



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Hybrid question

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Elaine RATCLIFF <khaligr1@hotmail.com>

Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 7:25 AM

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

I was not able to attend the whole meeting. I know hybrid was decided but how does that work for middle school? Will they stay in the same classroom? How about lunch? Recess? Will there be 6 foot distance between the kids or some type of barrier between desks? What is the plan when a student or staff member contracts COVID? How long does the school shut down for?

Thanks!

Elaine

Sent from my iPad

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**Decision**

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**Cristi Bush** <cb7194@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 7:29 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Good morning,

My name is Cristi Bush and I sat and listened to the comments last night. I also filled out the survey for my daughter attending Chief Charlo. My wife is a teacher at Big Sky High School. I am disappointed in your decision and disregard for your community. I am so upset that my wife, myself and my children's life means nothing to you! It is not you shoved into a class of kids that will not have temp checks or be tested before school. We have done everything in our control to keep our family safe during this Pandemic, I hope that there are zero deaths associated with this decision, as I am dealing with a new autoimmune disease as of a few months ago.

The survey was ridiculous and poorly worded. And as a business owner and a wife of a teacher, the hybrid model will definitely negatively impact our income and my business! I have to close M-W to be home with my daughter because my wife is teaching. No childcare is available for an 8 year old and if so, we will have a whole different group she would need to be with and another ridiculous expense! Would any of you sit in a classroom full of kids without temp checks and testing? Seeing and being in close contact with over 100 kids a day (against Bullocks group numbers) Because let me tell you how well parents keep their kids home when they are ill, they won't! Your playing with a lot of unknowns and many lives. I am angry.

You knew what your vote was prior to listening to all the individuals that did not agree. It took an entire 30 seconds for your terrible decision.

Cristi Bush

Sent from my iPhone

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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**Return to school**

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**lbond@bresnan.net** <lbond@bresnan.net>

Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 3:45 PM

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

I was alarmed to find out that MCPS is opening schools this fall during an increase in Covid-19 cases. I understand that the district is under a lot of pressure to open; however, I am concerned that this decision may be based on parental need for childcare instead of the safety of children, staff, families, and the greater Missoula community.

This is not a decision based on sound educational ideals and I fear that shutting the school district down when cases are found in the schools is a little like shutting the barn door after the animals have escaped. Any positive cases in Missoula schools means that there are positive cases in the community. The classroom is similar to a Petri dish and the result of one infection will be disastrous.

Please rethink this decision for the health and safety of all.

Thank you,  
Loraine Bond

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**Return to School**

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**Josie Firehammer** <josiefirehammer03@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 6:01 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;, rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us

Hello Dr. Watson and Board of Trustees,

I am an incoming junior at Sentinel High School and would like to voice some of my concerns about the return to school. My family has asthma, which has led us to consider the online option. I want to protect myself and my family, but by choosing online I fear that I will have a lesser school experience. Before schools were closed, I had registered for three AP classes, two bands, and two regular level courses (one of which I was going to take for dual credit). I do not know if these courses will be offered in the online format, and if they are I do not know who would be teaching them. I have received little to no information about what the online format will look like, which has made it almost impossible to make a decision. There are many high risk students who are looking into the online option; the online students do not deserve a worse education. For some of us online is not a choice, it is our only option. As much as I want to participate in in-person classes, my safety is the number one priority. I do not understand how the district can justify opening schools when the board meeting last night consisted of three hours of the public's concerns. The plan seems flawed. It allows my grade level to go off campus for lunch which increases the number of interactions we have in the day. Those who chose to stay on campus will still participate in classes with those who go out. Increasing interactions increases the rate of transmission. We were told that we would not return to school unless cases were going down, and they are not. It will only get worse if the schools reopen. The best and safest option for school, considering the current situation, would be a well thought out online education that offers all courses possible. Opening the schools is not safe, and is incredibly irresponsible. I know that making any decision during this time is difficult and I thank you for your work.

Thank you for your time,  
Josie Firehammer

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## Online Academy

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**Lisa Firehammer** <firemeisters@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 8:11 PM

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

Hello Dr. Watson and MCPS Board of Trustees,

I hope you are well. Given that the Board approved the recommendation to return to school in a hybrid model, my student plans to enroll in the Online Academy. This is due to health issues, not a preference.

However, before we complete the registration, we need more information:

\*If COVID cases continue to increase to the point that remote learning is required for the start of the semester, would students who have registered for the online academy be allowed to join regular classes, remotely, with their own teachers?

\*Conversely, if things improve dramatically during the semester, how would it be determined whether students could return to in-person classes? The website states this will be decided case by case, but what would be the criteria?

\* My student has planned an autumn 20 schedule she's excited about, with courses and teachers she selected intentionally. Currently, it appears that she would be able to complete only two of these courses in the Online Academy, with teachers she may not know. But the information about the Online Academy on the district website is so vague that it's not clear whether this is the case.

\* At the board meeting last night and in previous correspondence, we've heard that principals are working on plans related to AP courses and the Online Academy. When will we have details about those plans?

My student is currently registered for three AP courses. It does not appear that these courses will be offered to students in the Online Academy. One of the courses, AP Seminar, is a prerequisite for an AP Research course she'd planned to take senior year, completing an AP Capstone. My student was not just taking these courses to boost her resume, though they would, she also was excited about the content and the challenge they would provide.

We are concerned about the potential effects enrollment in the Online Academy will have on her academic and professional future, but because of the health issues in our family, we don't have a better choice. What assurance do we have that the quality of education offered to students with disabilities and illness will be equivalent to that offered to students who can attend class in person?

\*What is the deadline for registering for the online academy?

I strongly urge the Board to reconsider its decision. Offering remote learning to all students would ensure safety for students, teachers, families and our community. Your first obligation is students' safety, and your second is their academic success. You have abdicated both responsibilities.

Sincerely,  
Lisa Firehammer

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**Request for explanations involving last night's board meeting**

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Kelly McDonald &lt;kpmcdonald@hotmail.com&gt;

Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 9:40 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Hello School Board and Superintendent,

I am a parent of two children in Missoula public schools: one entering 6th grade and one entering 4th grade. I am writing to tell you my extreme disappointment and dissatisfaction with what occurred at last night's public meeting.

