources to support them?

Thank you for your time, I was hoping I could join the school board meeting but I will be working late tonight.

-Sarah Fielding-

Sarah Fielding, MSW, LCSW
P.O. 9242
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Public comments.

Adriel Shearer <ezra.shearer@gmail.com>

Tue 7/28/2020 2:24 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Grace McNamee Decker <gdecker@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Marcia E. Holland <meholland@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Michael J. Smith <mjsmith@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Sharon Sterbis <sssterbis@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Jen Vogel <jvogel@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Ann Wake <awake@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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July 28th 2020,

To the public, The Trustees, and The Superintendent

Below are some thoughts about the current reopening plan. Unfortunately I can not endorse this plan as so many details have been left unsaid. But more than anything I think that we need to be upfront and honest with the public and all stakeholders in our decision. We do not know if it is safe to return to school. The data that is being used to inform our plan is not applicable for our three urban high schools and we are not taking the decisive and definitive action necessary to ensure our students are safe. Will the steps we are outlining increase safety and reduce risk of transmission, yes obviously and absolutely. But MCPS is guessing. So let's lead with that. MCPS can not be certain that no one will be infected in our schools. MCPS can not be certain that social distancing will be adhered to in every classroom. This plan seems to be delaying the inevitable shift to full remote learning. And if that is the case we should simply make that decision for high schools now and concentrate on opening our elementary schools in as safe a way as possible.

The stark truth is that no one knows if it is safe to return to school. In the absence of that certainty the MCPS plan the best guess we have to minimize risk. MCPS hopes that this will make things safer. But there is a greater than zero chance that our students and our staff will become infected by coronavirus at our schools. This is especially true at the high school level. We know that the safest possible thing for high school staff and students is to go full remote until there is a vaccine. SO we are left with a cost benefit analysis. Do the costs of remote learning outweigh the harms of increased risk of coronavirus. OR do the benefits of in person learning outweigh the costs of contracting coronavirus? Compounding the problem are the anticipated restrictions to teaching and learning that will put in place. Masks, labs, student interaction, teacher interaction etc.

I am not opposed to the plan. I believe that certain aspects of the plan deserve increased scrutiny.

Remote Learning:

The students who opt to be full remote students will not have regular classroom teachers leading their instruction. They will have MCPS teachers “facilitating” their successful navigation of a for profit company’s curriculum. Currently, MCPS administrators are evaluating a number of private for profit companies to farm out our students who are or have families at elevated health risks. One example of the type of product they are considering is provided by APEX Learning.

APEX learning is owned by Education Growth Partners LLC. Education Growth Partners is “a private equity firm dedicated to small buyouts and providing growth capital to proven, high potential learning, data and knowledge, and workplace companies that offer compelling solutions to unmet needs the extensive operating experience and investment expertise of Education Growth Partners; team ensures its companies receive an infusion of highly strategic capital and insight that can accelerate their reach, scale and impact to create long-term value” (<https://edgrowth.com/>). For APEX Learning profitability and long-term value means taking students out of public school classrooms and putting them into their virtual classes. We do not know who is teaching these students, we can assume they are not licensed Montana educators or familiar with the MCPS curriculum or the work of MCPS PLCs. We know our students and our taxpayers deserve and demand an education provided by our Missoula teachers in a student-centered responsive manner. We can not outsource the education of our students who have elevated health risks and we do not need to do so.

These platforms do not offer the same learning opportunities for our students. APEX has a limited number of classes for students to choose from. Many of our students will have their educational opportunities diminished because they are not returning to school in the fall. These students should not have to choose between their education and their health. Yet that is what we are proposing to them. Either you return in the fall or you don’t get to take all of the classes you are eager to take. Some of these classes that will not be offered include AP and IB Diploma classes, specialized electives and advanced math, science, health and engineering classes. Many of the classes we have been heralding and holding up for our students as the innovative and unique opportunities offered at MCPS will be closed to our students through no fault of their own.

Even if we are to accept that under remote learning students will have limited options for courses we should not compromise on the value of the education that they are receiving. Our students and our community expect MCPS teachers and they deserve nothing less than highly qualified Montana certified instructors. Replacing an ELA teacher at MCPS with 20 years of experience who knows your name, knows your street, knows your neighbors with an anonymous teacher working remotely on the other side of the country is not what our community needs, deserves or expects. We know nothing of the curriculum, the assessment, who the teachers are, what their qualifications are. All we know is that these platforms are designed from the bottom up to maximize profits for investors. MCPS teachers are up to the challenge and willing and able to provide remote learning opportunities for our students. By fulfilling our need for remote learning internally we ensure our students will have a high quality education, will adhere to MCPS curriculum standards and will be able to seamlessly transition back to in person classes.

Our tax dollars should stay in the local economy and outsourcing to the direct competition of public schools could result in long term costs to our schools and our district. We rely on our community for our funding. Shipping the taxes they pay to a venture capitalist in Seattle and New York City is a betrayal of that responsibility especially when that same venture capitalist would prefer if the students that use their product this year, in desperation, decide to continue using that product for the rest of their public education. If just 10% of the students who are forced by MCPS to use APEX or a competitor this year opt to go with APEX for the rest of their academic career that could mean 70 fewer high school students next year. We can not afford to pay our competitors to teach our students. The future of public education will be shaped by the decisions we make now. We can not compromise on our demand for local teachers to meet the needs of every one of our students. Ensuring local teachers teach our students also is responsive to the social and emotional well-being of our students. We can not out-source our relationships, the foundation of all good teaching.

Informing our decision process:

On our district website MCPS claims “Our plan will be based on the COVID-19 outbreak conditions in Missoula and surrounding counties.” However, in Rob’s communication and current presentation to the board there is no mention of the rates of infection of surrounding counties. As Missoula is the heart of commerce for Western Montana; any plan for reopening must consider the case count and rates for our surrounding communities. Our students, families and businesses are constantly interacting with members of our this broader community. We must, as we stated, evaluate all surrounding counties and beyond in our evaluation of our community spread and incidences of infection.

Further stifling to our decision process is the delay in case counts that the MCHD is using. We are looking through a time machine to view what cases were like two weeks prior each time we look at this data. This is not appropriate or helpful during a dynamic and rapidly changing situation. To complicate matters we are asking staff and families to make decisions now based upon data that is two weeks old about where they will be in the future. The current graph does not have accurate numbers from July 7- present and hasn’t been updated in over a week. ([here](#)) Will it be safe for us to return to work, will it be safe for my child to return? If we are making decisions informed by data we are in an impossible situation. This delay becomes even more problematic when we return to in person classes. If a student tests positive will the teacher then have to wait until a negative test to return to the building? During that time will the substitute teacher have to test negative prior to entering the classroom? Will students be asked to leave the classroom if they have any symptoms? Who decides if the child is exhibiting symptoms? We can’t commit to a plan without the details of that plan.

Mathematical Models:

The PA Schools study is informative but deeply problematic for planning on reopening Sentinel, Hellgate and Big Sky High Schools. There are a few key aspects of their modeling to consider. At the high school level the inputs used to determine transmission rates do not include passing periods, open campus lunch or mixed grade level classes and the size of the high school used in the model is 600 total students (See page 43). Models can not work unless the parameters and inputs are the same; this is especially true when we are attempting to calculate disease transmission rates. Let

us consider that we are making a decision to reopen schools and that decision is based upon a non-peer reviewed study of schools with half as many students than ours and conditions significantly different from where we stand.

The average overall and individual class size used in the model is significantly lower than the MCPS average. This model also assumes 20% of students opting not to return in the fall. We do not know what that number is for MCPS so we do not know what our final number of students will be. Meaning the classrooms in the model would only see 9 students on average. Our classrooms, even if we have 20% opt out, would be closer to 12 students. Unless we have fewer students opt out then the student count would be much higher. All total this model is assuming only 240 or so students will be in the building on any one day. At Sentinel, that number will be closer to 500 students in the building. The model used relies upon the number of agents (students) and their interactions with one another to predict transmission rates, that prediction is based upon half as many students in a building than we have.

To complicate matters more there has been no official announcement regarding how passing periods and lunch will be handled at MCPS high schools. Yet alone any announced plans to limit students to grade level specific classes. The model does not have inputs for passing periods to calculate transmission rates or mixed grade level classes. The model also treats all students K-12 as having the same rates of transmission. A recent peer-reviewed study shows that 10-19 year old children transmit the virus at the same rates as adults ([summarized here](#)). The model does not account for this. I am no mathematician or statistician but I have an inclination that when calculating complex mathematical predictions and models increasing factors by 33% (average student in each classroom) or 100% the doubling of the entire 9th grade class the other corresponding numbers would also increase.

Finally, this is a mathematical model used to predict agent interactions. Let's not fool ourselves or anyone else. This is a guess. It is guessing what the result will be. We too are guessing what the result will be.

****Model does not take intramural sports as an agent.****

Unanswered Questions

How will bathroom breaks be managed?

How will passing periods be managed?

How will supplies for cleaning the room after each class be distributed?

Buses drop off at dramatically different times where are students supposed to wait until classes begin?

Will parking lots be patrolled? Will students be allowed to loiter in parking lots?

Will students be allowed to carpool?

Will students be participating in extracurricular activities?

Can students work in groups?

Will students have a time to take a break from masks?

Can a teacher walk around the classroom?

Can a teacher correct work and pass it back to students or are other means of distribution necessary?

Can students participate in labs?

If cases spike, but we are still in phase one but a student no longer feels safe will they be compelled to attend classes?

Can students be held accountable for “remote learning” work?

Can we assign homework in addition to our normal class meeting times?

Can we assign homework when we are not meeting for in class sessions?

How will lunch be managed?

Will drinking fountains be turned off? If so, where will students get water during the day?

Will sparta mart and other school stores be opened?

What liability is the district taking on? If I infect students am I liable? Is the district liable?

Can the district be sued?

Will staff and students be supplied masks?

How many masks per day will be provided?

What type of masks will be provided?

Will paras and SPED teachers receive N95 masks?

What requirements will be placed upon student and teacher masks?

If a student or a teacher has a “mask” that is ineffective on who will enforce that?

Who will supervise student health screenings?

When and where will students be undergoing health screenings?

If a teacher has symptoms will their tests be prioritized? Who will administer the test? Will the entire class quarantine while waiting for test results?

When Covid appears what will be the direct action Taken?

Covid-19 class schedules - Public Comment

Boni Rasmusen <brasmussen@montanapb.com>

Wed 7/29/2020 7:51 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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To Whom It May Concern:

I was surprised after reading your Public Comment section of all the opinions of not having kids return to full time learning. I missed the July 28th meeting so I am not in the "know" of what was discussed there. Likewise, I was not there to support a fulltime classroom schedule with a remote learning option. All the parents I have spoken with have wanted to return to full time classroom learning, but I believe our opinions are not being heard. I will try to spread this email address around to others to submit their opinion so our side will be heard more.

I will have 2 kids that will be in different schools. A 12 year old going to Hellgate and a 14 year going to Big Sky. I observed the remote learning process last year and found it profoundly and unbelievably lacking. I understand it was unplanned for, but the process itself on its best day is lacking in a multitude of ways.

Florence schools recently met with the public and had an overwhelming response for the request of fulltime onsite classes. They acquiesced the public and are doing so with remote learning as an option. Hellgate followed suite also. My request and opinion is for you to offer the same opportunity to the kids at Big Sky that are being allowed to others.

I have read the other opinions stating the safety risk isn't worth it. I believe the current risks to society and families and the far reaching ones into the future outweigh the safety risks. I believe raising kids that have been taught through remote learning is a greater risk. The kids are not learning that way without a parent to oversee it and supplement it. If a parent had the option to stay home to supplement remote learning then that would be a different scenario, that will not however be the case for all kids. I believe the children that will be left home alone due to remote learning create an even higher risk than returning to school fulltime. I believe the pressure and stress this puts on families between schedules, employment, and relationships will cause both long term and short term risks that our society cannot afford to lose any ground on. We have to do all we can to help our kids succeed and become productive members of society. Without a guarantee of an attentive parent in every home that can be present throughout the entire remote learning process, it is not a good enough system of educating our children. If a parent had the option to stay home with their

kids throughout remote learning there is no reason for them to not just homeschool them on their own and pick their own curriculum.

The kids that you keep separated or keep at home for their safety are going to be together at daycare and/or friends homes while parents are at work. They will be meeting at sports, restaurants, movie theaters, and other recreation options as they are opening. Kids are going to Silverwood and Splash. Kids are in contact with their parents who are in contact with all the other adults in town through errands, employment, and family.

I have also read Public Comment referring to going for only 2 hours, or another set shortened time. The people that the kids are going to be in class with, are the same people they will be interacting with each time. There is nothing helpful about 2 hours of education and you are still going to be with the same kids with germs getting spread whether in 2 hours or 8 hours.

Bus routes, after school care, recreation, and on and on will ensure kids are contacting other kids no matter how you planned on separating them for school. They are not going to stay separated whether by primary or secondary contact so please give them the level of education they need and you are responsible to provide, that remote learning cannot provide.

The time kids spend in the classroom with guidance to keep them focused helps prepare them in life. In short, they get up, get themselves ready to present themselves, make sure they have been responsible for pets and chores before being at school for the day, hopefully are learning to interact respectfully with adults, and navigate difficult situations that arise among their peers. Remote learning does nothing for their personal preparation for life. Other parents have added many more concerns that such as kids that don't have as safe of a home environment, but as this is my letter, I have provided my main reasons.

Thank you for your time.

Boni Rasmussen

Boni Low Rasmussen

homeschool / public school program

1 message

Nici Holt Cline <nicirae@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 30, 2020 at 1:53 PM

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

Hi there,

First of all, thank you so much for your great and thoughtful work regarding the pandemic and return to school. I understand there is no perfect solution for all and just a heavy situation all around.

We have two kids - 5th and 7th grade - currently enrolled in MCPS. Last school year we had generous, hardworking and kind teachers who gave online learning their very best. We discovered pretty quickly that the computer-heavy platform did not serve our family well, particularly our daughter with dyslexia.

As we are all trying to come up with solutions that help all kids and families, I am writing to advocate for a homeschool connections program.

I have been researching these programs that are popping up around our country. I feel that the addition of this option would meet the needs of many families, like ours, who wish to stay enrolled in public school, and do not want an online learning program in their home. Additionally, more enrolled students at MCPS would help with funding and, most importantly: the service of more kids.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District offers a program where:

- Learning takes place at home.
- Learning is designed and presented by families with the support from a Connections Teacher Advisor.
- Students may elect to participate in some courses in the neighborhood school.

During the pandemic, we are all trying our best to make informed decisions, advocate for the safety of our community, balance jobs (and job loss) and kids at home, take care of our emotional health and much more.

Adding the option for kids to learn from home and offline would be a productive and positive solution for families who seek an education that is hands on, creative, and person-to-person. It would serve many students with learning disabilities.

I see it as an additional option: 100% online, A/B day + online, 100% homeschool, A/B + homeschool. Thanks for your dedication and consideration.

All my best,
Nici Holt Cline

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blog: dig this chick
shop handcrafted:



comment on school opening

Leslie and Michael McClintock <LeslieMikeMcClintock@msn.com>

Sun 8/2/2020 7:08 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Dear Superintendent Watson and School Board Trustees,

My husband and I are seniors in our mid-seventies. Because of our multiple health concerns, our doctors have recommended that we strictly isolate, so we have been doing that. While we are retired and self-isolating, the question of school opening has concern for us, as it does for everyone.