It appears to myself, and others, that those of you who voted to open schools this month in a Phase 1 hybrid model had already made your decision prior to the three hours of public comment, the vast majority of which requested to not open in Phase 1 this month. Each of those people took time and effort to speak to you, did you even listen to them? And after all of that thoughtful public comment, your response was as if there had been no comments made at all.

I would like to know what went on behind the scenes prior to the start of the meeting.

Rob Watson, I would like to know first of all why you recommend opening in Phase 1. Is there some risk of losing some funding if you don't recommend this? Please explain.

Board members who went along with the recommendation for opening with Phase 1 hybrid model this month: I would like to know who told you to vote like this or guided you to vote like this? Did someone indicate if there is a risk of losing some funding or some other threat for if you don't do this?

I would like each of you who went along with this recommendation last night to either go on record at the next regular meeting or issue some written statement prior to then, to explain your rationale for approving this. I would like to read or hear each of your top three reasons why Missoula schools should open in a hybrid form this month.

I would like each of you who were making this recommendation or went along with this recommendation, to explain what you will do or expect will be done when the school district begins to face lawsuits because teachers or staff who foreseeably and as a direct result of your decision last night, will contract a life altering virus at their workplace, and will need to be hospitalized for it, and may have life-long physical changes because of it, or worse end up dying from it. My understanding of coronavirus is that it is known to cause scarring in the lungs, and/or enlargement of the tissue in the heart. These injuries are permanent, physical, and life changing.

Chair Holland, I would like to know why you suggested this motion be made: to return to school in Phase 1 hybrid model, rather than simply wait in silence for a trustee to make that motion or some other motion himself/herself.

I would like each of you who voted in favor of this recommendation, to state if your decision in your mind was already made up, prior to the public comments being made.

If that is the case, then I respectfully request you to change your meeting operating rules, to require you to signal publicly as to whether your mind on a motion is already made up and would not be swayed in response to any comment or amount of public comment. And in that case, please change the rules to not allow any public comment at all once a motion is made. We each don't need to waste hours of our lives waiting to make a comment, if it will make absolutely no difference to you. We have more important things we must do for our children and for our own wellbeing.

Sincerely,

Kelly McDonald

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**followup to board meeting this week**

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**Debra Lassila** <2311lassila@bresnan.net>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org  
Cc: Andy Lassila <2311lassila@bresnan.net>

Thu, Aug 13, 2020 at 7:58 AM

Good morning,

My name is Debra Lassila. I am the mother of a Hellgate Highschool student and a registered nurse. My following comments represent myself & my husband.

After viewing the 3 hours of board meeting and public comments this past Tuesday evening, I am alarmed by the following as it relates to planned re-opening of schools during a Pandemic:

1) the meeting room and attendees were in compliance with CDC and the Missoula County Public Health Department's (MCPHD) COVID19 guidelines for reducing risk and spread of the disease by implementing face coverings and social distancing, and yet the plan is for thousands of students to return to school in an environment where social distancing of 6 feet or more can not, and will not be, implemented. You were all adults, in small number, in a large room; you did not feel comfortable with breaking those guidelines for a short (relatively) time for one evening and yet it is acceptable to not provide that same circumstance in the schools? If it is not possible, then that should be the guide for when/how you open classroom instruction during a pandemic. Interestingly, the international school wants to borrow MCPS space- I had that idea 4 weeks ago as to how we could spread students out and make it safer.

2) I did not hear that any new nurses, custodians, or other personnel have been added to the schools to accomplish safe return and safe practices during the school day (CDC and MCPHD guidelines). What I heard was teachers were going to do it?? Is that correct? I don't teach, and teacher's expertise is not infection control and health monitoring. With 20 years of experience in healthcare, I can simply look at a child and know if they are ill. I can interpret data, and infection control is the mainstay of my practice.

3) I heard that a plan will be developed for inclusion of students who 'can't wear a mask'. The plan for such students, THE REASONABLE ACCOMADATION, is for them to stay home and do the online academy. I practiced nursing all summer with patients 3 years old to 90 and not one of them could not wear a cloth mask. Likewise, if a person's health condition (of which myself and my colleagues can not think of a single one in persons that are well enough to be out of their homes) includes a contraindication for wearing a cloth mask, then they are at increased risk for developing more severe COVID19 disease and complications. Thus, they should not be around hundreds of others, inside, without social distancing. The presence of a student/staff member without a mask on poses a health hazard to others. My family will need to know IN ADVANCE if this risk will be present in any of my son's classes should he return to school via the hybrid model. I need this information to do a proper risk assessment for whether to proceed with allowing my child do participate in classroom instruction. Furthermore, "a face shield is not a substitute for a cloth mask"- quote from COVID19 Incident Commander Cindy Farr during one of her daily health briefings (I've watched nearly every one since spring).

4) The public/parents/taxpayers need to know what do the majority of the teachers think? What has been their feedback? Are they comfortable with the plan, as proposed, to resume classroom instruction during a pandemic with rising trends of case numbers and hospitalizations?

I have to go to work now, so I can not finish my list of concerns and questions. I wear an N95, gown, and eye protection for EVERY patient contact I have (no COVID19 symptoms) so that I am not considered a contact should the person later test positive for COVID19, and also so that I don't bring the disease unknowingly home to my family.

Thank you for your time. Will someone please confirm that you have received my comments?

Debra Lassila, RN, BSN, CEN, CTM

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

**Request to re-write and re-administer return-to-school survey, request to reverse school board decision for Phase 1 hybrid model, and request to reopen school this fall in Phase 0 online/remote learning**

Kelly McDonald &lt;kpmcdonald@hotmail.com&gt;

Thu, Aug 13, 2020 at 10:11 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Hello School Board and Superintendent,

I am a parent of two children in Missoula public schools: one entering 6th grade and one entering 4th grade.