We rely on our son and daughter-in-law for help during the week with many things that we have trouble doing ourselves. As they are also living in isolation and have both been working remotely, they are the only people who can come into our house.

Our daughter-in-law teaches in a Missoula public school. We are very concerned about the question of in-person classes this fall, given the daily increase in Covid-19 cases in Montana and in Missoula County. We are very concerned about the danger to our daughter-in-law and to our son for contracting covid-19 if she is teaching school in person, which she would have to do. Once she went back to work, we would not be able to see them anymore, which would be very difficult for us. We can't be exposed to the virus as we're in the highest risk group. Many families associated with the school are in this position.

We have been watching the daily health briefings by Cindy Farr and Ellen Leahy. At the Friday, July 31, briefing, Ellen Leahy noted that the number of active cases on that day was 69, increasing from 60 the day before. She said that the reproductive rate or transmission rate in Montana and Missoula County is low but that it is ticking up. We have seen that in the last few weeks and likely will continue to see these numbers rise as the time goes on without flattening the curve. She said that the three basic control measures, distancing, masking, and keeping the number of close contacts low are the only ways we can control our number of cases and our transmission rate. She said that the average number of close contacts per case is running about 5 and that in Missoula County as of the 31st, the Health Department was monitoring 239 close contacts. She said that cluster contacts, including workplace clusters, lead to increased community spread.

It stands to reason, then, if the workplaces of MCPS are opened up by hundreds, more probably thousands, of people, the chances for community spread and the rate of infection greatly increase. In addition, opening schools only works if every precaution is taken, but we're talking about children. What child would be able to strictly adhere to the precautions? How many videos have we seen of children with masks only partly on their faces, certainly below their noses. That's only one example.

If we must all work to keep our number of contacts low in order to control the spread of this dangerous virus, it doesn't make sense to open the schools, bringing the potential for vastly increased community contact and rate of disease transmission.

We are all living with this. We need to keep following the best safety practices that our Health Officer, Ellen Leahy, recommends. The possibility is good that there will be a Covid-19 vaccine by the start of 2021. While this is very difficult, it seems that the safest course is to keep the number of each of our contacts as low as possible to tamp down community spread.

Sincerely,

Leslie & Michael McClintock

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

School Re-Opening

1 message

Glenda Bradshaw <glendabradshaw@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 3, 2020 at 6:33 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Hank Trotter <hank.trotter@gmail.com>

Dear MCPS's Board of Trustees-

I wanted to send a note in support of a robust remote only, re-opening of our schools for the upcoming 2020/2021 school year. It seems like Covid time moves slowly and then speeds up; one day it feels maybe a little bit safe to cautiously reopen schools and then in a blink of an eye it seems like the riskiest thing we could do. In the last week I've gone from well, maybe...to absolutely not, that's a crazy idea.

Anyway, I could go on and on but I wanted to throw my two cents in for a remote only reopening. At the very least, it should be remote only and you would need to opt in for an in classroom experience. There are those for whom an in class experience is probably very necessary. Instead of an opt in to remote learning, inclass teaching should be the exception and not the norm. It's simply not safe or fair to teachers (who often have their own kids at home) and students. Further, it will be very disruptive and socially isolating for families throughout the county who have maintained safe Covid pods to now have their children in school with hundreds of other children, exposed to everything they and their families are doing. We will no longer know how careful our children's playmates and their families have been. It's like going from zero to sixty with one of the potential risks of doing so being death.

Kids will get to go to school (for a second until 80 people test positive for Covid and it all closes down) but then who can we safely see when our children are exposed in large group settings (there's too much data to suggest otherwise). They can't see grandparents, immuno-compromised friends and family, extended family or friends. No safely anyway.

And I really do want to emphasize the risk to teachers and administrators, as well as to children and their families. If we're going to treat teachers and administrators like front line workers, I would like to see them offered hazard pay. They aren't getting paid to put their lives at risk. Will they be receiving a pay package and pension equivalent to a police officer? I doubt it. It's frequently women's work and women have been at the underpaid forefront of essential Covid workers. You have the power to change that.

For those children who need to be in a school setting, perhaps grades can be combined. I think there's lots of good outcomes to multi-age classrooms. The idea should be to minimize the number of people going into a physical classroom and to maximize the education delivered through remote channels. The kids should be ready to log in and be at school at 8 or 8:30 and there should be nearly day long teacher led instruction.

I hope you will strongly consider not reopening the schools and having teachers and children attempting to learn in a very stressful and likely unsafe environment. It's 2020, we should be using technology. There is no reason to unilaterally reopen. It is far too risky, to everyone involved.

Best-

Glenda Bradshaw

School reopening ideas

Rachel Kantor <patteecanyonoutdoorschool@gmail.com>

Wed 8/5/2020 9:05 AM

To: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Hello!

I am asking that MCPS implement a plan for outdoor learning (as much as possible given our resources and weather). Beyond the many benefits of outdoor learning, it has been shown that COVID-19 transmission is greatly reduced when one is outside, versus inside. The open air/outdoor style of classes was implemented during the Spanish flu epidemic very successfully, even in areas of the country that get cold in the winter. If this was implemented in some capacity at MCPS, then I would feel much more comfortable, and more willing, to send my 3 children to in-person classes. Here is a link to some great resources on how to do this. <https://www.greenschoolyards.org/outdoor-infrastructure>

I have been educating young children outside in all weather conditions for the last 6 years. Granted, we are a much smaller group, but the children thrive with this style of education. I am happy to help and offer advice as I'm able.

Thanks,
Rachel Kantor

Fall planning - remote only option communication concerns

margotholeary@gmail.com <margotholeary@gmail.com>

Fri 8/7/2020 1:45 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Good morning,

It's been brought to my attention by an MCPS teacher that the online curriculum for students who choose remote learning only will be completely different from the curriculum that students will receive in the classroom. I'm not sure that the parent community is aware of this. I have two children in high school. Anecdotally, other parents I speak to were not aware that the curriculum would be different if a family chooses the online only option. They thought it would be like the spring when teachers continued with the normal course materials. I would urge MCPS to do a better job of communicating this. Otherwise, it's impossible for families and students to make informed decisions.

Respectfully,

Margot O'Leary

closing schools

Catherine Carter <ccarter@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Sat 8/8/2020 7:09 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Dear Board Members and Superintendent Watson,

I know that closing the schools for the rest of the year is a difficult decision. I think the schools should be closed in spite of the inconvenience that decision will bring. No human life is worth opening the schools. We need to be safe! The children can get COVID-19. The staff can get COVID-19. Both groups can transfer the virus to each other and can take it home to families or out into the general public. Please, think safety first!

Cathy

Concerns regarding reopening

Susan Sullivan <sjsull55@gmail.com>

Sun 8/9/2020 1:40 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Susan Sullivan <sjsull55@gmail.com>

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Dear Deciders for Missoula Schools -

I want to start by saying that you are in a very difficult situation, and I completely understand the complications of trying to maintain safety and education for all of our students. Tough choices will be made, and, quite frankly, none of the options are good.

My reason for writing is to express concerns for bringing students back to school, specifically, high school students, since they are able to be at home unsupervised in most cases. I am not oblivious to all of the reasons that our students would be better off in a face to face situation, just as I am not oblivious to the potential to contract a deadly disease or a life-long illness from the exposure to someone who is contaminated. That is the tough choices part.

In my humble opinion, there are too many unanswered questions to move forward with a reopening of any face to face setting. While I am sure that you are exploring many questions that may not be answerable, here are things to consider. Schools that are weeks ahead of us are already shutting down. A giddy-up-whoa approach will be the hardest approach for teachers, parents and students. Consistency is better than unpredictability.

And finally, if adults can't get this right, how do we expect highschoolers to get it right. The world is full of bullies, and while that is terrible, and frightening and just plain wrong, we can't be sure that a high school student will not act like this man did. People may attack others, thinking it is funny, or to make them appear higher up on the pecking order - they already do that in high school, and now, here is one more tool to use. While this man was possibly intoxicated, it is quite possible to consider high school students similar in reasoning power at times to people who are intoxicated. So what will the school district do for the person who is traumatized by a bully, or even worse, actually gets Covid from someone who thinks it's all just funny? See the article here: [link here](#)

This story is about a school in Georgia, which is now closed by the way, after having 9 active cases among students and teachers. The [link is here](#), showing what is probably the way that any high school will look at some point. The district has no way of guaranteeing safety of

Return to school

shane.m.jones@gmail.com <shane.m.jones@gmail.com>

Mon 8/10/2020 10:18 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Cc: Hatton Littman <hlittman@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Good afternoon,

Where the decision and recommendation by the Mr. Watson does not impact our family, the recommendation as a whole can have a big ripple affect on a lot of families. If the recommended solution is a hybrid solution for those families who have younger children, this could be placing additional stress on the household.

As an example, you have a single mother who is a teacher who has 3 kids, ages 6, 8 and 10. With a hybrid solution, how can families like this survive to pay for additional day care for the children on days there is not school.

This could also be for families with 2 incomes where both parents work, again with younger age children.

Also, what is this recommendation doing to prevent the spread of the disease. In reading various articles from the Toronto SickKids, they detail out the risks, or lack there of for child to child transmission. If you are concerned about the teachers, the teachers are still going to see the same amount of kids and still have very similar risks.

Where this recommendation may seem like the least path of resistance, I believe there will be additional stresses on the family and at what cost based on some of the research that is out there and I do know there is conflicting research all over the place about COVID, but the numbers do support the SickKids reports based on our numbers of cases and fatalities in children.

Best regards,
Shane Jones

APRN FNP-C comment

1 message

Charlotte Creekmore <folkintegrative@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 11:56 AM

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

Hello! I am disappointed in our public schools for not creating a robust live option for home. I feel that schools will shut down quickly if our community reopens and placed at risk. Every teacher or school worker yet that I have spoken to feel that in person is a distraction from what could be a robust online program. My children are 3rd Rattlesnake, 7th Washington Middle School and 9th Hellgate. As a medical provider I feel thT it is unsafe for kiddos in school, masks or not and just wanted to share my opinion. This forest causes you to be not ill at all, extremely sick for months, or dead. I do not quite think that we should gamble with something soo dangerous. Just my feelings here. Thanks for your consideration, happy to help out in any way possible. It seems our schools are being used for 'childcare' at the possible cost of lives. I say this as a single mother who is also the sole provider for my family. Charlotte Creekmore

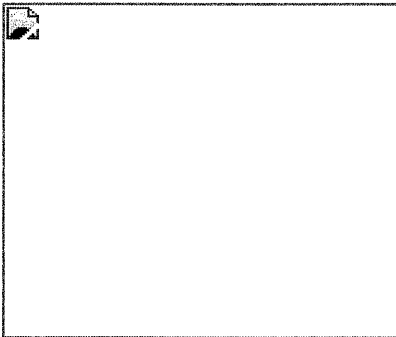
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Charlotte Creekmore

folk integrative family medicine

folkintegrative@gmail.com

folkintegrative.com



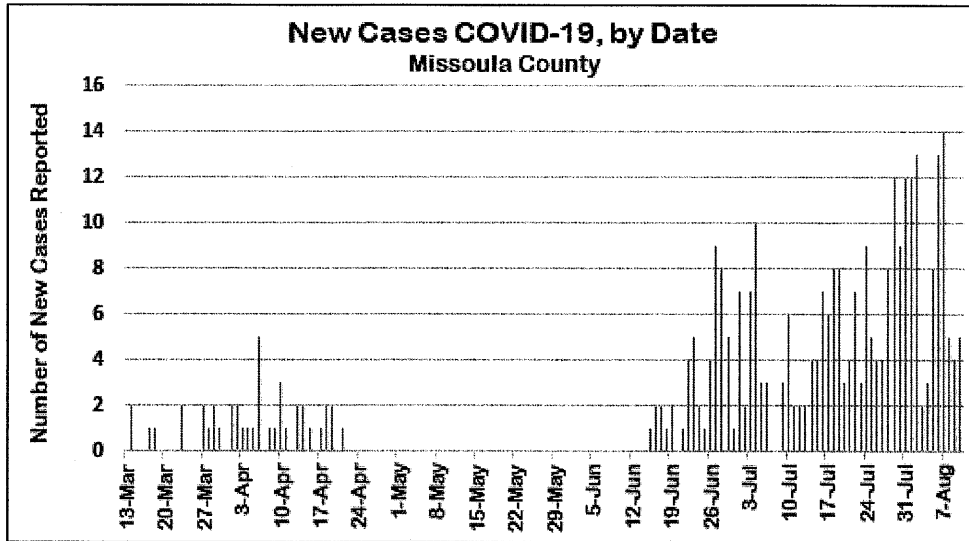
Regarding re-opening.

1 message

Matthew Rich <div.lyonrich@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:03 PM

I am writing to voice my strong opposition to reopening schools to in person learning. I know MANY teachers who are frankly terrified at the prospect of re-opening, and I for one am also worried about the increase in transmission our community will see. Instruction can continue at home without increasing danger to our kids and our community. We are now in even worse shape than we were when schools were initially closed, opening now is ludicrous. Were our numbers actually dropping that would be one thing, but they are not. In fact our community saw consistent record numbers just before this last weekend.



The best thing for our kids is to end this pandemic as quickly as possible. But our continued half measures only prolong and increase our communities suffering. We are already seeing communities all across the country that have reopened having to close back down. This is foolish. Make the right choice for our kids and our community. Re-open in phase 0.

Sincerely
Matt Rich
Father of an 8th grader at Washington Middle School.

Virus-free. www.avast.com

MCPS in-person classes

1 message

Tobin Addington <tobinaddington@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:10 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: javgeris@mcps.k12.mt.us, gdecker@mcps.k12.mt.us, meholland@mcps.k12.mt.us, dllorenzen@mcps.k12.mt.us, vmcdonald@mcps.k12.mt.us, kmercer@mcps.k12.mt.us, woldperson@mcps.k12.mt.us, mjsmith@mcps.k12.mt.us, ssterbis@mcps.k12.mt.us, jvogel@mcps.k12.mt.us, awake@mcps.k12.mt.us, rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us

August 10, 2020

Dear Missoula County Public School Board Trustees,

I am writing today as a parent of two students at Lewis & Clark Elementary School and a member of the wider Missoula community. I want to start by thanking you for the tremendous amount of care, thought, and hard work you've put in to navigating the complex issues facing our schools. I cannot imagine the competing pressures you're all under, and I want you to know I appreciate your efforts.

I am reaching out now to express my grave concerns about re-opening MCPS schools for in-person classes in the midst of a global health emergency. On behalf of our students, their teachers and parents, the staff, and the wider community, I urge you to reconsider in-person classes this semester.

We would all love our kids to be back in school. It is incredibly important to their intellectual, emotional, and physical development, as well as — in many cases — their parents' ability to go back to work. When I filled out my MCPS survey, I indicated that I would be sending my kids back to school. Because that's what I want to happen. However, the survey didn't give any space to express my deep reservations about local community transmission levels that might impact our decision about sending kids back into classrooms in the coming weeks.

The cold, hard truth is that we have not done enough as a community to suppress the spread of COVID-19 to make opening schools possible in the coming weeks. The epidemiological data seems increasingly clear. According to the Missoula City-County Health Department, over 1/3 of Missoula County COVID-19 infections are due to community spread. Which means we can't tell where a large portion of the virus is, has been, or is coming from.