I am writing again to express my dissatisfaction and disappointment with what occurred at the public meeting on Tuesday night August 11. I believe that the decision on Tuesday night to open schools in a Phase 1 hybrid model this month was inappropriate, particularly following what was stated in the three hours of public comment that occurred on the topic. I also have concern that the data for the return to school survey that parents completed, is skewed, and therefore unreliable. I am requesting that a survey be re-administered, and that the decision to open schools this month in a hybrid Phase 1 be reversed and re-addressed. Please replace your decision with a data-driven and up-to-date plan for Missoula's schools.

I believe that a more appropriate action in the current state of this pandemic would be to have Missoula schools reopen in Phase 0, so that teachers get some small chance this month to prepare for presenting online learning again. This is a regrettable situation that teachers are facing, because as we draw closer to the first day of school this month, you are now asking them to prepare for some in-person learning, with all new protocols for school and classroom expectations, while they also must prepare some online learning for the students, and navigate the online learning platforms. I feel that this is not adequate time for teachers to prepare their lessons and their learning spaces. This is particularly disappointing because my common sense tells me that if you open schools with in-person learning, particularly with all of the anxiety and potential chaos we are facing and will continue to face, the schools will soon erupt in coronavirus outbreaks, and at that point the teachers and students will be again shifting to 100% online learning anyway. Why not just prevent that scenario from occurring and open with 100% online/remote learning, find ways to provide increased support to those families who struggled with it in the spring, and allow teachers the chance to prepare all of their lessons in an online/remote format? That would be appropriate in a pandemic, and I would fully support it. Listening to the parents give public comments on Tuesday night, I believe many of us would fully support this.

My concern about the data from the parent survey being skewed and not reliable is as follows. I remember reading that the parent survey is to be completed by Monday August 10 at 5pm. I was waiting as long as I could to complete the survey, so that I could have the most time possible to consider the options, follow the news about the status of the pandemic, and talk with both of my kids in some open, honest and non-pressured discussions. I felt that I had accomplished all of this, and I completed a survey for each of my two children at around 3pm on August 10. I remember being surprised to get an email at 3:40pm stating the results of the survey. I was surprised because it had been stated that the survey would close at 5pm, and I was not expecting to get any survey results while the survey was still open. After considering this more, I now fully doubt that my responses to the survey were even included in the results that were reported.

I have other concern that the survey data is skewed, after hearing several public comments on Tuesday night that stated the language of the survey was misleading or was not clear, and some stating that they felt they did not have enough information when answering the survey. I heard several people requesting that the survey language be clarified and re-administered, and I am joining them in the request to re-write and re-administer the survey.

I now have thought more about the survey, and I am now wondering if the reported 72% of parents who responded to the survey might not be an accurate percentage of parents. As I said, I completed two surveys, one for each child as the survey instructed to do. If a family of four children completed four surveys, would that be counted as four parents responding? Or was the potential for multiple children in the same family taken into account in your reporting of the percentage of parent response?

I also am wondering if any families had two parents who each completed a survey for only one child (two parent surveys per child)? Was this potential taken into account? If it was taken into account and there was checking to make sure there was only one parent survey completed per child, wouldn't it be better to report it as 72% of families responded to the survey? Or to make it even more clear, since within one family there could be two or more children, each child or each parent with different preference about attending in-school or 100% online learning this fall, wouldn't it be better to report your numbers, not as a percentage of parents who responded to the survey, but as a percentage of students in Missoula public schools for whom a survey was completed? For the same reasons, I question the reported 73% of parents/students preferring to attend school in person this month. If the majority of parents want their children to attend school in person this month, where were they during the meeting Tuesday night? Was your vote or your recommendation based, in part, on the reported results of the return-to-school survey? If so, I believe your vote or your recommendation is

problematic, and I request this to be remedied immediately. These are my thoughts and I urge you to consider my questions and please reverse your decision to reopen in Phase 1 hybrid model. Implement a plan to open in Phase 0 online/remote learning, allow teachers to put what little time remains towards their ability to prepare their lessons, allow teachers (as you are allowing students) an ability to protect their health and safety and that of their families, and then reassess as time continues. Please make a plan that is up-to-date, informed by science, data-driven, and show us that the data you use for your recommendation is reliable and not skewed. Please explain what was informing and influencing your recommendation, and what was informing and influencing each of you who supported this on Tuesday night. Finally, please change your meeting operating rules to not allow public comment, if it ultimately will make zero difference in your voting and motions decisions.

Sincerely,

Kelly McDonald

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**School reopening**

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**Shirley Atkins** <zoolmntree@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 8:17 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS board members,

Two points:

**IN-PERSON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE:**

As a former elementary school teacher, and more recently, a former substitute teacher, and a grandparent, I strongly encourage you to delay ANY form of in-person school at this time. While Missoula's numbers are rising (we have now surpassed Bozeman in active cases) and Montana's numbers are consistently growing, we should not be bringing kids together into classrooms. Not only is this dangerous for the children and for the staff, it is likely to increase Covid-19 spread throughout the community. Even the proposed AA/BB scheduling will exacerbate the problem as parents seek other venues to provide care for their children on the off days, thereby increasing the children's numbers of contacts and possible contagion beyond the "half classrooms" the AA/BB schedule organizes.

**A BETTER WAY TO ORGANIZE SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS:**

On another note, how on earth do you intend to find enough substitute teachers to cover classrooms when teachers get sick even with ordinary illnesses? A substitute who goes in and out of multiple classrooms and even multiple schools every week could potentially become a Typhoid Mary carrying disease from one area of the city to another! Not only that, but your pay scale certainly makes it difficult to find experienced individuals willing to risk a Covid-19 infection by substitute teaching. You need to rethink how you will handle this! I worked for 3 years in Arlington County Virginia public schools from 2011 to 2014, and they reduced this threat (well before the pandemic) by assigning each school a permanent in-house substitute teacher who was paid to be there full time and could step in to cover classrooms as needed, and cover short term stints throughout the day when teachers were needed to attend IEP meetings, and the like. When not needed to cover a classroom, the in-house substitute did other work as assigned. By being in the same school day after day, the substitute teacher became known by the students, and the Sub knew the school culture and the student body in such a way as to increase his/her effectiveness while stepping in for another teacher. MCPS would do well to adopt this system, and during the pandemic, this could reduce the possibility of a single substitute spreading the virus throughout the district. Think about it.