Add to that our testing-result delays, and it seems we are largely flying blind. And that's all before the University of Montana welcomes back its students, the cohort most likely now to acquire and spread COVID-19, statistically-speaking. It is doubtful that reintroducing thousands of 20-somethings into the community is going to lower our transmission and infection rates.

Just today, a *New York Times* article tells us that "at least 97,000 children around the United States tested positive [for COVID-19] in the last two weeks of July... as some schools have tried to reopen, only to quickly order quarantines or close their doors."

It goes on to say, "Missouri, Oklahoma, Alaska, Nevada, Idaho and Montana were among the states with the highest percentage increase of child infections during that period."

I believe we are putting our children and their teachers and staff into an impossible situation. We are asking them to assume the risks of going back to school, in situations where we now know virus transmission is high risk — large groups, indoors, over extended periods of time, breathing the same air — because we haven't brought the community spread down to a level where we can track, trace, and isolate enough cases to manage the disease.

We are told that there are always risks to going back to school and that some amount of risk is necessary to achieve the benefits of in-person education. And while that may be true, recent experience around the world and in the United States tells us that when we put kids back in school, COVID-19 infections will increase. Those infections will then spread to teachers and staff, and the families of the students, which will transmit the virus wider into the community, until we have to shut everything down again.

Please, don't put our teachers, our kids, or us in a position where we have to risk illness, potentially dire long-term health consequences, and even death, only to have schools open for in-person instruction for a couple weeks, before we have to close them again.

Better instead to allow teachers to begin focusing now on remote instruction, with the understanding that, as undesirable as it is, it represents the least bad option we have until such time as we as a society get a handle on the virus, whether through therapies, vaccines, or altering our behaviors sufficiently to lower the spread.

Let's teach our kids that we value the health and safety of our community, and that we can act together and sacrifice to achieve a greater good. It's time for us to stop passing the buck until it stops with the most vulnerable among us.

It's time for us to lead.

Sincerely,

Tobin Addington
tobinaddington@gmail.com
917-453-5838

8/10/2020

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - MCPS in-person classes

cc: Rob Watson, Superintendent



School Re-opening Letter - Addington.pdf

27K

August 10, 2020

Dear Missoula County Public School Board Trustees,

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We are told that there are always risks to going back to school and that some amount of risk is necessary to achieve the benefits of in-person education. And while that may be true, recent experience around the world and in the United States tells us that when we put kids back in school, COVID-19 infections will increase. Those infections will then spread to teachers and

staff, and the families of the students, which will transmit the virus wider into the community, until we have to shut everything down again.

Please, don't put our teachers, our kids, or us in a position where we have to risk illness, potentially dire long-term health consequences, and even death, only to have schools open for in-person instruction for a couple weeks, before we have to close them again.

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It's time for us to lead.

Sincerely,

Tobin Addington
tobinaddington@gmail.com
917-453-5838

cc: Rob Watson, Superintendent

Letter to Rob Watson

1 message

Jeanne Veteto <jmveteto@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:11 PM

Hi
I hope this is okay to reach out directly to you.
I appreciate you navigating us through this difficult time.
In regards to your latest email. When you state "We expect that in-person learning will result in transmission and positive cases of COVID-19."
That statement tells us you are okay risking those possibilities.
COVID-19 not only kills people, but has potentially life long complications.

We have had over 50 new cases in Missoula since you sent that email.
COVID is in our community stronger than ever.
Communities around the country are making statements that the US needs to take a step back and get a grip on this virus by Not opening schools - by not having high school sports. By acknowledging the lives that have been lost.

This is a global pandemic - people are not willing to risk their lives during this time. Most teachers are so stressed and scared about the potential of returning to school, we love our jobs - but we love our lives more. Honestly, I don't believe this generation of young people will suffer by acknowledging a global pandemic.
There is so much we can teach them about life, the world, and themselves during a time like this. We can teach them that Life Is bigger than just themselves.

I know this is complicated!
We all have our own personal experiences and relationship with this pandemic.
I am asking you to please consider remote learning for our community- students and staff safety and lives.
Thanks for reading and I hope a personal email to you was okay.
We are all people trying to navigate through this difficult time.
Sincerely,
Jeanne Veteto

--
Jeanne Veteto
Health Enhancement
Sentinel HS

School Reopening1 message

Joel F <joel.friedrichs@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:12 PM

To whom it may concern,

I am concerned with school re-openings because, although kids often will not have a bad reaction to the virus, if they touch their nose or mouth as an asymptomatic carrier of the disease they may transmit the virus and other children will bring it back home to loved ones. I think most people with children would agree that most likely their kid will touch their mouth or nose and then a doorhandle or desk, remove their mask for short periods because they feel it is uncomfortable or not be able to take basic precautions to prevent the spread of this illness. The safest route would be to advance at home learning capabilities in order to protect our children's families and our communities in general.

Thank you for your time,
Joel Friedrichs

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

school re-openings

1 message

Colleen Mattson <ckgander@yahoo.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:25 PM

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

Just read that 100,000 kids have tested positive since schools have begun to re-open. Is that a statistic we want our kids to be a part of? I vote NO for in-person re-opening. Convince me I am wrong- how are you going to prevent an asymptomatic kid from coming to school and shedding the virus.

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS****Public Comment** <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hybrid1 message

Michelle Bailey <m3bailey@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:26 PM

Hello,

I would like to know how our kids can zoom(or other platform) into the classroom on the days they are expected to be remote. 2 days per week of in-person education as a freshman is not sufficient and with today's technology it would be very easy for all kids to be involved in the classroom teaching via either in person or through a remote platform where they can still see and hear the teachers as well as participate in every class.

My child went from A/Bs throughout middle school to barely pulling through with Cs during the spring remote learning. I do know he was not the only one. I realize lots of comments are being thrown your way but this would be a very plausible way to keep all kids participating in class everyday, to remain connected and accountable. (via in person or remote every day)

Please address this and determine a plan for how we can accomplish this.

Thank you
Michelle

Sent from my iPhone

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Public comment

1 message

Ms. Thai <lovethosepez@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 12:50 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Please consider continuing with Flagship online for those students who require remote learning due to compromised immune systems.

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

(no subject)

1 message

Autumn Azure <autumna11.12@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 2:56 PM

Schools shouldn't reopen

Reopening Schools

1 message

Katie Mostad <katelynmostad@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 4:39 PM

Hi,

I am reaching out to publicly comment on the reopening of schools in the Missoula school district.

As we watch case numbers and deaths from the coronavirus pandemic soar across the state and the country, we are warned that there may be no clear path through this catastrophe. Experts insist that low transmission rates of the virus, made possible only with the proper safety precautions put in place, will prevent us from overloading our healthcare system.

These safety precautions, like mandating facial coverings and limiting the capacity of public spaces where transmission of the virus is more likely to occur, have been noted for why Montana's cases have remained relatively low in the first few months of this pandemic.

However, since the reopening of many non-essential businesses and the relaxation of key public safety guidelines, our state has seen higher rates of transmission, record daily case counts, and record deaths.

In Montana, those who have the money and the means are able to effectively shelter from the virus and keep themselves safe. For those of us who cannot afford to isolate or work from home, the risk of contracting the virus or transmitting it to a vulnerable family member remains very real.

Children are not immune to the coronavirus. In some instances, the damaging effects of the virus on children have been horrific. In some, fatal. If we do not take action now against the reopening of schools, we are choosing to send our children into battle on the front lines this fall against a merciless pathogen. We are choosing to put the lives of parents and teachers on the line for in-person learning. We are needlessly putting the other members of our communities at risk.

Provide schools with the resources and funding for remote learning. Give teachers the training and experience to teach digitally. Ensure that students have access to the means necessary for them to engage with their education away from school. We are living through unprecedented times, but our plan of action during these times does not have to come blindly on the wind.

Listen to the advice of health experts. Opt for remote learning. Keep transmission low, and keep our families and communities safe from Covid-19.

Kate M.

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

No in person!!!

1 message

Sara Clement <sara.clement1015@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 5:57 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To whom it may concern,

I know it may seem like we just need to get back to normal, but it's NOT okay to risk the likelihood of innocent kids becoming orphans after they bring covid 19 home to their parents. Kids bring home every germ they encounter, and this virus is no exception. We KNOW this is going to cause an increase in infection, so please do not play Russian roulette with our families! NO IN PERSON CLASSES!

Sincerely,

Sara Clement

Fall 2020 MCPS - please do not reopen in-person

1 message

Erin Asay <elasay@mcpsmt.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 6:26 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a first grade teacher at Franklin Elementary, going into my 10th year of teaching. I adore my job. I love seeing all those little faces every day, and seeing them grow and laugh and do hard things. My job is hard, and some days really heavy, but like many others in my profession, I keep on going because those kids are so important to me.

As a teacher, a lot has been asked of me. I spend part of my summers in trainings, read educational books in my spare time, write lesson plans and grade papers in the evenings. I buy school supplies for students, I tie their shoes and wipe their noses. I listen to them cry or celebrate, and I call CPS more often than you would guess. I sometimes drive kids to school, make home visits, babysit, or bring groceries for families who need a hand. I spend large amounts of money making my classroom a safe, warm, nurturing place with resources for all different kinds of kids to be their best selves. I participate in active shooter drills and trainings, and would likely throw myself in front of a bullet for my students if that terrible situation were to arise. And I do all of these things because my heart's desire is for these kids to be happy, safe, and successful. But asking teachers to go back to schools before we know if things are safe feels like just one thing too many to ask.

There are so many unanswered questions. Can young students transmit the virus to adults at high rates? What are the long-term effects on students who catch Covid? Will kids die of Covid? How many teachers will die? What happens when it's flu season and we can't differentiate the symptoms? What if two kids are sick at school and there's only one isolation room? What happens if parents can't come to pick up their students when they're sick? How will kids choose books to read without touching them, or borrow pencils when they've lost theirs? What happens when a student is escalated and needs to be restrained for the safety of themselves, staff, and other students? How will classrooms and teachers recover when a student or staff member dies? Did you know MCPS insurance doesn't cover in-person therapy? What will we do when teachers are sick? We already have a huge substitute shortage. What will teachers do when they run out of sick days? Teachers often supply their own cleaning supplies for their classrooms. What happens when we can't find sanitizing wipes or hand sanitizer?

I know many of these questions are unanswerable. But with so many unanswered questions, are we willing to risk the lives and health of our students and staff by going back to school? Children and teachers are the district's most valuable commodity. Please don't put us at risk by experimenting with reopening schools until our cases are down, and questions are answered.

I am a 31 year old first grade teacher, and last week I sat down with my family to write a will. I did this because my dreams are haunted by the idea of dying alone in a hospital from Covid, while my family struggles with legal matters in addition to grief. I never thought my job risk would be so high when I chose this career.

There are options. MCPS can reopen fully remotely. Teachers are creative, driven, and passionate, and we will find a way to make e-learning successful with the support of our administration. Other schools in the nation have opened, and we can spend the first semester of school learning from their mistakes. Let's exercise some caution. Maybe in the end we'll look back and think we overreacted, but imagine the consequences if we under-react.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am grateful for your service to our district.

Erin Asay

Return to School Concerns

Jill Derryberry <jhderryberry@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 4:48 PM

Dear Board Members,

As a teacher, I want more than anything to be back in my classroom teaching students. I also want it to be safe and effective. When I received notice of the initial phasing plan and the data and metrics that would be used in making the decision, I felt reassured that we were doing what was in the best interest of our students, staff and community. I falsely believed the metrics would be followed and started keeping track of the sites provided and the numbers reflected.

We were told local data would be examined from 7/29 until 8/26.

Now, we are not looking at the most current data that, in fact, shows case counts averaging 9. Our infection rate was reported to be 1.04 in Missoula County by DPHHS in their Aug. 4 briefing.

All of these indicate that we should be opening in phase 0. Yet in our recent update we were told that despite the increases in ALL of the metrics being used, the recommendation would still be for in-person learning. It was followed by an acknowledgement that this will result in transmission of COVID-19 among our staff and students, and, therefore, community.

We are being told the data doesn't matter. Safety isn't paramount.

Furthermore, the plans for in-person instruction are not pedagogically sound. While I agree in-person learning is best for students under normal circumstances, what is not accounted for is the significant changes being made to in-person learning. Having students sit for hours, condensing content, while limiting strong interactive teaching strategies is not going to have the benefits some keep touting. It will be both unsafe AND detrimental to learning and engagement, thereby accomplishing nothing positive.

I had trust the district would do what was in the best interest of our students, staff and community. Now I cannot trust the changing messages and feel I'm seen as expendable and worth putting in harm's way for a faulty pretense of in-person learning.

Please follow the initial plan and the most current data that shows we should open in phase 0 with the hope of returning to effective in-person learning when case counts are low.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jill Derryberry

Comments on 2020 school reopening

1 message

eck 1 <eck88@hotmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 8:46 PM

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

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees,

I am a parent of a Rattlesnake School 5th grader and I want to thank you all for the work you are doing in this time of exceptional uncertainty!

In a recent communication about potential school schedule phasing options, there was mention of remaining in phase 0 (all online learning) if the case counts in Missoula county and Montana were increasing or even plateauing at current levels. However the current email from Superintendent Watson acknowledges that those levels are indeed increasing in the county and the state, yet he intends to recommend that we start the school year with phase 1. This is worrisome, as it indicates the decision was based on a misperceived popular opinion of whether parents WANT their children to return to school regardless of current case counts. It is a decision that blatantly ignores the current reality of our case numbers and high level of community spread in the county. Importantly, conclusions derived from the parent survey overreached what should truly be assumed, as the questions were worded in a way that encouraged parents to say they preferred the hybrid approach. Nobody WANTS their child to have to do online schooling, and I don't know if I would actually choose that option, but that is what I selected, as the survey offered no other option to voice my concern about increased exposure should students return to the classroom. I understand the need to get a sense of interest in online schooling for planning purposes, but I would have appreciated other questions to gauge the level of parent apprehension about having children in school this fall. Based on the misleading survey questions, it is not appropriate to conclude that 73% of parents prefer a return to school, regardless of current COVID conditions.

I feel it would be reasonable to do as indicated in the original communication regarding the phasing plans: monitoring county case numbers and only implementing phase 1 if case counts are truly low. But county case counts are high, with a large percentage of community spread. This will only worsen as UM students return.

I also want to note that I recognize the importance of in-person learning. We struggled with the online learning situation this spring. But I think about the big picture, and know that the virus situation will eventually change in a way that will allow students to safely return to school. All students will be behind academically from where they would have been, but in the big picture, this is a short setback, and their learning will eventually pick up again.

Last, but certainly not least, I am concerned about the safety of teachers and staff. I have heard that they are reluctant to speak up about exposure concerns, for fear of retribution. This puts them in an awful and unacceptable position. I ask you to consider to refrain from opening schools until Missoula County COVID-19 case counts are low, and decreasing, and when we have adequate supply and staffing for testing and contact tracing. I am asking for patience, because if schools open, we will certainly have more people that become ill, and the long term consequences of this virus are sinister.

I sincerely thank you for reading my comments, I hope you will consider my perspective, and I would greatly appreciate a response.