Thank you for your attention.

Shirley N. Atkins

Retired Montana Elementary Teacher and Substitute

Missoula, MT.

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**ONLINE only our teachers are asking**

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**Charlotte Creekmore** <folkintegrative@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 8:31 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Our teachers are overwhelmingly asking for online with quarterly evaluations. Listen to our teachers and the union. Others states are doing this and meeting at home needs somehow, please research and do this for our community. Thank you for your end of summer stressfull work. We value you and your time!

On Monday, August 10, 2020, Charlotte Creekmore <folkintegrative@gmail.com> wrote:

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

—  
**Charlotte Creekmore**  
folk integrative family medicine

folkintegrative@gmail.com  
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**Charlotte Creekmore**  
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**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Delay reopening

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Valerie <valeriekrex@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 8:40 AM

Dear Missoula County School Board,

I am writing to plead with you to delay in-person instruction. The community was told that we would be following the science and the science has us at close to a 10% positivity rate. We are no longer in the "green zone". Dr. Fauci recommends remote only instruction when we are above 5% and we are above this benchmark. It is not safe to send students and teachers into the classroom right now.

Thank you,  
Valerie Krex

Sent from my iPhone

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Please reconsider the hybrid model

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**Kate Smith** <katemeinig@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 8:48 AM

Hello,

I am writing to ask that you reconsider opening up schools under the hybrid model. Please look at the data and the increased number of COVID-19 cases in our community and make the right decision and have all students on the online model. It's not safe for kids to go back to school, even for 2 days a week right now. And, it's not fair to put our educators at risk. We are in the middle of a deadly pandemic and waiting to open schools is the right and safe thing to do.

Thank you to Grace and Sharon for making the right vote this week!

Kate

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Remote learning

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**Shannon's Hotmail** <shannon\_wicks@hotmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 8:51 AM

I support a remote start for school in the fall for the safety and consistency that students, parents and teachers deserve. You have made it nearly impossible for parents to work full time and keep their kids in school with this hybrid option. We will have to employ a nanny full time which is a huge cost that you cannot possibly expect all families to endure. Your decisions are impractical for working families.

Shannon Doherty

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**(no subject)**

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**Bryn Rouse** <berouse@mcpsmt.org>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 9:29 AM

Dear School Board,

Please consider modifying your motion from 8/11's board meeting to extend the amount of time before you reassess changes between phase movements. Teachers, parents and students need consistency more than ever and committing to less than one trimester of hybrid learning does not allow for adequate implementation of a new system that includes extensive planning, restructuring of schedules/classrooms, ways of teaching and childcare and job considerations. This is especially true with many details of the school year still being resolved less than 2 weeks prior to the start.

It has been apparent since June that returning to in-person instruction every day (even on the modified schedule the district has proposed for Phase 2) will be unrealistic through 2020. Instead of constant chaos of moving between phases, the district needs to commit for a set period of time to either the Phase 0 or 1 and focus on quality implementation and support of staff and families of that plan.

Bryn Rouse

Resource Teacher, Grades 3-5, Hawthorne Elementary

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Protect Our Teachers

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**AB PolarBear** <abwinne@hotmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 9:30 AM

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

Dear MCPS School Board members:

Please listen to our community's teachers, administrators and staff and slow down the process of reopening schools.

Our school employees serve our community, and deserve to be protected. There are too many uncertainties about the health risks to school employees, and these valuable public servants deserve our support and protection.

- Annabelle Winne, MCPS parent of 2 children

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## **I support a shift to remote learning until cases trend down in Missoula**

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**Kate Rodriguez** <kate.rodriguez1@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 9:34 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Good morning,

I'm writing to express concern about kids going back to school in-person this fall.

Cases are still trending upwards in Missoula and I think sending kids to congregate in enclosed spaces at this time is dangerous. We still don't know for sure how harmful this virus is for children, but emerging evidence seems to suggest that they, too, can get seriously ill. Not to mention the teachers and other staff members who will also be congregating inside, many of whom may be in the "higher risk" categories.

We should wait until Missoula cases are trending down to resume in-person learning. Let's take the time to prepare protocol and procedures to ensure that all students and staff members will be safe.

Thank you for your time,  
Kate Rodriguez

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**Thank you for reopening schools!****Melissa Cotter** <cotter.mel@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 9:53 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us

Dear Superintendent Watson and Board of Trustees,

Thank you for making the decision to reopen schools! I am a nurse, and a mother of two young children and have been hoping that schools would reopen in some capacity for in person learning. My children suffered this spring as a result of school closures. It was unimaginably difficult for me to try to continue working as a full time nurse, be home with my two children, try to attend to their education, and care for them around the clock. It was an impossible ask. I watched as my children regressed academically, and they longed to return to their classroom, teacher, and friends. Education is essential for children's wellbeing! My family cannot do another school closure again. I would have to resign as a nurse and stay home with my children.

I have heard that some are claiming that parents only voted affirmatively to reopen schools, because the school district promised they would only open in phase one or two if cases have gone down. I'm hearing claims, that now those same parents no longer feel that reopening is safe. I believe that those comments are misrepresenting the polling data, and that a minority of parents are perhaps trying to speak for the majority of families. There is a fully remote option for those parents who are not comfortable with sending their children back to school for in person learning.

I want to make my voice heard, that I am in support of reopening schools. I recently agreed to be interviewed for a local news story, on my opinion as a parent, regarding schools reopening. I tried to find another parent out of my coworkers and friends who could also be interviewed and would represent a different opinion. I could not find one parent, out of my coworkers and friends, who was not in support of schools reopening.

Thank you for the decision you have made, and for all of the thoughtful deliberation it required.

Sincerely,

Melissa Cotter

Sent from my iPhone

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**Thank You.**

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**Emma Merle Hunter** <emmamerle@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 9:53 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

I'm a mom of three elementary school aged children. I'm also a RN working in public health and early child health and development. I know you're receiving plenty of negative feedback regarding your vote to open in phase 2 with partial in-person instruction, so I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate that decision.

As a public health nurse, I feel it's entirely evidence-based and appropriate to be offering in-person instruction in our community at this time given our infection rates and testing rates. As a RN working, at times, with high risk families and with knowledge of how incredibly damaging over the entire lifespan exposure to abuse and neglect or unsupportive caregivers are, it makes me feel so much less scared for kids in our community to know they'll be in a room with an educator two days per week. As a mom, I've struggled to work from home while my kids run rampant. I was not impressed with my ability to facilitate remote learning for them. There's been some back-sliding in terms of academic performance. Of course I'll take it over continuing the spread of a fatal disease, but I also can imagine how far-reaching these academic losses are for some kids and how difficult it will be for them to recoup those losses.

Again, I truly feel, in my professional opinion as a public health professional, that your decision is safe. Thank you!

Emma Hunter

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Re-opening of Schools and Teacher Safety

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camille allen <camillerallen@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 10:33 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

My name is Camille Allen. I am an educator and graduate student in Missoula. I have been asked by some current educators to reach out about their concerns about reopening schools in the fall.

Many teachers are feeling anxious about the procedures outlined for opening schools and would highly advise starting school remotely to give everyone time to establish procedures securely and confidently. This would provide extra security for teachers, students, and families by making sure correct protocols are in place prior to student returning to buildings.

I know that starting school remotely comes with huge obstacles but, to me, the lives of our students, teacher and community members is the largest issue at hand right now.

I would fully support schools being open for low income and at risk students to work in socially distant areas where they would have access to safety, food, internet and support.

Please consider the impact your decisions will have on teachers and what you are asking of them before opening schools.

Thank you for your dedication to families, students, and educators here in Missoula.

Best of luck,

Camille Allen

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## Request for Reconsideration of Hybrid School Opening

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**Cora Gavin** <cgavin@lumenad.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 3:01 PM

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees,

I'm writing to you because I'm extremely concerned about your decision to restart in-person education in a hybrid (Phase 1) model on August 26th.

My mom is a teacher. She's at risk. She has no choice but to return to work and risk her life with the possibility of being exposed to COVID-19, or lose her job, which she cannot afford.

I fully understand that people in America are working through this pandemic. The difference to me between my mom's job and a grocery store clerk is that it can be done remotely. I know that your concern is for the students and their mental health as well as their academic progress. However, fully remote learning is possible. It has already been done! And with very little guidance. Now that the teachers have had even more time to acclimate to a new way of doing their jobs, they'll be able to perfect the process. We're all learning as we go and many jobs can't be done at a normal capacity right now. Students are more adaptable than you think. **YOU CAN'T IGNORE THE FACT THAT THE UNITED STATES IS IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC.** Reopening schools and then inevitably closing them again once more cases spread will not change that.

There were 139 cases of COVID-19 reported yesterday (8/13) in the state of MT. That's a 397.14% increase in reported cases in this state since 35 were reported on March 26th. See attached screenshot. You can clearly see from this chart that cases have been consistently rising in Montana, especially since June. If there are more cases now than there were when you originally switched to remote learning in March, why would you decide to reopen schools? There are currently (as of 8/14 at 11AM) 76 confirmed cases in Missoula County. 77% of those confirmed cases are from "Close Contact to a Confirmed Case" or "Community Acquired." This is according to the missoulacounty.us website. I am sure that you know the stats so I will leave it at this but I'm simply trying to emphasize that COVID-19 cases are NOT consistently decreasing. This is dangerous for parents, children, AND the MCPS staff members. There is not conclusive evidence to suggest that children (especially older children) can't transmit the virus. Are you not even worried about kids bringing the virus home to their parents?

Please, how can you justify to me that my mom's life is expendable. Would YOU make this same decision if YOU were the one that had to go back into the classroom, or if it were your mother? Is it going to be worth it if my mom dies because she had to teach students in person with PPE that you can't even guarantee she will be provided with?? Giving teachers the option to apply for fully remote learning but then telling them (after application) that they can only be considered for that option if they have a disability is, in my opinion, unconstitutional.

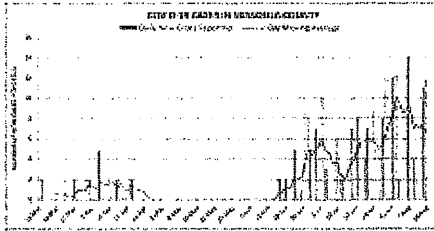
I took the time out of my workday to write you this email, so I sincerely hope that you take the time to read it in full and consider what I have to say.

I am an active member of this community and I will be watching. You will be held accountable for the decisions that you make and the resulting consequences. People will absolutely die as a result of this decision if you don't reconsider. Which side of history do you want to be on?

Sincerely,  
Cora

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**Cora Gavin**  
**LumenAd | Campaign Analyst**

406.552.1022 | LumenAd.com



16K

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**A very concerned teacher**

1 message

**Sara Hull** <mtgrizfam@gmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 4:09 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

MCPS Board of Trustees public comment:

I am writing as a dedicated teacher who is, for the first time ever, afraid to go back to school. I am soon to turn 50 and realized that means I have now been a certified teacher longer than I have not been one. When people say teaching is a calling, we really mean it. We have had other jobs, worked in other industries, but we are teachers to our core. And teaching is our chosen profession because of the students. On our students' best days, our job is wonderful. On our students' worst days, our job is difficult, but it only makes us work harder to reach them.

In my tenure as a teacher, I have had students die. Some because of cancer. Some because of their multiple disabilities. Some with unknown causes. But none from a preventable action not taken. I have also lost colleagues, the most recent occurring out of the blue last night. In every single event, I have struggled with the loss, and have struggled to make sense of it. My students have suffered even more in every situation. But never have I imagined I would be faced with the possibility of having to watch a student or a colleague become infected with a potentially deadly virus by another student or colleague. Talking to my students about sudden or senseless losses has always been difficult; I cannot begin to fathom how I will respond to questions about COVID-19 deaths, which could be prevented by staying home.