Eva Karau

Our kids are not experiments; please do not re-open

Emily Withnall <emilywithnall@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 7:19 PM

Dear Missoula County Public School Board,

I am writing with concern about the proposed re-opening plans as a parent with two teens in the MCPS schools. Like almost all parents right now, I'm well aware that there are no good options. It's impossible to work with kids at home and there are many social and emotional benefits to kids being at school, in addition to learning. However, no loss of life is worth it. Not enough is known yet about deaths in children, and even if it's .05%, does Missoula want to face even one child's death as the result of re-opening too soon? The economy can be rebuilt. It will be hard, but it's possible. A child's life cannot be returned. And even if children are 100% protected (which we know they are not) teachers are at extremely high risk. Even if they are teaching half empty classrooms and not interacting with other adults at all, the chances are still great that they will contract covid-19. They'd have to be in Hazmat gear and N-95s to avoid this. I'm horrified that the national leadership is asking teachers, who already receive so little compensation, to risk their lives. I know many will take that risk because they love their students so much. But it's not fair to put them in that position.

I understand that if schools don't re-open that this will leave many families in the lurch. I understand that many kids are safer at school and rely on schools for food. But I believe these factors can be solved for without putting so many other people at risk, too. I'm writing to ask you to please consider starting the school year with online instruction for all students for at least the first 9 weeks. This is what many other school districts across the U.S. are doing, and it would allow time for more planning and for monitoring the pandemic, especially since numbers are only continuing to rise.

And while there is real concern for the lowest income families, especially with regard to food security, low income families are also the least likely to have access to health insurance or adequate health care. Low income families whose kids have been exposed to covid-19 will be at even greater risk if they cannot afford to go to the hospital. People without insurance are dying at higher rates because of the terror of how much medical debt they will face if they go to the ER. MCPS did a wonderful job with ensuring food access in the spring and I have no doubt that it can be done again. But please don't put the most vulnerable families in the position of having to choose between a kid (or other vulnerable family member) dying or a mountain of debt.

If, however, MCPS pushes forward with any type of re-opening, I'd ask that there be widespread testing of students and teachers regularly, regardless of symptoms. As reported just today, 116 construction workers in Bozeman tested positive for covid-19, after passing temperature checks. They were all asymptomatic. Most kids will likely be asymptomatic, too. Temperature checks are not sufficient for keeping students and teachers safe.

Before any plan is finalized, I hope that if schools do re-open in person in even a limited way, that you will let parents know what the expectations are regarding a student or teacher testing positive. Will the student have to quarantine? What accommodations will be made for the student, especially if they are ill with regard to attendance and making up work? Will their classmates and teacher have to quarantine? If not, what is the thinking behind that? If so, what about anyone the teacher has come into contact with (other adults at the school, family at home, etc.)? And if there are multiple incidents like this, with large chunks of a school in quarantine at regular intervals, will this lead to full online learning? If so, what are the requirements for making that decision?

My kids will not be returning to school in person. I am a single parent on Medicaid and food stamps and have many of the same work concerns as other parents about how to pay my bills and get work done. However, my worry is that if schools give parents the option to send their kids, many will trust that it's safe to do so when no one is actually able to guarantee that. Please don't put parents in that position. Or teachers. Or kids.

Thank you for taking time to consider my perspective. I do not envy the position you are in and understand that it must be extremely difficult.

Emily Withnall

Online Academy Question

Erin Beaudette <erinbeaudette97@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 10:19 PM

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

To The School Board,

I realize every family has a unique situation and you are dealing with a lot right now. I am hoping for some clarification before the Online Academy registration begins on Wednesday. My daughter is going into 8th grade and has completed 7th grade Advanced Math. Due to my younger daughter's previous heart, lung and immune system issues, both of our daughter's will need to access the Online Academy. Will my older daughter be able to continue with her Advanced Math class as she has already completed the first semester of 8th grade math last year? We would like to see her continue to be challenged in math, she is a very bright child and would be bored if she had to repeat the material she learned last year.

Thank you,

Erin Beaudette

Mother to Brooklynn (8th grade at CS Porter) and Irelyn (5th grade at Jeannette Rankin)

Parent comment

1 message

Melinda Cline <macline79@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 10:16 PM

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

I disagree with the Superintendent's recommendation to return to school under the hybrid model. I believe an all online model is a safer way to start and manage the school year.

Covid cases in Missoula do not show significant enough of a decrease to make me as a parent feel secure in the safety of my children returning to school in person. In addition, as an adjunct faculty member for the University of Montana, I am acutely concerned about the impact returning students will have on the spread of Covid in our community. Without more time to see how that change in our population impacts the larger community, the school board would be making a significant gamble in assuming numbers would not be further impacted in a negative way.

Please consider this and all of the other reasons why school should be online only.

Melinda Cline
Mom to 2 middle schoolers

Comments from Finneas Colecott, 10th grade, Hellgate HS

1 message

Kristin Kopplin <kkopplinphd@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 10, 2020 at 11:25 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, %20gdecker@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, mjsmith@mcpsmt.org, Kristin Kopplin <kkopplinphd@gmail.com>, Julian Colecott <jhcolecott@gmail.com>, Finneas Colecott <finneascolecott@gmail.com>

Dear School Board:

I understand you are meeting to finalize a plan for how our school will proceed for fall semester. I would like to share a few comments and reflections about my experiences this past spring..

Regarding this past spring:

Some teachers definitely stood out better than others during this time. From what I could tell, there were three different types of attitudes or teaching styles that the teachers expressed.

1. The teacher tried to make the most out of the situation and excelled at learning the new software and crafting a curriculum that could be taught in an engaging and thought provoking manner. These teachers did the best with the resources they had and truly made an effort to help guide students through this difficult time.
2. These teachers were the polar opposite of the first group of teachers. They barely made adaptations from their previous in-school teaching plans (some didn't even try) and took a very long amounts of time to get back to students inquires via email. This lead to a poor response from students all around and many of the other students I have talked to in classes, taught by these teachers, share this same feedback. I think it speaks for itself when the average grade of a class drops 30-40% in the first month of online school that something is not going right.
3. These teachers were somewhat in the middle ground: it was clear that they were making an effort, but there were some things that were holding them back. Most of these teachers were great when it comes to in-school classes, but some of them were just not great when it comes to using technology, which made it harder to learn from their class. Some of the things they did online were great, and others didn't turn out as well... Whatever the case may be, they were all clearly trying to put together something meaningful, but sometimes the execution left a little bit to be desired.

Regarding my hope for the fall:

I think that the idea of having a combination of in-person school and online school is concerning, because it just combines the problems with both ideas. On the one hand, you have all the problems with online school (i.e. people not having good access to internet, kids not learning as much, some students living in unsafe homes, teachers struggling to teach, students w/ IEPs not getting support, etc...) and on the other hand you have in-person schooling, with large numbers of people in a confined space with poor air circulation, which is the whole thing we are trying to avoid in the first place. When COVID started, all of the schools were closed, quite suddenly, and extra curriculars and sports stopped. From what I could tell last spring, Missoula had very low numbers, maybe about 30 confirmed cases by June. Now, as the cases in Missoula are rising significantly, we decide that it will be a good idea to have in-person schooling?. It seems to me that this is just going to heighten the risk that the students and staff will be facing. It just makes no sense to combine the two. You have all the problems with online and all the problems with in-school and it heightens the learning problems as well as illness risk for everybody.

One thought I have is that you could survey and ask people whether or not they have adequate internet, adequate computer access, safe home environment, etc. For the people who clearly need to be in school, they should be given first priority to attend in person. Other students who have access to computers, internet and a reasonably quiet and/or safe home, could remain at home. That way, the teachers could teach relatively few students in the class, the other students could log-on via zoom or another platform and participate in real time, in the same classes from their home. The teachers could still teach in the style they are used to, live, in-person, and give out homework etc for the students who are accessing the class from home. This would put the teachers at significantly less risk, as well as the students. It would also probably be easier for the maintenance crew as well to manage all the extra cleaning.

I don't know if this is true, but I have heard through the grapevine that students might be offered an either /or type scenario, where they either opt into all on-line classes (eg Montana Digital Academy or other, which is often not as rigorous as the usual classes at Hellgate) or they elect to go to school, sign up for continuity w/ known teachers/classes at

Hellgate, only to assume they will be sent home shortly, when cases of coronavirus come up on campus and then the same teachers will be suddenly trying to teach in the format they used last spring, unprepared many of them, and general chaos due to making last minute decisions. I am hoping this is not the case, and the teachers and administration has been thinking all summer on how to deliver curriculum effectively, rather than just how to keep the space sanitized.

I do not want to go to school under the current scenario (eg in person). I don't think HS students are particularly concerned about hygiene, or washing their hands. HS students probably feel a level of invincibility, like we don't think it will happen to us. Even if we don't think the virus is a risk for students, (I personally don't want it and have two members of my family w/ asthma), I think that sending approximately 1200 students to school, potentially spreading virus, definitely puts the staff and teachers at risk, exposing them to a large numbers of kids in the school. You only have to look at schools around the country, esp in the south, where they have started earlier this summer, to see the problem—schools suddenly closing, after a spike in cases occurs.

I hope I have the opportunity to take classes from known teachers and teachers I anticipate learning from, rather than being given the MT digital academy options. That would be very disappointing to me. While the MT Digital Academy has practice in delivering this type of learning remotely, the rigor just is not there. (I have not taken classes from MT Digital Academy, but my brother has taken several classes from them, and several friends have as well, and several Hellgate Teachers have told me that typically these classes are not the same quality as what they deliver—I believe that to be true, and hope for the best education I can get this coming year. I know I have to be flexible, and this is somewhat of a moving target, but I'd hope for as much stability as possible, and the option to take classes at Hellgate w/ known teachers first, and fill in w/ Mt Digital Academy, if necessary.

Thank you for your work as School Board Members and thank you for considering my comments.

Finneas Colecott
406.926.9623

(My mom is sending this email, because I was not sure where to send it)
Please send any reply, directly to me:
finneascolescott@gmail.com

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS****Public Comment** <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

School Reopening Plan

1 message

Beth Gherlein <bgherlein@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 12:37 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

I am the parent of a five year old MCPS student registered for kindergarten at Paxon this fall, and I am angry. My daughter loved preschool, she loves school, and she was so excited to start kindergarten. But little by little, ever since we turned in her registration materials in February, I have come to understand that the kindergarten experience I wanted for her will not be possible. Now, the best I can hope is that she will be safe. I have been closely following the school reopening conversation, and when I read the draft plan and watched the superintendent's video carefully explaining the plan, the phases, how decisions would be made and what data those decisions would be based on, I felt reassured. But now I feel betrayed. We were told that reopening schools for in-person instruction would only happen when case numbers and spread were declining (or steady low), that the administration would be carefully monitoring specific indicators and that decisions would be made transparently and based on data. Now, the superintendent is recommending in-person instruction begin in spite of the fact that case numbers are rapidly rising in both Missoula county and the state, and pediatric cases in Montana are rising at one of the most alarming rates in the country. If this is not a scenario that merits at least starting the school year with all remote learning, then I'm not sure what is. Apparently the superintendent wants to abandon everything about the reopening plan that made it seem safe and reasonable. According to its own criteria, MCPS is now advocating a plan that threatens the health and safety of our kids, our families, and our community. How can we possibly trust that they will have our best interests in mind with any future decisions?

Thank you,
Elizabeth Gherlein

COVID-19 testing capabilities

Brian O'Leary <btoleary@gmail.com>

Tue 8/11/2020 3:09 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Does a rapid testing apparatus exist in the county to support the hybrid model? I would like to think yes. But anecdotally my impression is that it does not. Sending students and staff back into the classroom without the means to rapidly identify those who are ill seems like a recipe for disaster.

Thank you,
Brian O'Leary

Graphs.

Adriel Shearer <ezra.shearer@gmail.com>

Tue 8/11/2020 11:51 AM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

 1 attachments (139 KB)

Copy of Missoula Case Data.pdf;

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The attached graphs are based upon more up to date data and are a more accurate reflection of the Missoula County Health Department's publicly reported data.

It should be noted that we are seeing almost 2x as many daily cases as we were two weeks ago.

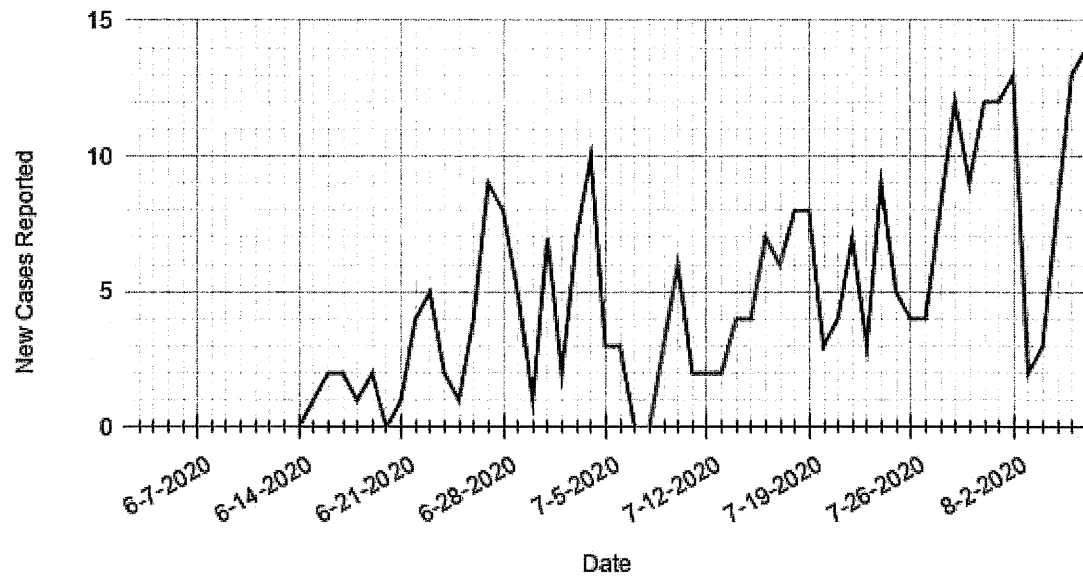
Ezra Shearer

Data:

<https://www.missoulacounty.us/government/health/health-department/emergency-preparedness/coronavirus>

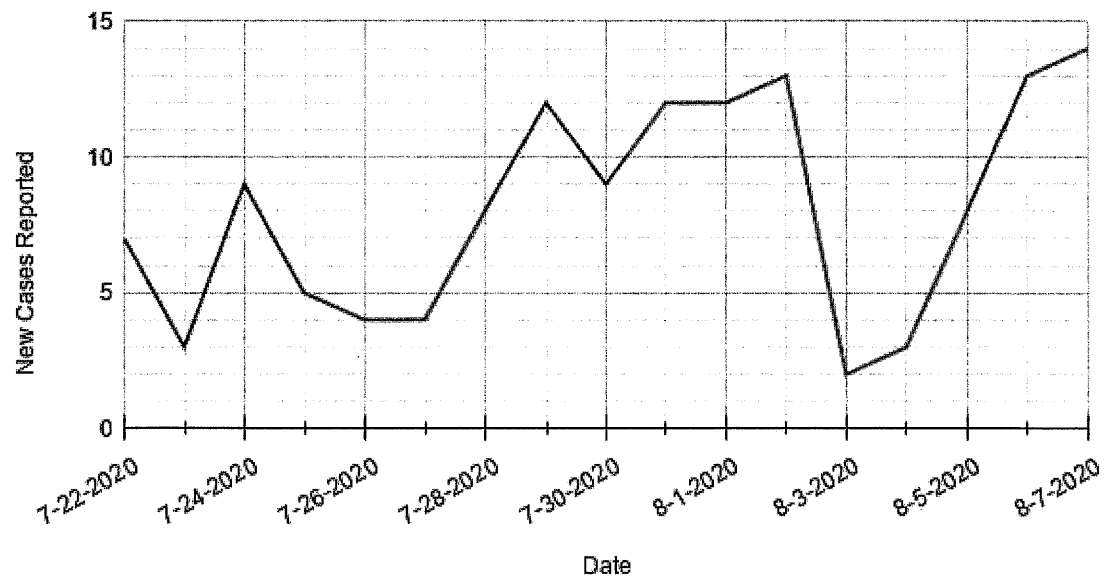
Long-Term New Cases Per Day: (6-3-2020 to 8-7-2020)

New Cases Reported vs. Date



Short-Term New Cases Per Day: (7-22-2020 to 8-7-2020)

New Cases Reported vs. Date



Return to School decision

Shelli Kenworthy <why5xys@mac.com>

Tue 8/11/2020 2:28 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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I thank you all for the time and effort that has been put into the plan presented tonight.