I have been an active listener and/or participant in all Board meetings and was listening to the Missoula County meeting this morning. Time and time again, I have heard the words "safe" and "conservative" being used to describe our hybrid reopening model. While I did not feel it was a safe model when the Board met on Tuesday, I am even more apprehensive after this morning's meeting.

The concern for me comes from just how many different locations our students are about to be in on a weekly basis, and how many exposures to the virus they will potentially have from Monday through Friday. Some students will be able to utilize after school care through the Y at their elementary school. Others will perhaps go to the Y, or to the Boys & Girls Club in their City Life Center. But, on the days they are out of school all day, they will need to go to a different floor and program of the Boys & Girls Club, or perhaps a day camp through Missoula Parks & Rec. At minimum, an elementary-age child with a working parent/guardian has now been exposed in three separate cohort groups, on top of their family. How is this the safest model?

On today's Missoula County meeting, health agent Ellen Leahy stated the "only protection we have now is distance." This was evidenced by all participants being online, in separate locations. We have already been told we will not be able to keep 6' of social distance in classrooms, so it will now be 3' with masks, yet studies have recently shown the virus can remain in the air in aerosol form for more than 16 feet. Ms. Leahy went on to say our children may not have symptoms, so we might not even know they are contagious; and then these children could go on to spend their week in four different locations during the course of a regular work day. How quickly will any contact tracing be able to occur with all these exposures?

I have not yet applied to be a remote-only teacher for our Online Academy due only to my fear for my students. If I am not there, who will teach them? We WANT to teach our students. We WANT to be back in the building. But we WANT to live even more. Teachers say we would give everything for our students. Please do not ask us to truly give everything. I am begging you to allow us to begin the school year online until we truly know the virus can be controlled in Missoula County.

Sara Hagen Hull, MCPS Special Education teacher



Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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## Reconsider motion

1 message

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**Joy Brooke** <joyannathompsonbrooke@yahoo.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 5:49 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Trustees,

As an instructional coach and someone who supports teachers and students, I am concerned for their health and also for the anxiety occurring among all. I would like to you to reassess the decision to begin hybrid.

Everyone wants to go back. We all want things to be normal. Unfortunately, this going back will cause risk and add more trauma possibly to students as cases in our community continue to increase. Schools shut down and we end up going remote again anyway.

The way we are doing hybrid with two days on and three days off has been shown that it increases the spread of Covid the most, as the three day kids are not at school families are mixing and matching what to do with their kids.

I'm really worried for our teachers and ultimately our students safety.

<https://www.wired.com/story/hybrid-schooling-is-the-most-dangerous-option-of-all/>

As the cases decline we should put priority to get K-2 and then 3- 5 back.

Then middle and high.

We should also prioritize those students/families that need basic needs met mental health support.

We can do distant learning better! Schools around the world are doing this and it's working.

What we did last spring was "emergency teaching". We can do distant learning. We can give students a great experience remotely with some just a little training. We can create a great experience for students.

Teachers are familiar with the remote environment and will be safe and healthy ... they have two days to prepare for hybrid, something they are not familiar with and may not be safe and will be at risk. They will do it and do their best because that's what teachers do, but at what cost?

I'm asking you to reconsider for the teachers and ultimately for our kids in this community.

Thank you,

Joy Brooke, Ed.D.

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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

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## **Please push back the re-opening**

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**Jenni Rohrbach** <jennirohrbach@hotmail.com>

Fri, Aug 14, 2020 at 9:17 PM

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

Kindly note

Our community, families, teachers are not ready to start in phase 1 or 2. Please hold of the re-opening of the schools at least for a few or three 4 weeks, once the covid numbers stop increasing. Online academy is not ready, school is not ready, the re-opening plan needs more preparedness.

Thank you

Sent from my iPhone

Tracy Hardy  
4409 23rd Avenue  
Missoula, MT 59803

August 15th, 2020

Board of Trustees  
Missoula County Public Schools  
215 S. 6th St. W  
Missoula, MT 59801

Trustees,

I am writing as a parent and an educator with Missoula County Public schools. I have 7 children living at home who attend school at 3 different buildings (Jeannette Rankin, Big Sky and Hellgate). I teach special education at Jeannette Rankin and my partner is a counselor at Hellgate High School. Regardless of HOW schools open this fall, I have two very important roles in the reopening.

As a parent, I have great concerns about the safety and health of my family and close contacts. After 5 months of living in a pretty tight, small circle of contacts, my family is now going to be exposed to a conservative estimate of **500 different contacts** per week (How many of you will be potentially exposed to 500 different contacts each week? ) as we all navigate our different schedules and expectations in 3 different school buildings. That is really pretty frightening given that this [risk assessment tool](#) developed by Georgia Tech estimates that in a group of 500 people there is a 99% chance that someone in that group will be COVID-19 positive. Chances are, if I or one of my family members gets the virus, we will be sick, work through it and be fine. BUT, there is also a chance that we won't. I desperately want to be working face to face with students and to have my children back in their classrooms with their friends and peers in an environment and with structures that are SAFE and with minimal risk.

All families are being offered the opportunity to enroll in the Missoula Online Academy and the choice to complete the first semester of this school year virtually. The online information given to the public is that students will be taught by MCPS educators. In fact, MCPS is going to contract with APEX learning system. A PRIVATE company who bills themselves as an accredited, online school. Why would the district pay what is essentially private school with their public funding to provide a different curriculum and content than our already purchased district approved curriculum that their very own, Montana licensed educators can provide??? This move to spend public funds contracting with a private school is a threat to our essential public education system that we should not endorse or approve.

I am concerned about many issues that the phase 1 hybrid model creates. First, teachers' mental health. I am not sure what has been communicated to you as a school board regarding

teachers daily schedules that have been created to accommodate this schedule. All teachers in the district will be asked to give up their 45 minute lunch period and in its place receive a 30 minute lunch and a 15 minute break (I am not sure how these breaks will be realistically and consistently staffed). Elementary teachers will be losing their guaranteed daily prep time away from their students. This prep time with no student responsibilities will now happen only 2 times per week and teachers will need to leave our classrooms to find a quiet place to work, as our students will stay in the classroom with the specialist teacher (PE, Music, Library, ) assigned to provide this prep time. Teachers will be asked to take their students to recess and to supervise recess. Teaching is hard. In a normal year it is hard mentally and emotionally. Teachers need breaks away from students to regroup, breathe, use the bathroom, get a drink, and reset themselves so that they can give their students their best selves. Lunch, prep and recess are sacred times in a teachers day that are now being reduced and/or eliminated.

In addition to the daily schedule changes I am concerned that teachers will continue to be asked to do more with this less time. We will be asked to teach two groups of students two days per week AND provide some asynchronous learning opportunities remotely (the exact expectations of this have not been communicated yet) when the students are home for 3 days per week. **We will be asked to teach 4 days per week and provide asynchronous, online learning opportunities for students 3 days per week.** HOW are we expected to find the time to make this happen? For our PIR day on 8/31 elementary teachers have been tasked with 6 hours of remote learning about two online learning platforms, SeeSaw or Google classroom. I imagine that after these 6 hours of PIR teachers will need another 6 to 8 hours each week to implement what they have learned and create and provide adequate learning opportunities for the 3 days that students will be out of our buildings. This will be on top of planning and creating what will be presented in the classroom. Given our current schedule we will not have the time to have adequate planning and preparation time until September 14th, eleven days after school starts!!

The newest iteration of our schedule for the first 16 days of school has eliminated any time for deep cleaning opportunities between the A and B cohorts. The original iteration of the schedule was AA X BB with the opportunity to clean thoroughly on the X day between cohorts. This is no longer happening during the first 16 days. Some classrooms barely get cleaned effectively when there isn't a pandemic, I certainly don't trust that our custodial staff will be able to do a much needed better job with the same amount of resources.

This pandemic has definitely illustrated for our society that public education IS an essential service and that teachers ARE essential workers. I hope we can all agree on that. Teachers are essential workers. Just as essential as healthcare workers, law enforcement, and grocery store workers. Given that, and knowing the physical conditions in which we work with students, then we should be given protective equipment, opportunities for testing and systems and structures for keeping everyone safe. If you want us to return to in person learning then give us N95 masks, face shields, cleaning supplies, personnel to clean, adequate ventilation in our buildings, adequate spacing between bodies in our buildings, access to quick testing, training on

how to keep things clean, sanitized and safe, and appropriate training and time to do our job of educating to the best of our abilities.

Because of the reduction of breaks, increased work expectations, not being given essential worker protection and the burdens and fears teachers are carrying with them as they reenter our buildings this fall, I worry about fast burnout and teacher's mental health and overall wellbeing. A healthy, happy teaching staff sets the stage for a healthy happy school and students.

As both a parent AND a teacher I am asking that you reconsider the motion approved on 8/11/2020 to reopen schools in "phase 1" as outlined by Dr. Watson. I urge you to slow down this process to implement a safer, better designed reopening with adequate training and time in place for teachers and staff. Teachers would be so much better prepared to deliver their best instruction if given at least a week of training and time to implement and create lessons whether for in person or face to face learning. **I am suggesting that students start on September 2nd at the earliest, rather than August 26th in order to give administration and teachers the time to prepare for whatever model of learning is deemed safest at that time.**

Sincerely,  
Tracy Hardy

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## Remote learning

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**K M** <ktmaunz@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sat, Aug 15, 2020 at 8:46 AM

Dear Board of Trustees:

I know this is not on the agenda for this coming meeting. But I am deeply concerned about teachers going back into the classroom right now. Missoula is not in a good place for reopening. I feel that you are needlessly putting our children and our teachers at risk, along with all the family members who engage with them. Yes, we need care for kids and I think there are better ways of doing that and thinking creatively then opening up our schools.

Hire teacher aids, education students at the university who are not going back. Create small pods of 5 or 6 kids. Allow those aids to monitor online classes from the teacher but also do outdoor time with the kids. We are failing at reopening schools all over the country. We don't have to fail. We could do this a different way.

We should have clear and strong safety guidelines in place. I am from a family of teachers and right now my heart breaks for all the teachers who have to choose going back to work and their health. This is not ok.

Refocus the goal. Children not receiving intense instruction for a year will not kill them. But children not receiving good childcare could. Have teachers all go remote, they will educate online and form pod groups that can gather outside or in classrooms, in other public spaces that are no longer being used...we can make this work in a way that is safe for teachers and in a way that parents who NEED childcare are receiving it. Please work with the teachers. I feel that you all are sending them into war unarmed. They need tools, they need to feel safe or else their stress is going to negatively affect all the students they are teaching.

I know these are challenging times please work with teachers to figure out what is right. They need to have the number one voice at the table.

Thank you,  
Katie Maunz

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**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**Reopening Schools**

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**Melissa Lynn** <mslynn@mcpsmt.org>

Sat, Aug 15, 2020 at 10:25 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

I would like to ask the board to consider the motion to reopen schools under the Phase 0 Model of the district plan until Missoula sees a continuous downward trend of COVID cases. I also ask the Board to consider committing to longer term (monthly or academic quarters) as opposed to two week decisions for consistency for students, families, and staff.

We are entering a political warfare using our community's kids. Reopening schools when data shows it is not safe is, in essence, a form of genocide. This is a pandemic. The consequences of trial and error are not minor. If this was a scientific study, it would never pass the Ethical Review Board. The risk of human lives far outweighs the potential outcome of the trial.

One day we will look back at this. I hope we can say, "We did everything we could to protect our citizens using the data we had at the time," and not, "We should have done more." We don't know a lot about this virus and we can not act in ignorance and hope.

Thank you-

Melissa Lynn she/her

1<sup>st</sup> Grade

Lowell Elementary

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## Opening of schools this fall

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**Dodie Andersen** <dodieinmont@msn.com>

Sat, Aug 15, 2020 at 11:34 AM

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

Dear Members of the Board,

As a grandmother of a student in your school district who cares about the future I am imploring you to use ONLY REMOTE LEARNING for the 2020-2021 school year. Your students often live with older adults who are vulnerable to death from COVID 19 and also infants who could be sickened unto death or severely crippled by COVID 19. Your wrong decisions could also put the district in danger of lawsuits, and increase the spread of the disease throughout the county causing needless pain and suffering. Listen to the scientists not the greedy politicians. Protect your students and staff by having NO IN PERSON LEARNING for the 2020-2021 school year. Be on the right side of history for you will be judged by what you decide. Stand strong for what is truly best for those you have the power of life and death over. Thank you.