I feel that you have provided an excellent option for those who are afraid of the virus and an equally excellent option to allow in person and safe education for the rest of us (70+%).

Thank you for allowing families to make their own decision.

Shelli Kenworthy

School re-opening

Rachel Kantor <patteecanyonoutdoorschool@gmail.com>

Tue 8/11/2020 2:39 PM

To: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Dr. Watson and Board of Trustees,

Please prioritize the health and safety of our students, **teachers and staff**. Economics must not be the deciding factor and it saddens me that this was consistently brought up more frequently by the board and superintendent than health and safety.

We have not shown a consistent decline in case numbers to warrant opening our schools up safely. We do not have the testing and tracing capabilities in place to accommodate the increase that will result from schools re-opening. I have yet to receive my own COVID-19 test results, which I took almost two months ago.

As an early education teacher, I know all too well the difficulty in ensuring proper health practices with-in the schools. Proper mask wearing will need to be enforced, which will be extremely difficult to do and will take up a good portion of class time. Proper handwashing must be enforced, and again, we do not have the facilities, oversight, and time to ensure that this happens.

In addition, if we open up our schools in the hybrid model, our children greatly increase their risk by attending school in-person on some days and an alternative care system on the other days, greatly increasing transmission routes. By opening remotely, children only risk exposure through one group (ex: their daycare group), rather than through two separate groups, school and the care needed on out of school days.

We can more effectively meet the academic needs of children and reduce the workload of our all-ready overworked teachers through a completely remote option. Schools can facilitate and partner with other organizations in our community in order to assist families in providing the care and oversight needed for their young children. This also allows the families who need care for their children to be able to choose the remote option. At this point, families who rely on caare to go to work can not choose the remote option. We need to put in place, on the community level, a care system to ensure all children have the right to the remote option.

Once again, I hope your vote is based on health and safety, not economics.

Regarding School Re-opening

Solomon Kenworthy <21kensol@student.mcpsmt.org>

Tue 8/11/2020 2:58 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Hello, my name is Solomon Kenworthy, I will be a senior at Hellgate Highschool this upcoming school year.

A major factor for my decision on whether I return to school in-person, or use the online academy would be the choice of classes. Will there be a way to see what classes are available for one option or the other? And which teachers or on each platform? Is there a difference in what will and won't be available? For example, if the Lance class at Hellgate is available online or in-person or both.

Also, as I was watching the school board meeting I was wondering why the question of, 'should we go back to school in-person is even a discussion if 76% of high school parents said they would want their child to go back in person? It would be as if Disney were to put out a survey about whether or not they should recast Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones. If the majority vote 'don't recast' and then they recast him anyway, why even put the poll out in the first place?

Because this is public education, shouldn't we do what the majority of those families have indicated that they want?

Thank you,

Solomon Kenworthy

subbing question

rachel kantor <rachelakantor@hotmail.com>

Tue 8/11/2020 3:27 PM

To: Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>; Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>

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Dr. Watson and Board,

What is the plan for ensuring that there are enough substitute teachers given that many are retired teachers and may not come back due to their high-risk category?

Has there been an analysis for the risks brought to the substitute teacher being in a different class each day and the increased risk they bring to the students in the classroom?

What is the plan when a substitute teacher cannot be found? There will be an increase in the need for substitute teachers given the stricter illness policy and the increase in teachers taking sick days. Will teachers be pressured to still come to work with mild illnesses if there are not enough substitute teachers?

I have yet to hear publicly that these issues are being addressed, let alone a solution. I hope this is done before in-person learning begins.

Rachel Kantor

email to Rob Watson regarding re-opening school concerns1 message

Will Pereira <wwpereira@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 9:53 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

On Mon, Aug 3, 2020 at 3:43 PM Will Pereira <wwpereira@mcpsmt.org> wrote:

Rob,

I'm sure you remember Brett Taylor. Brett just sent me a link to this site hosted by Georgia Tech, <https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/>, which shows an estimate of the % chance that an event attendee will be covid positive, on a county level basis. Looking at Missoula county, and reducing the 'ascertainment bias' from 10 to 5 (no reason to do this other than to be conservative in making the estimate; see site for explanation), and setting the event size at 1,000 (approx city high school population), we get a current risk level of 96%. Reducing the event size to 500, we get a current risk level of 79%. In either case, we are looking at a much greater than even chance that every school that opens with 500 or more people present will have a covid exposure incident. I know this isn't one of the sites that you listed as a source of data, but perhaps it should be, as it provides a quantitative estimate of the likelihood that a covid exposure incident will take place.

Also, in your most recent video (I didn't watch the original longer version), you talked about looking at trends, but you never discussed the timeline of the trend, which is important. For example, the trend for positive covid tests may be downward over the last three days, but upward over the last two weeks. In order to understand how you are evaluating the data, we need to know this piece of information, so it would be helpful to me if you could provide a time frame over which you are looking in assessing the trend for number of positive tests. Also, is there some % decrease in positive tests or a particular transmission rate that serves as a trigger to move from one "Phase" of school to another?

Finally, I'm starting to feel more and more anxious as school approaches about actually being in the classroom with kids, and am wondering what kinds of precautions are being implemented, besides the wearing of masks and reduced class sizes and modified schedules. Plexiglass shields around a teacher's desk or lecture area? Is the district providing students and teachers with masks? If not, are there any standards regarding construction of masks and how they must be worn? One thing I will probably not be willing to do unless/until case #'s drop dramatically is to be a hall monitor during passing time. We've not been provided a plan for allowing students to move from class to class yet, but I will say that I am not currently willing to stand in the halls with several hundred students passing by me during a five to ten minute time interval (with or without a mask), and my experience with high schoolers tells me that if there isn't active monitoring of student behavior, then there will be misbehaviors on a regular basis. These facts lead me to conclude that we will need a robust and effective plan in place to be able to manage these transitions without putting both students and teachers at great risk.

I know there's lots here to deal with but we are getting down to crunch time, and these are all issues of great importance to me, and likely to others as well.

Regards,

--

Will Pereira

--
Will Pereira

"Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth." Einstein 1901

Teacher, Earth Science & Chemistry

728-2400 x7082

Sentinel High School

Teachers going back do not feel safe going back

1 message

Lindsay Manzo <lrmanzo@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 11:20 AM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, mjsmith@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

First off, thank you for all you do and thank you for being a public servant during all times, but especially during this intense public health crisis.

I just wanted to comment that although me and many of my colleagues are going back to school to teach this fall, we do not feel it is the safest option OR the best for education. Many of us did not realize that we could apply to teach remotely just due to concerns about ourselves or our family catching Coronavirus in a school setting. We assumed and were often told by administrators - that this opt-out was reserved for people (or family members) with pre-existing medical conditions.

Almost all of my department (Sentinel Science) believes it is unsafe to return to in person learning (especially in the way we are doing it - with open lunches and sports still happening) at this time - but all are returning to teach, because we did not think there was another option. We also did not want to see AP classes and advanced science classes (not offered by MTDA) disappearing as options for students. We take pride in what we can help students experience in their High School experience and also care a great deal about our students. We also have non-tenured teachers who were concerned about opting out of the in person approach - for fear of being replaced the following year.

So, please - when you see how many teachers have chosen to go to school to teach - do not believe it is because we all think it is the best idea for public health - or even student learning!

Lastly, this hybrid model, considerations of public health put forth by the CDC and health department along with our current lack of chromebooks due to the weeks long delay is setting us up for some 'worst practices in education'. As of now, the way we are setting it up it keeps students from collaborating, keeps them from doing labs (we have always been short on money for supplies and lab equipment and do not have enough to have each student - even with small classes - work without sharing and being close), keeps the teacher from being close to them to show respect and manage behaviors, keeps them from place based experiential education, keeps them from learning through mentoring, etc.

We will obviously try to keep this experience as engaging and relevant as possible - but in order to keep students safe - everything we have learned to make a classroom a community is bizarrely modified or disappears.

I personally would love the US to shut down for a month - and then start school as normal with all the healthy interactions/curriculum we can normally provide. But I think that is bigger than MCPS, bigger than Montana - etc.

Thanks again for all you do. Thank you so much for caring about public health and education.

--

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

Return to school start date

1 message

Margaret Pereira <pereiramamt@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 11:42 AM

Dear Board of Trustees,

I support the plan to return to school on a hybrid model but I do not think that students should return on the 26th as recommended by Rob Watson. Instead, students should return on Monday, August 31 to give the teachers the full week of August 24-18th to prepare to teach in this hybrid model. Teachers are being asked to make such large changes to their known teaching structure that they should be given paid time to adequately prepare for this new environment.

The district has considered the parents input for the upcoming school year, please consider your teaching staff as well. I have spoken with quite a few who agree that they should be given more time than the standard 2 days to prepare to teach during a pandemic.

I appreciate your consideration.

Regards,
Margaret Pereira

Concerns regarding re-opening plans

1 message

Will Pereira <wwpereira@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 12:27 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear School Board Members,

First I want to thank you for your dedicated service to the district, especially in this exceptionally difficult time.

I want to share some concerns I have with the re-opening plan that Dr. Watson will be proposing this evening.

1. Candor. I am concerned that Dr. Watson seems to have told us that his recommendation for reopening schools in a face to face setting was contingent upon stable or declining covid counts in Missoula County, but in his most recent communicate to parents he states: "there has been a recent increase in case counts, not only in Missoula, but also in the rest of the state." Despite this acknowledgement of increasing case counts he states that he will recommend to the board that we should reopen in the hybrid model which includes face to face instruction. This seems to be a direct contradiction to his stated plan, and this direct contradiction, without any explanation for the course reversal causes me great concern with regard to his candor and trustworthiness.

2. Lack of adequate teacher preparation time. Dr. Watson's plan for reopening seems to possibly provide one day of extra planning time, but that has never been clearly delineated to the best of my knowledge. I believe that teachers are allowed to use the time allotted as PIR on Aug 31 as prep time prior to school opening, but am not certain, as I don't believe we've received any formal notification of that or explanation regarding any details. Even given one extra day of prep time, that is clearly not enough to allow us to adequately prepare, as Dr. Watson stated to me in a personal email: "I understand that it is only one day, which is not enough." Despite his acknowledgement that one day is not enough, he has not indicated that he has tried, or will try to figure out how to provide us with more prep time prior to reopening schools.

Here is a rather simple, but still inadequate, fix for that problem: No students in buildings until Aug 31; teachers have the entire week of Aug 24-28 to spend planning and meeting with building admin to figure out details of the reopening plans. The two days of lost instructional time can be made up on Aug 31 and Feb 8th, which were previously designated as PIR days. No need for a special day for kindergarten, 6th graders or ninth graders this year, as pretty much everything about schools is completely new to all students this year, not just these three grade levels. If admin is unwilling to give up this special day for those three grades, then forgive/forego 8 hours of required PIR time and use one of the two MEA days as a student contact day. I would predict at this point that there will be no face to face MEA conference this year for obvious reasons, and therefore those two days should be available as student contact days if needed.

With regard to the need for increased prep time, you must understand that virtually every aspect of teaching is being impacted by the covid crisis and the proposed new teaching schedule. I can't think of anything that I have done for the past 24 years as a teacher that won't be significantly different due to either the reopening plan or the covid crisis that has precipitated this plan. And we are being offered only one day of extra planning time. I honestly see that as flagrantly irresponsible. Given the administrative acknowledgement that one extra day of planning is inadequate, the only other options are to either be unready to teach on day one of the school year, or to spend a rather significant amount of my summer vacation time working outside the contract, with no hope for remuneration. For a variety of reasons I don't see either of those as reasonable or acceptable, and am very disappointed that the administration has not offered any other options for your consideration.

3. Many, many questions. Teachers have a huge number of questions/concerns regarding reopening schools. Virtually all daily activities and procedures are impacted by the current situation and many new concerns exist that have not been addressed. How will lunch work? Hall passes to go to the bathroom? Attendance procedures? Will teachers have full autonomy to design and select individual late work and other policies of that nature that we typically are allowed, or will we have restrictions like we did in the spring such as: only one graded assignment this week; only two graded assignments the next week; no students are allowed to fail after the quarter of remote learning if they were passing prior to remote learning. Will grading scales be up to us? So many questions about regular details of teaching that we normally take for granted.

We need to hear details about how the district will respond when a student shows covid symptoms, or tests positive without showing symptoms. What will be the procedure if one of my students starts coughing and shows a fever in my class? Will I and that entire class need to be tested immediately and not return until test results are returned? What if one of my students in 1st period shows no symptoms, is present on Monday and Tuesday, but tests positive for covid (perhaps the student gets a test because of a covid exposure event outside of school) later that week, say Friday. We now have potential exposure to me and all students in that class, as well as all students in my other classes, and any students and teachers in all classes attended by all of my students. What is the plan/procedure for dealing with that scenario?

What is the plan for dealing with a possible cluster of cases in a school? Will the entire school close and go to remote learning? If so, how much time will teachers be given to prepare for full time remote learning? How long would the full remote system be in place, and under what conditions would school be reopened? I believe the school board needs answers to these questions, with specifics and details prior to being able to vote to reopen face to face instruction. I don't believe that a promise from the admin to have a plan in place before Aug 26th should suffice to allow a positive vote for reopening our schools safely.

4. As I was beginning this letter, I got a call from my dept chair informing me that the district will not have the chromebooks available that we were supposed to get, and may not get them until late September or October. That seems to throw a huge wrench into the proposed hybrid schedule. If we can't be assured that all students have the technology they need to engage in remote learning, then that dramatically changes how teachers might be able to approach teaching 'remotely', and what the district can expect from students. Again, this is a detail that the school board needs a clear, concise answer on before being willing to say yes, we start students back to school on Aug 26th.

5. Safety. Dr. Watson's most recent communique states: "We expect that any return to in-person learning will result in transmission and positive cases of COVID-19." I am shocked at the matter of factness of this statement and the apparent disregard for its import. Covid disease has extremely variable impacts on individuals, is highly contagious, and extremely dangerous to a segment of our population. We know that it's not extremely deadly to most children and teens but just the opposite is true for the elderly. I am very concerned that as a district we disregard the potential that a student or teacher may contract the illness and unwittingly spread it to a loved one, an elder, or someone else who may spread to an elder member of the community who then dies of the disease. This is a very real possibility, and I find it disturbing that we might brush aside this very real chance, accepting it as a necessity, which it simply isn't. We can choose to engage in full remote learning until in fact that risk is at least somewhat lower than it currently is. If a small group of students needs to be present at school because they can't/won't engage in remote learning off campus then we can bring those students into buildings and provide support and structure that they don't get at home, without bringing back most/all students and teachers. The fact is we already know who those kids are based on the results of remote learning at the end of last school year.

6. Finally I think it's crucial to say that there are many other options than the one(s) proposed by Dr. Watson for reopening schools. The current proposal creates a huge number of challenges in order to address a relatively small number of problems. I think we can do better, and I think it's absolutely untenable to expect any sort of uniformly positive, quality experience for students if the board votes to go ahead and reopen under the schedule and system proposed by Dr. Watson.

I know your decision is not easy and I don't envy you or our district admin, but I encourage you not to abandon reason and sensibility in exchange for the blind hope that things go well...

Regards,

--

Will Pereira

"Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth." Einstein 1901

Teacher, Earth Science & Chemistry

728-2400 x7082

Sentinel High School

question about IEP accommodations and SpEd resources1 message

Ashley Cheung <acheung@shiningpeakpsychotherapy.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 1:21 PM

Hello,

I am wondering how the SpEd department will function during each of the phases. What resources will families and students have available in regards to small group learning/Title classes?

Will students be able to leave their classroom to go to the SpEd room for part of the learning? Will paraprofessionals be able to enter classrooms to support the students that need it?

Will a family be able to request a 504 at the beginning of the year and be able to get that set up within the same timeframe as is typically allowed?

Will there be staff and opportunity for an IEP evaluation to be completed as usual?

I have some families and students I work with that are wondering what to expect in terms of support services so that they're better informed to make a decision regarding in-person or the online academy...

Thank you.

--

Ashley Cheung, LCSW
Shining Peak Psychotherapy | Child & Family Therapist
phone: 406.880.9340 | fax: 406.721.5072

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Concerns about re-opening

1 message

Kelly Nelson <kjnelson@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 2:29 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, mjsmith@mcpsmt.org, dllorenzen@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear School Board members,

I am writing to ask you to put safety first when considering which phase schools should re-open in. Students and teachers and secretaries and custodians and bus drivers and all of the people that make schools function will be going home each day to their families. Opening school will greatly increase the number of contacts each person has in a day, and according to an article today on KPAX, 43% of Covid-19 transmission in Missoula is through community spread. And, according to the CDC, Montana has the 4th highest Covid-19 transmission rate in the nation. And while putting students in co-horts during the school day reduces the number of contacts at school, in the Phase 1 model, there will be 3 school days (and weekends) when students are not in school and is it reasonable to expect that they isolate on those days? And if they do not isolate, their number of contacts increases even more and contract tracing becomes more difficult.

Earlier in July, Dr. Watson outlined a plan that would use Covid-19 case numbers to inform a decision about which phase schools would begin in. I believe that starting in Phase 1 (hybrid model) required a decline in cases. But in his recent letter to parents, Dr. Watson says, "there has been a recent increase in case counts, not only in Missoula, but also in the rest of the state." So I am very concerned that he is recommending that we start in Phase 1 when case numbers have gone up and not down. Are case numbers not actually going to be considered when making this decision? In addition, the phase plan outlines how to go up in phase, but not what would have to happen to downgrade. If we do start in Phase 1, how many cases are required before we backtrack to Phase 0? Would it be by school? So, Sentinel may have to return to Phase 0 but other schools would stay in Phase 1? Or if there are x number of cases in the district overall, would we then move to Phase 0 as a district?

Personally, I miss my classroom and I miss my students and I miss teaching in person. Teaching science online is certainly not the same as teaching science in person. There are definitely drawbacks to schools being fully online, but we can make up for any deficits in reading, math and science skills. We cannot give a person back their health or their life.

This is a very difficult situation with no clear, easy, make-everyone-happy solution. Thank you for listening and for considering this from all angles.

Sincerely,

Kelly Nelson**AP Physics 1 & 2 and APS****Sentinel High School****728-2400 ext. 7068****kjnelson@mcpsmt.org**

Comments on MCPS Reopening School Plan1 message

Kathleen Kennedy <kkennedy@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 2:40 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Marcia Holland <meholland@mcpsmt.org>, mjsmith@mcpsmt.org, Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org
Cc: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, Jennifer Courtney <jccourtney@mcpsmt.org>, Kathryn Ballou <kcballou@mcpsmt.org>

August 11, 2020

Dear Trustees:

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my comments. I have recorded my thoughts, questions and concerns by adding a column to a copy of the District's COVID-19 MCPS Reopening Response Plan. I apologize for formatting issues and if this makes it hard to navigate, but it seemed the best way to address specific items in the plan. I realize that my understanding of all details may be incomplete, but given potential health effects of Covid-19, I am compelled to respond regardless. I wish there could have been an avenue to discuss these concerns much earlier.

To sum up my concern as both a parent of a high school senior and as a career educator, I want to get back into the classroom, however, MCPS must ensure that the model of delivery does not undermine the benefits of in-person instruction. I will obviously do my best to work with whatever you decide, but I urge you to think critically about what is being proposed. It isn't too late to improve or modify this plan. At a minimum, I think we should modify the first week of high school instruction to orient students to this new model and work with them to process the experience of last spring. As the schedule stands today, we launch right into the year of instruction as if nothing has happened. This is counter to everything I have learned this summer about what reopening schools should look like this fall. Let's set students and staff up for success! We are in an unprecedented situation and we need a plan that can be responsive and flexible to meet the challenges these times require of us all.

Thanks again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kennedy

MCPS, COVID-19, Reopening Schools, Guidance Comparison Chart

Background information: During July, four guidance documents were released regarding the reopening of schools:

Governor's Plan for Reopening Safe and Healthy Schools for Montana

Office of Public Instruction, Reopening Montana Schools Guidance

American Academy of Pediatrics, COVID-19 Planning Considerations, Guidance for School Re-Entry

Montana Academy of Pediatrics, School Reopening Recommendations

The following chart was created to show some of the basic considerations from each of the guidance documents. It is intended that MCPS administration will use these guidelines for a safe reopening of our in person learning in schools in August 2020.

Topic	Governor's Plan	OPI's Plan	AAP Plan	MCPS Response	My Response to MCPS
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<p><i>Basic Principles</i></p>	<p>Noting the uniqueness of every school district in Montana, our goal for this document is not to be prescriptive, but to provide effective, flexible guidelines to all schools in hopes that we can safely resume in person instruction in the fall.</p>	<p>As we approach the beginning of the school year, we encourage school leaders to plan for multiple scenarios and consider the different consequences of each. Concurrently, we want to ensure, regardless of the scenario, when we re-engage with students that schools continue to take safety precautions to ensure the health of their students, staff, and greater community.</p>	<p>The AAP strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school. The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020. Policy makers should acknowledge that COVID-19 policies are intended to mitigate, not eliminate, risk. No single action or set of actions will completely eliminate the risk of transmission, but implementation of several coordinated interventions can greatly reduce that risk.</p>	<p>MCPS believes that in-person learning is important, but the return to school also places students and staff at-risk for contracting COVID-19. We expect that any return to in-person learning will result in transmission and positive cases COVID-19. This risk needs to be managed so that transmission rates are kept low and the local health department is able to complete contact casing when there is a confirmed case. Our in-person learning plan includes considerations for personal protection as well as limiting the mixing of groups.</p>	<p>In-person learning is important, however the model that the district selects should not undermine its benefits. If the model selected does this, we will have put people at risk for little educational gain. The model of in-person learning selected should both mitigate risk and be grounded in best educational practices. This may not look the same at all grade levels and schools.</p>
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<i>Phasing Model</i>	Phase I, II, III Reopening for school districts has been categorized into three phases that align with Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III of the Governor's Reopening the Big Sky Plan.	Scenario 1,2,3,4 As COVID-19 impacts are fluid, we anticipate that multiple scenarios may occur when schools re-open in the fall of 2020 or may occur throughout the school year. Four scenarios are included as guidance examples for you. Following state directives, individual districts in consultation with local health authorities should determine which scenarios best fit their local situations.	General guidance given for all situations, not dependent on any particular phasing model.	MCPS uses Phase 0, 1, 2, and 3 to describe the level of restriction and response for return to school plans. The level of risk increases with each phase. Phase 0 is a 100% virtual learning model, while Phase 3 is a traditional in-person learning model. MCPS will make decisions regarding our phase based on guidance from MCCHD. Our current phase may or may not match the current phase from the Governor's office. <u>REF: MCPS Phasing Model</u>	What causes the district to move from one level to the next? Are there specific positive percentages? Are we basing everything solely on virus transmission rates or are we giving consideration to how well a model is working educationally for students and staff? Why is the Online Academy starting a week after in-person instruction (September 2 vs. August 26)? If any entity needs a delayed start, it is those of us who will be embarking on MCPS's drastically modified delivery of in-person instruction! Are we allowing students who spend their first days in an in-person model to transfer to the Online Academy during that first week?
<i>Phase 0, Scenario 1</i>	Stay at home order - no school	Buildings closed. All students remote learning model: This model will only occur if the state of Montana is under a complete stay-at-home order and/or	N/A	MCPS Phase 0 Full time remote learning, buildings closed. All students and staff are in remote learning	Many districts across the country are opting for full remote learning without a stay at home order. Staff may work in the building to deliver instruction and students attend class remotely. It is frustrating that everyone has seemingly dismissed remote learning as a potential alternative based on the flawed system we implemented last Spring. Many of my students told me that they would have done better during remote learning if they had been required to show up to a scheduled online class meeting. We don't have an accurate picture of its potential as an alternative because

		school buildings are closed.			teachers haven't been given an opportunity to improve it. While we as a district may not opt for a full remote learning model, it could happen again. I am unclear what we are doing beyond purchasing APEX to train staff and students to engage in remote learning more effectively. This is concerning considering remote learning is part of the Hybrid Model or Phase I.
<i>Phase I, Scenario 2</i>	Stay at home lifted in order to allow for gradual re-opening while minimizing the spread of COVID-19 through strict social distancing and building safety protocols. Schools may re-open for in-person instruction depending upon the circumstances of their community.	A mixed model of traditional and off-site learning. A limited number of students will be present in the school building at one time, with remote learning occurring for all students not onsite. This will require a blended approach for the planning and delivery of learning opportunities for students.	N/A	MCPS Phase 1 Hybrid Model or Blended Learning Model. Students attend school for in-person learning two times per week and the remainder of the week is done remotely. Half of the students are in school on any given day. <u>REF: MCPS Return Overview Doc</u>	<p>A Hybrid Model does reduce the number of students in the building and in the classroom at a given time, but as proposed by MCPS does so at the cost of increasing exposure time. A 2.5 hour block may not be tolerable for some students who wish to be back in school but do not have the ability to focus on a single subject for such a prolonged period of time. Restrictions on student movement will limit teachers' ability to use refocusing techniques and "brain breaks". Limited air movement and air exchange in some buildings could mean that this model increases the potential for spread even if distancing within the classroom is achieved.</p> <p>The interspersed Wednesday remote learning days for all students during 5 day weeks will be at the end of the cycle for one group of students and at the beginning of the cycle for another group. This means that this day cannot be used as a synchronous class that brings all students together. It limits teachers' ability to use that day for all students to move forward. Any online session would get reduced to a virtual "check in" or office hours. Additionally the long gap(5 days) in in-person contact with students makes planning far more challenging and places time management demands on students that may undermine their progress.</p> <p>Please see comments for Phase 2 as well.</p>

<p>Phase II, Scenario 3</p>	<p>School districts will open and continue to adhere to strict social distancing and building safety protocols. Limitations around large social gatherings remain in place.</p>	<p>There will be an increased capacity/number of students in the school building. This coincides with the governor's Phase 2, which increases permissible group size to 50 persons. Additionally, during this scenario schools will limit the number of activities to allow for continued physical distancing and will continue to provide remote learning opportunities for students who are not onsite.</p>	<p>General statement regarding capacity/number of students in school: Schools should weigh the benefits of strict adherence to a 6-foot spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative. Strict adherence to a specific size of student groups (eg, 10 per classroom, 15 per classroom, etc) should be discouraged in favor of other risk mitigation strategies.</p>	<p>MCPS Phase 2 Modified Schedule Every student, every day, but the school day is shortened and the schedule is modified to allow for limited mixing of students. <u>REF: MCPS Return Overview Doc</u></p>	<p>Nowhere in the schedule am I seeing fine details of the "modified block" or what a student's actual day and semester will really look like should they choose to return to school for in-person learning. Someone referring to the sample schedule would have to do the math themselves.</p> <p>As I understand things currently, each in-person class will consist of two 2.5 hour blocks separated by a restricted 30 minute lunch. Further we will be rotating through a student's schedule to complete the semester in 3 weeks of class contact. As the calendar stands now, this will be broken up into two quarter rotations over the semester calendar. Once this model commences, no matter what phasing level we are in, we will be forced to continue it through the quarter even if it is not working for students and staff. Something so inflexible in a situation that is rapidly evolving gives me pause.</p> <p>At the high school level, students will be returning from a period of extreme uncertainty and what many professionals are describing as a collective trauma. People support in-person instruction because they assume it will bring back a sense of stability and the normalcy we have been craving. Our proposed schedule so drastically departs from that it is surely to require a period of adjustment and orientation. Unfortunately, such a period is not built into the proposed schedule. Why aren't we planning for a period for students to get to know all of their teachers and build their support network as the school year commences? Why aren't we planning a period of time to work with students to process what they experienced at the end of last year? Neglecting this opportunity is going to have ramifications for the successful implementation of any model we choose.</p>
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Phase III, Scenario 4	<p>This phase eases most restrictions, but still encourages social distancing and limitations on large social gatherings to allow the economy to strategically reopen while continuing to prioritize public health. While this phase will facilitate a return to a "new normal" for schools and communities, it will be equally important to continue to monitor public health indicators and adjust strategies to mitigate community spread.</p>	<p>Near full capacity of attendance and operations in a traditional setting, with remote learning for students not onsite.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For ALL INDIVIDUALS there is no limit on group size, however, everyone should observe physical distancing and minimize contact time with others, and limit time spent in crowded environments. • VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS may still need to take precautions, and remote learning for students not onsite should be available. 	N/A	<p>MCPS Phase 3 Traditional School Schedule. Every day, every student under a traditional school schedule. Students and staff are still monitored symptoms of illness. Some restrictions on group size may still exist which may limit some school activities.</p>	<p>Until there is a vaccine, a return to the traditional school schedule must require measures to reduce virus transmission. Proper masks and social distancing need to be part of any plan.</p>
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Group Size	<p>Non-school setting: Phase I limits group size to 10 if social distancing is not possible. Under phase II group size is limited to 50 if social distancing is not possible. School Setting: Under Phase I and Phase II: Occupancy limits that follow local and state guidelines on classroom size and that allows for social distancing</p>	<p>Under Scenario 3, Phase II, Avoid GATHERING in groups of more than 50 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing. It is recommended to continue physical distance in gatherings of any size. Groups larger than 50 people should be canceled unless physical distancing can be maintained</p>	<p>Strict adherence to a specific size of student groups (eg, 10 per classroom, 15 per classroom, etc) should be discouraged in favor of other risk mitigation strategies.</p>	<p>As of August 2020, the MCCHD has placed a limit on group size to 50, when physical distancing cannot be maintained. We have very few classes that are larger than 50. We cannot guarantee physical distancing in all situations, so we will limit the group size to less than 50, whenever we cannot physically distance. We will also require cloth face coverings in all situations.</p>	<p>As a staff member and a parent I am making my decision to participate in-person instruction and sending my child back to school with the expectation that MCPS will utilize best practices to mitigate risk*. Those practices need to be grounded in the most current science. This science is evolving and we must have a plan that is willing to evolve along with it.</p> <p><u>https://schoolsforhealth.org/risk-reduction-strategies-for-reopening-schools/</u></p>
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<p><i>Grouping & Scheduling</i></p>	<p>Establish protocols for students to remain in the same groups or classroom, while teachers rotate, when practical.</p>	<p>Consider alternative schedules for class instruction. Keep students in same groups or classroom, with teachers rotating when practical. Alter the bell schedule to limit the number of students in transit between classes at any one time. Realign a bell schedule to include times for hand washing/sanitizing. School districts should create a unique plan that is appropriate for their school size. It is recommended that gatherings occur in shifts (recess, cafeteria and hallway passing).</p>	<p>The risk reduction of reducing class sizes may be outweighed by the challenge of doing so. Cohort classes to minimize crossover among children and adults. Have teachers rotate instead of students when possible. Use of block schedule at MS and HS to assist with cohorting of students. Stagger class periods by cohort for movement between classrooms.</p>	<p>Under Phase 1; Hybrid Model, MCPS will establish a schedule where only ½ the students are in school on any one day. This will allow for more physical distancing and will allow us to refine our protocols with smaller numbers. Under Phase 2; Modified Schedule, MCPS will create a time schedule that creates intensive block classes. This will limit the mixing of students on any given school day. In addition, MCPS will implement a shortened school day, which will allow for a staggered start.</p>	<p>Physical distancing is essential, but expecting students to be compliant for a 2.5 hour block of time seems unrealistic.</p> <p>Although we are reducing group size to permit physical distancing, we are doing so by creating a prolonged period of exposure with a 2.5 hour block. Research** demonstrates air exchange is a critical component of reducing risk in indoor settings. 2.5 hours in a classroom will impact indoor air quality unless indoor air is being filtered or replaced with outdoor air. How will we handle this issue if we have a late fire season and outside air quality declines? Collecting data on how systems are operating at all schools is essential. If exchange is not satisfactory, portable air filters should be provided.***</p> <p>**https://theconversation.com/how-to-use-ventilation-and-air-filtration-to-prevent-the-spread-of-coronavirus-indoors</p> <p>***https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NEhk1IEdbEj_b3wa6gl_zNs8uBJjSS-86d4b7bW098/edit?usp=sharing</p>
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<p><i>Social / Physical Distancing</i></p>	<p>Under Phase I and Phase II, the school Health & Safety plan SHOULD consider strict social distancing; for example, rules for traffic flow in congregational spaces and occupancy limits that allows for social distancing. Under Phase I and Phase II, the school Health & Safety plan MAY consider methods of limiting the number of individuals in classrooms and other learning spaces.</p>	<p>Scenario 2 (Phase I) Students may alternate school days, prohibit congregation in hallways and lunchrooms, install physical barriers in areas where it is difficult for individuals to remain at least 6 feet apart, provide physical guides such as tape on floors or sidewalks.</p> <p>Scenario 3 (Phase II) Recommended to continue physical distancing in gatherings of any size. Continue to limit communal spaces such as cafeterias and playgrounds.</p>	<p>There is a conflict between optimal academic and social / emotional learning in schools and strict adherence to current (CDC) physical distancing guidelines. In many school settings, 6 feet between students is not feasible without limiting the number of students. Evidence suggests that spacing as close as 3 feet may approach the benefits of 6 feet of space, particularly if students are wearing face coverings and are asymptomatic. Schools should weigh the benefits of strict adherence to a 6-foot spacing rule between students with the potential downside if remote learning is the only alternative.</p>	<p>For traffic flow in hallways, MCPS will develop protocols, based on individual school environments. Under Phase 1 and 2, lockers in grades 6-12 will not be used to minimize hallway gathering. Under Phase 1, MCPS will implement a hybrid model which will lessen the number of students in school on any given day. Under Phase 2, MCPS will implement school schedules that limit the mixing of students during the school day. Under Phase 2, we cannot guarantee physical distancing in all circumstances, but will be using other protections, like cloth face coverings, to minimize risk.</p>	<p>Please see the comments above about indoor air quality.</p>
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Face Coverings	<p>No specific requirement or recommendation for use of masks.</p> <p>"Provide masks for those present in the school building. The school Health & Safety plan should consider guidelines on the use of masks by all staff and/or students."</p>	<p>No specific requirement or recommendation, but restates CDC guidance. The CDC recommends cloth face coverings when physical distancing is not possible. This recommendation may be challenging for students (especially younger students) to wear in all-day settings such as school. If schools require face coverings, they should provide instructions to students and staff on the proper use, removal, and cleaning of cloth face coverings.</p>	<p>Yes for Adults and Middle/High School students. Maybe for elementary students. Although ideal, universal face covering use is not always possible in the school setting for many reasons. When developing policy regarding the use of cloth face coverings by students or school staff, school districts and health advisors should consider whether the use of cloth face coverings is developmentally appropriate and feasible and whether the policy can be instituted safely. School staff and older students (middle or high school) may be able to wear cloth face coverings safely and consistently and should be</p>	<p>Under Phase 1 and Phase 2, MCPS will require cloth face coverings for all staff and students, while inside school buildings or while outside and physical distancing cannot be strictly enforced.</p> <p>Staff and students will be expected to provide their own face coverings and MCPS will provide for anyone without a face covering.</p> <p>There will be exceptions made for a limited number of individual circumstances where the cloth face mask cannot be worn due to health limitations. We will have a limited number of modified face coverings with plastic window for situations where it is important to see the face of the teacher or student.</p> <p><u>REF: Students & Staff Face Coverings Doc.</u></p>	<p>Research has identified that not all face coverings are the same. Masks without air valves are more effective than bandanas and neck gaiter. Guidelines must be refined to ensure that proper face coverings are used.****</p> <p>****https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/early/2020/08/07/sciadv.abd3083</p>
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			encouraged to do so.		
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Health Screening	<p>Under all phases: Process for monitoring student and staff for symptoms and history of exposure. No specific process defined. Monitor and screen any non-school staff, including parents, when entering school buildings.</p>	<p>No specific guidance regarding testing or health screening. Require anyone (student and staff) with COVID-19 symptoms to stay at home.</p>	<p>Recommended to be done at home, not at school. The list of symptoms of COVID-19 infection has grown since the start of the pandemic and the manifestations of COVID-19 infection in children, although similar, is often not the same as that for adults. School policies regarding temperature screening and temperature checks must balance the practicality of performing these screening procedures for large numbers of students and staff with the information known about how children manifest COVID-19 infection, the risk of transmission in schools... In lieu of temperature checks and symptom screening being performed after arrival</p>	<p>Based on guidance from the Academy of Pediatrics and the Missoula County Health Department, health screenings for students will be done at home rather than upon entry. Conducting health screenings at the door of the school could create bunching up and would impact school functions. Recent guidance has stated that temperature may be ineffective in certain age groups. Students showing symptoms will be screened at the office or isolated location within the school. Parents will be provided with directions and a list of symptoms to conduct screenings at home. Staff and other adults will be screened upon arrival at school. All students and staff will be monitored throughout the day for symptoms and will be isolated and sent home if symptomatic. REF: <u>On-site screening procedure for staff</u> REF: Home health screening for parents</p>	
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			to school, methods to allow parent report of temperature checks done at home may be considered.		
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<p><i>Exclusion for Positive COVID-19 Case</i></p>	<p>Districts should establish guidelines in relation to isolation or quarantine for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms or history of exposure. In addition, guidelines when a quarantined staff, student or visitor may return to school.</p>	<p>Develop communication systems with county health for potential COVID exposure to school buildings, students, or staff.</p>	<p>Students with a positive COVID-19 test will be quarantined at home until there has been 24 hours with no symptoms AND 10 days since symptoms first appeared. Students with a COVID-19 exposure (close contact) will be required to quarantine at home for a minimum of 14 days, even if they are asymptomatic or have a negative test.</p>	<p>For any student or staff with a positive for COVID-19, MCPS will closely follow the guidance from the county health department. This includes being isolated at home until there has been 24 with no symptoms AND 10 days since the last symptom. MCCHD will monitor the individual and release them to return to school.</p> <p>For any student or staff that is considered a close contact (exposed) to a confirmed COVID-19 case, MCPS will follow the directions from the county health department. MCCHD will identify the close contacts, not the school. MCPS will cooperate with MCCHD to provide seating charts and contact information. Any individual who is identified as a close contact is required to quarantine for 14 days, regardless of symptoms or negative test. MCCHD will release them to return to school.</p> <p>REF: <u>Confirmed case document</u></p>	<p>The forced 2 week quarantine of a close contact may lead to people withholding information and/or a reluctance to obtain a test.</p> <p>If a teacher is determined to be a close contact of a student who is a positive case due to exposure in the classroom is it appropriate for that teacher to have to use their sick leave for the time they must quarantine?</p> <p>If a teacher gets ill and is hospitalized or has long term health effects due to exposure at school, is that covered under workman's compensation?</p>
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<p>Universal testing for COVID-19</p>	<p>No mention of universal testing</p>	<p>No mention of universal testing</p>	<p>Testing all students and/or staff: It is not clear that such testing would reduce the likelihood of spread within schools. It is important to recognize that virologic testing only shows whether a person is infected at that specific moment in time. Antibody (blood) testing: At the current time, serologic testing should not be used for individual decision-making and has no place in considerations for entrance to or exclusion from school.</p>	<p>Universal testing is listed as an <i>unsubstantiated practice</i> by the Montana Academy of Pediatrics because of limited value from the results. In addition MCCHD does not recommend antibody testing at this time, due to lack of confidence in the current testing process. MCPS will not be conducting any universal or antibody testing at this time. Circumstances or improved testing may change in the future and MCPS will reassess. <u>REF: MT Acad of Pediatrics, page 4.</u></p>	<p>While universal testing may not be substantiated, my hope would be that testing priority would be sought for teachers who have a positive case in their classrooms or have any respiratory symptoms regardless of the MCCHD's criteria. We have had a substitute shortage for years and any quarantine requirement is going to stress an already stressed system. Having the ability to rule out Covid-19 as flu and cold season begins will be essential. Teachers sick leave will be impacted by circumstances that are not necessarily under their control.</p>
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<i>Bussing</i>	<p>Clean buses after each route, Reduce bus loads to allow for adequate social distancing, assign seats to students on the bus.</p>	<p>Consider CDC guidance on pupil transportation. Schools should consider the need for more buses or alternative schedules to safely transport students. When physical distancing on buses is not possible, schools should consider cloth face masks and other mitigation strategies.</p>	<p>Encourage alternative models of transportation for students who have other options. Symptom screening at home. Assigned seating. When 6-ft distance cannot be maintained between students, face coverings should be worn. Minimize the number of people on the bus at one time, within reason. Have windows open if weather allows.</p>	<p>Under Phase 1 and Phase 2, MCPS will implement a shortened school day schedule, which will help to lower numbers. This staggered start will allow our transportation contractor to use additional buses at peak time to reduce the numbers on each route. 6ft distance between students would not be possible on most bus routes, however we will limit the number of students per seat and require the use of cloth face coverings. Buses will be cleaned throughout the day and high touch surfaces cleaned between routes. Seating charts will be used to help with contact tracing if needed. REF: Bus Protocol</p>	
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<i>Hallways / Lockers</i>	Create rules for traffic flow and congregational spaces (bathrooms, concession areas, hallways, etc.); establish methods of staggering the use of communal spaces and hallways and ensure regular cleaning. Clean all hallways, common areas, and the outside of lockers.	Provide physical guides, such as tape on floors or sidewalks and signs on walls, to ensure that staff and children remain at least six feet apart in lines and at other times (e.g. guides for creating "one way routes" in hallways).	Consider creating 1-way halls to reduce close contact. Physical guides on floor or sidewalk for traffic flow. Stagger class periods by cohort for movement between classrooms. Eliminate use of lockers or assign by cohort to minimize mixing of students before/after school.	Under Phase 1 and Phase 2, the modified schedule will reduce the need for the number of passing times within the school day. Dismissal procedures and hallway traffic flow procedures will be developed to minimize risk. At grades 6-12, lockers will not be used in Phase 1 and Phase 2 to minimize gathering in the hallways.	Implementing any sort of social distancing and traffic patterns in hallways at the high school level is wishful thinking. Understandably, many students are coming back to school because they want to be social as much as they want to learn. Even with a staggered dismissal, as soon as students are out of their seats, they will gravitate to within 6 feet of one another. While it is important for us to try to prevent this, we need to accept that this will be a consequence of in-person instruction rather than thinking this is a place where we can exert much control.
<i>Playgrounds</i>	Keep libraries, gyms, playgrounds off-limits unless they can be sanitized between groups.	Continue to limit communal spaces, such as cafeterias and playgrounds with shared playground equipment. If this is not possible, stagger use, and disinfect between uses. Outdoor areas, like playgrounds, generally require normal routine cleaning but do not require disinfection	Enforcing physical distancing in an outside playground is difficult and may not be the most effective method of risk mitigation. Emphasis should be placed on cohorting students and limiting the size of groups participating in playground time. Outdoor transmission of virus is known to be much lower than indoor	Playgrounds and outdoor areas can provide needed respite from extended time indoors. MCPS will allow for limited use of playgrounds and outdoor spaces, as defined by school principal. Emphasis will be placed on cohorting student groups and limiting numbers outside at any one time. Playground equipment may have to be restricted, depending on ease of cleaning.	While play outside may present challenges with social distancing, we should encourage holding class outside and invest in materials to facilitate that. Perhaps students could be surveyed to see if they have a "crazy creek" or packable stadium chair that they could bring with them to school so that outdoor spaces can be utilized more broadly. If students do not have one, perhaps the district could provide one to students who can't afford one. We need to think about ways to make a 2.5 hour block as tolerable as possible to students. Spending part of that time outside in a way that maximizes safety and comfort may be helpful.

		. (Source: CDC)	transmission .		
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<i>Meals / Cafeteria</i>	<p>Establish procedures for restricting the use of cafeterias and other congregate settings, and serving meals in alternate settings such as classrooms</p>	<p>Consider remote meal service options that maximize safety and physical distancing, such as grab and go breakfasts and lunches. No self-serve stations or buffets. Staff wear masks and gloves while interacting with individuals. Establish hours of operation that allow for facility occupancy that meets physical distancing requirements. Develop traffic flow patterns and seating arrangements for each venue. Adopt school breakfast in the classroom strategies for lunch. Designate entrances for those leaving campus for lunch.</p>	<p>Consider having students cohorted, potentially in their classrooms, especially if students remain in their classroom throughout the day. Create separate lunch periods to minimize the number of students in the cafeteria at one time. Utilize additional spaces for lunch/break times. Utilize outdoor spaces when possible. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after eating.</p>	<p>Under Phase 1 and Phase 2 food service will be made available to all students, but service will look much different. At most schools, food service will be Grab and Go or meals will be delivered to the classroom. Breakfast will be a Grab and Go model at middle school and high school. At K5 schools, MCPS will provide a breakfast in the classroom, which will be free for ALL K5 students. Due to the shortened school day, the lunch period will be shorter, 30 mins at all levels K-12. At K-8 students will likely be eating in their classroom or other space where cohort groups can be maintained. Breaks will be given for restroom and passing between classes if needed. At 9-12, due to space considerations, grades 9 and 10 will remain on campus for lunch, while grades 11 and 12 will be allowed to leave. This decision will be reassessed at the end of 1st quarter. Principals will work out lunch access points so that students can maintain smaller groups. Grab and Go meals (breakfast and lunch) will be available for pick up at all schools for any student who is on remote learning or participating in the MCPS Online Academy. Meal prices, including free and reduced price options, will apply with the exception of free breakfast in elementary schools.</p>	<p>How are students in grades 9 and 10 practicing social distancing during lunch? Students need a break from their time in the classroom and teachers need that time to sanitize desks before the next class comes in.</p>
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<p><i>Visitors & Adult Protocols</i></p>	<p>The Health & Safety plan may include processes for identifying and restricting non-essential visitors or volunteers.</p>	<p>No specific restrictions for adults and/or visitors.</p>	<p>Given what is known about transmission dynamics, adults and adult staff within schools should attempt to maintain a distance of 6 feet from other persons as much as possible, particularly around other adult staff. Physical distancing by and among adults is strongly recommended, and meetings and curriculum planning should take place virtually if possible. In addition, other strategies to increase adult-adult physical distance in time and space should be implemented. Parents should, in general, be discouraged from entering the school building. Physical barriers, such as plexiglass,</p>	<p>Under Phase 1 and Phase 2, no outside visitors will be allowed at school. This includes parent or community volunteers. This also includes university or military recruiters. Guest speakers will be encouraged to participate in a virtual format. Programs that require student and community member interaction will be done in a virtual format as much as possible. Exceptions may be made for university students who are participating in an approved field experience, such as student teaching. Expectations will also be made for parents who may be attending a prearranged meeting at the school for educational or other program reason. However, these meetings should be done in a virtual format if possible.</p>	
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			should be considered in reception areas and employee workspaces where the environment does not accommodate physical distancing, and congregating in shared spaces, such as staff lounge areas, should be discouraged.		
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<p><i>Organized Activities / Extracurricular</i></p>	<p>Lowest Risk: Performing skill-building drills or conditioning at home, alone or with family members. Increasing Risk: Team-based practice. More Risk: Within-team competition. Even More Risk: Full competition between teams from the same local geographic area. Highest Risk: Full competition between teams from different geographic areas.</p>	<p>Organized youth activities should avoid gathering in groups of more than 50 people in circumstances that do not readily allow for appropriate physical distancing. Pursue options to convene sporting events and participation in sports activities in ways that minimize the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to players, families, coaches, and communities. Limit gatherings, events, and extracurricular activities to those who can maintain physical distancing, and support proper hand hygiene. See Guidance from: <u>National Federation on HS Sports</u></p>	<p>It is likely that sporting events, practices, and conditioning sessions will be limited in many locations. Preparticipation evaluations (health screening) should be conducted in alignment with the AAP Preparticipation Physical Evaluation Monograph.</p>	<p>At K5 and 6-8, under Phase 1 or Phase 2, organized youth activities will be restricted to groups from within the school. In other words, activities or competitions that require mixing of students from different schools will not be permitted. At 6-8, intramural programs may still be allowed as long as students are competing against groups from within their school and cohorting of students is possible. At 9-12, activities governed by the MHSA will follow their schedule and guidelines with the final approval from the MCCCHD regarding sporting events. Under Phase 1 and 2, activities at 9-12 that are not governed by MHSA should be limited to competitions and grouping within the school, rather than competitions that require travel or mixing with groups from outside of the school.</p>	
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<i>Cleani ng</i>	Develop procedures for cleaning, sanitizing, disinfecting spaces, surfaces and any areas used by students and staff.	Follow CDC guidelines for guidance to appropriately clean and disinfect buildings, busses and playgrounds.	Cleaning should be performed per established protocols, followed by disinfection when appropriate. When using disinfectants, the manufacturers' instructions must be followed, including duration of dwell time, use of PPE and proper ventilation.	MCPS has specific guidance for routine cleaning by all school staff as well as detailed cleaning procedures for custodial staff. This guidance is specific to COVID-19 response. Protocols follow recommended cleaning guidance from CDC. Cleaning products are being assessed for safety, effectiveness and availability. REF: <u>Cleaning guidelines for Teachers and other school staff.</u> REF: Cleaning guidelines for custodial staff.	I have not seen any guidance about shared equipment during a 2.5 hour block. Are teachers allowed to have students use shared laboratory equipment such as microscopes and micropipettes? Can high school students be instructed to wipe down their laboratory area as would be standard lab protocol or is the teacher expected to do this for them during a lab?
<i>HVAC / Heatin g and ventila tion syste m</i>	Ensure the school is thoroughly ventilated and cleaned - opening all doors and windows or turning the HVAC systems up. HVAC system filters should be cleaned and changed.	Assess ventilation in classrooms and ensure that ventilations systems are working properly and are at optimal operation.	No mention of HVAC systems	MCPS will conduct an assessment of all ventilation systems in each school. Guidance for school staff regarding proper use of ventilation system will be given. MCPS is also exploring enhancements to the ventilation systems that are specifically related to COVID-19 protection. REF: Guidance for Principals regarding HVAC systems	The guidance document is not linked so I cannot comment on specific recommendations. Please see my comments regarding indoor air quality in the "Grouping and Scheduling" section above. Assessment must be done while buildings are occupied at a given capacity to see if things are functioning as designed. The specifications of equipment are not a sufficient assessment.

Updated: August 6, 2020

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Difference between online academy and remote learning

1 message

Jenni Rohrbach <jennirohrbach@hotmail.com>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 2:54 PM

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

Hi

Please clarify, if I choose in person option, my kids will go to school on Thursday Friday, is there a difference in remote learning on Monday and Tuesday, when teachers teach other half of the school on Monday and Tuesday. How does remote learning Wednesday look for everyone?

I guess people are confused how the material and resources On the online academy are shared and used.

The school has barely explained how online academy is going to look like? What is the time commitment, when's d how long, and expectations for elementary and kindergarten. Is it all virtual or also hands on projects writing, printouts?

How is the in person remote learning option different??

Thank you

Sent from my iPhone

Return to school not backed by metrics1 message

Julie <juliegday78@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 3:48 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

We're very concerned that the Phase 1 return to school recommendation by the Superintendent is not at all based in science and feel it is a very unwise decision. All of the graphs the districts claims to be using to guide this decision show increasing trends except for the Rt- which is behind the other metrics by a week. If this decision is truly in the best interest of our children, please provide the metrics (like the actual target numbers) you're using to make this decision. Further, as someone who answered the survey as wanting in-person school this fall, I'm very disappointed to learn this is being used to support a return to school during such a high point in COVID cases. I must have falsely assumed my desire to have my kids return to school was with the understanding that is was only if it was safe to do so. By all of the current metrics IT IS NOT!! Please reconsider starting in Phase 0 and only switching to Phase 1 when and if we see a declining trend in metrics.

We are unable to attend tonight's board meeting but would like this comment added to the public comments record.

Thank you,
Julie and Bill Gilbertson-Day

Feedback on Phase 1 opening plan/request for clear criteria for Phase 2 decision

1 message

Alison Dimond <alison.dimondkardos@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 4:11 PM

Hello Dr. Watson and Trustees,

I'm a parent of two kiddos in the district, a coming 1st and coming 4th grader, as well as a member of the PTA and sometimes lunch lady volunteer.

Thank you so much for your thoughtful work to develop a plan for returning to school safely. I can only begin to imagine the stress and difficulty of making this decision, which could prove life or death for people in our district. I do not envy your task! And I hope you feel support from the community.

That said, my trust in your decision making process was shaken by the decision to open school under Phase 1, the hybrid model. I understood, and very much supported, that you had a plan to make the decision about opening Phase 1 vs. Phase 0 (remote only) based on scientific data on case loads and transmission in the county. You said you would only open in Phase 1 if cases were declining or at a static low rate (which I understand you defined to a meeting of PTA leaders as 5 new cases per day or less). Case loads are increasing and have not been on average below 5 per day. But you are recommending opening in Phase 1 anyway.

I can see how there are many criteria to consider in the decision between opening in Phase 1 or Phase 0. I suspect you're considering that students will likely learn better with some face to face learning for example. I also appreciate that while cases are increasing, they're not skyrocketing. So there could be some wiggle room, even in a scientific data-based decision about opening in Phase 0 vs. Phase 1.

However, I am now very concerned about how you will make the decision to move from Phase 1 to Phase 2 (every kid in school everyday with a slightly shortened day and modified schedules). In your current guidance, you again say you will make this based on scientific case load and transmission data (From the phase reopening guidance document: "If we continue to see a steady decline or a static number in our community, then we will move into Phase 2 (every day, every student, five days a week) starting on September 21" and "If we start to see a steady increase in the numbers we are monitoring, then we could stay in Phase 1 (Hybrid model) for a longer period of time and continue to monitor the data").

I believe in your commitment to make the best decisions possible and to make decisions that prioritize the safety and health of our kiddos, teachers, families and communities. But to maintain trust, I strongly encourage you to follow the decision criteria you say you will use.

Will you commit to following these criteria and not moving to Phase 2 if cases are increasing? Will you please provide specific thresholds on what you mean by "steady increase," steady decline," and "static number" so we understand exactly what criteria you will be using and what level of increase or decrease will trigger the decision to move from Phase 1 to Phase 2, or not?

Will you also please provide the specific decision criteria you will use to decide if we need to open in Phase 0 instead of Phase 1 between now and August 26 (e.g. a specific 7 or 14 day average in increase in daily new cases or cases per 10,000 people)? Or will you clarify that there is no circumstance under which you would consider opening in Phase 0, if that's the case?

Similarly, will you provide clear, scientific data-based criteria for how you will decide if you need to move back to Phase 0 after school starts? And for how you will decide if you have to move back to Phase 1 if you make the decision to move to Phase 2?

There are also many good questions from previous public comments that I have not seen answered. I strongly encourage you all to publicly answer some key questions BEFORE you require families to choose between in person and all remote learning for the semester. In addition to providing clear decision criteria, as described above, I think you have to publicly answer the following before you can ask families to commit to all remote or in person learning for the whole semester.

- What will classrooms look like (e.g. desks 6 feet apart, no shared materials, no group work areas, etc.) and what will the school day look like (what will the schedule be, will students ever leave their classroom, will there be

recess, will there be specials and how will they happen)?

- If a family chooses remote only for the first semester, will they still be assigned to a classroom IN THEIR HOME SCHOOL for the second semester? Or will they lose their place at their home school if there are high class sizes? Will they know who their assigned classroom or remote teacher will be before you ask them to choose remote vs. in person learning?
- How many kids will each remote learning teacher be teaching, and will any grade levels be combined?
- What specific steps will you take if a positive case is identified in a school (e.g. close the school for 2 to 5 days, quarantine anyone who had contact with the positive person -- including everyone in their class -- for two weeks, other things)
- How will kids learn if they have to quarantine, remote learning from their classroom teacher or the online academy? How would this differ if we are in Phase 2 at the time of quarantine?
- How many cases would there have to be at a school, or what percentage of the school population would have to be positive, for you to close down the whole school and move that school back to Phase 0? And for how long would they stay in Phase 0?
- Who will pay for teachers' PPE and cleaning supplies? Who is supplying masks for kids who have trouble affording them?
- What are you doing to expand outdoor learning opportunities and improve ventilation in schools?

Without the answers to these and many other questions, I don't think it's fair to ask families to choose between in person and remote learning for the whole semester.

Thanks for considering these comments. And thank you for your incredibly hard work in this challenging time.

Best, Ali

--

Alison Dimond Kardos
Sustainability Consultant
alison.dimondkardos@gmail.com
Missoula, Montana
406-241-3398

**MISSOULA COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Do not place us in danger

1 message

Michelle Ellen <meellen@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 5:25 PM

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

Superintendent Watson and Trustees,

Please see the attached letter. I will be reading this letter at tonight's school board meeting. I urge you to please take a step back, allow us to make the best decisions for our own health and safety, and vote to allow us to teach remotely for at least the first semester of the school year and possibly even the second should a vaccine not be readily available at that time.

 **Letter**

Thank you,

Michelle EllenBig Sky High School
728-2400 ext. 8629

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Michelle Ellen

2204 Wyoming Street
Missoula, MT 59801
(406) 360-6865
meellen@mcpsmt.org

August 11 2020

Missoula County Public Schools Board of Trustees
Dr. Robert Watson, Superintendent

Re: School Reopening

I am an MCPS teacher and I am deeply concerned about re-opening our schools in any kind of in-person model. There is no doubt that the best way to teach children is in person. However, our first duty must be to ensure the safety and security of every person in the schools. Learning cannot happen without first feeling safe and secure. Re-opening our schools to in-person learning is neither safe nor secure. As we have seen in Indiana, Florida, Arizona and other states, when the schools re-open, Covid 19 quickly spreads in large numbers and the schools are forced to quarantine students and staff, and often close the schools entirely. Only yesterday, the American Academy of Pediatrics released a report that "380,000 children have tested positive for Covid 19 since the onset of the pandemic." Of those 380,00 children, "179,990 new child cases (have been) reported from 7/9 - 8/6". That is a **"90% increase in child cases over 4 weeks** (emphasis added)."

But it is not just our students who will be put at risk by returning to the classroom. Every teacher, support staff, and administrator will be put at risk of contracting Covid 19 by being forced to return to school. Our family members will be put at risk. All of the effort that we have each put into keeping ourselves and our families safe will be entirely negated by returning to the classroom. My husband is 71 years old. Every year I bring home a cold virus or two. Every year, I get sick for a few days. He gets sick for several weeks from the exact same virus. And now you want me to expose him to a virus that could kill him.

Let me make it absolutely clear. I love teaching. I love my students. I love being in my classroom. However, I did not sign up for this kind of risk when I signed my MCPS contract. Out of the more than 700 MCPS teachers, over 120 have applied to be allowed to telecommute. Now we are being told that Human Resources will be the ones making the final decision on who should be allowed to telecommute and who should not. This is not a decision that HR should be allowed to make. No one should be allowed to gamble with our health and our lives.

We demonstrated last spring that with very little training or preparation, we were able to teach online and keep ourselves and our students safe. Was it perfect? Absolutely not. But no one contracted Covid 19. No one died. Dr. Watson states that *MCPS believes that in-person learning is important, but the return to school also places students and staff at-risk for*

contracting COVID-19. We expect that any return to in-person learning will result in transmission and positive cases COVID-19. How can you possibly justify placing us at that kind of risk? How can you possibly justify gambling with our lives like this? This is the first in-person trustee meeting for months and yet you will only allow the public to participate online because of the risk of having a large crowd in a small place. Isn't it just a bit hypocritical that you are unwilling to take that risk, yet you expect us to.

I urge you to make the sensible, safe decision and allow us to build on what we have already successfully done. Allow us to teach all students remotely with the same curriculum developed by MCPS teachers to meet the needs of MCPS students.

Sincerely,

Your Name

comment regarding the lease agreement for dance studio

1 message

Eli Nyght <eli.nyght@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 11, 2020 at 10:45 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

My name is Elijah Nyght,

The proposed language of the lease agreement modification states three rooms of occupation. Does the dance studio not need the restrooms? Or is it the intent of the board to retain the restrooms for the other portion of the building?

Additionally, there needs to be a summary next meeting of what the final square footage is going to be and what the income from that agreement shall be. There should also be a comment about if restroom access was included in the dance studio lease and how that is going to impact the use of the remaining rooms (Are the restrooms going to be available during the day by grace of the dance studio? Who is going to clean if it is used during the day?)