Dolores Andersen  
(406)493-0606  
1204 Ponderosa Dr  
Missoula, Montana

Sent from my iPad

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**Please reconsider and open in Phase 0**

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**ELIZABETH sTUCKEY** <stucksprinkles@yahoo.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sat, Aug 15, 2020 at 5:32 PM

Dr. Watson and the Board,

Thank you for your hard work during these crazy times. Please reconsider and open in Phase 0, virtual, until MCPS teachers have the proper training and supplies to safely have students in the buildings. At the board meeting it was noted that MCPS did not have all the supplies it needed also the decision seemed made under pressure to let parents know what the plan would be for school opening. Our numbers have gone up, teachers who have asked to teach virtually still don't know if their request has been granted. Also, it was mentioned that in Phase 1 hybrid students who were on their off days may be offered grab and go lunches and YMCA childcare at the school, thereby increasing the number of people and chance of exposure.

Last year when school went virtual seeing their fellow classmates and teachers, even over zoom, was invaluable. The Online Academy will not offer this extremely important social aspect. Also, the Online Academy will not provide Spanish for Paxson students. Please reconsider and open in Phase 0 virtual so the students and faculty will be safe, be able to form relationships, and have the opportunity to learn the same material. By opening in Phase 0 it will give MCPS more time to prepare for safely opening in Phase 1. If you must open in Phase 1 please have the grab and go lunches and YMCA not housed in the school and please offer specials virtually so that exposure rates are decreased.

Much thanks,

Elizabeth Stuckey, mom of a kindergartner and fourth grader at Paxson Elementary

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**Reopening Concern**

1 message

Erin Ensley &lt;erin.ensley@icloud.com&gt;

Sat, Aug 15, 2020 at 5:53 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

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**Super Intendant Dr. Rob Watson and the MCPS Board of Trustees,**

I am writing as both a parent and an MCPS music teacher in concern regarding the board's movement to open our schools in Phase 1, the hybrid model. I understand this decision was originally intended to be made by the incidence of cases in Missoula, but that seemed to suddenly become the decision of the board, disregarding the serious upward trend of transmission in Missoula. Harvard epidemiologists have determined that the hybrid model for reopening is the least safe option if it does not provide accessible childcare that is grouped similarly to the cohorts created for in-school days. As childcare is not being freely provided for the masses by cohort, we should in no way be making this decision for our community. The risk of children going to various daycares and grandparents' homes around Missoula and bringing the virus back to school will create a major outbreak that could devastate our community.

On a personal level, I am high risk. My husband is also a music teacher at another MCPS elementary school. In the interest of lowering our exposure we have applied to teach remotely, which we recently learned was an application to teach in the Online Academy. We have been told that staffing decisions will be made next week (the week before school) so we are in the position of waiting to hear the decision of HR as to whether or not our ADA application stacked up against the other 120 teachers who applied. This decision is not being made by a medical professional, and Dave Rott stated in the board meeting that it would not be realistic to assume that the district can accommodate all of the requests.

Music teachers have been closely following studies out of Colorado on aerosols in music classes all summer. The reality is that given the state of ventilation in our classrooms and the inability to socially distance, elementary music teachers will not be able to sing, dance, or share instruments with children in-person. We will be limited to music appreciation and rhythmic activities. When I consider that the proposed schedule is to stay with one cohort for weeks at a time teaching from a cart, I have no idea how to make those lessons academic or meaningful. At least in remote learning students were able to sing and dance along with me. I even won a grant to provide recorders and ukuleles for upwards of 60 students to have at home.

When I consider my son attending school in-person I am extremely uncomfortable with the fact that the reopening plan does not include health screenings, mandatory social distancing, or testing. I have been told that my school is working with the YMCA on providing childcare at my school, but I find that to create disproportionately unfair exposure for my son. Does it not defeat the benefits of the hybrid model for the teacher's kids if they are going to school 4 full days as opposed to 2 half days and being grouped in the school building differently than the cohorts? Current proposed music schedules give the average music teacher 80 student contacts and several adult contacts at one time. Between my husband and I that equals 160, then add my son's contact with students in his cohort and childcare that may be different than mine, maybe 30-35. Finally add the minimum 25 contacts my daughter will receive at her preschool. As a high risk person, I simply am not comfortable with that amount of risk, especially if my role in the school has been labeled as providing "respite" for other teachers who should not be forced into taking this amount of risk either. My father is the CEO of a leading children's mental health provider in the Pacific Northwest and he shared with me that his staff's protocol for returning to work with children is 160 pages long. As a teacher, I have a binder in my room that includes information on fires, earthquakes, shooters and other less-likely but valid emergencies however I have not received a single paragraph of actual protocol to prepare myself to handle COVID-19 in school in less than two weeks.

When I consider the Online Academy for my son, which would be my preference if I am able to make that decision based on my application, I find that it is still not an acceptable option. The only amount of social-emotional health my child received in the spring came from Zoom sessions with his home school teachers and kids he's known since kindergarten. The Online Academy removes any sense of familiarity and connection that students had from their previous schooling. He will be interacting with complete strangers on a computer- that is developmentally and socially not appropriate for a second grader.

Every solution to this magnanimous problem affects groups in an entirely different and significant way, however illness, permanent physical damage, and death are only a discerning factor in one option. The risk of these outcomes is

significantly decreased in remote learning. The risk of illness and death is 4-5% higher for our Black, Native, and Hispanic families who are more likely to be essential workers in our community. If we make the decision to shift to remote learning, not the Online Academy, we can funnel community funding toward social services such as FIT coordinators, CSCT, and Soft Landing to make sure that our most at risk students can safely receive help with remote learning in the school buildings without the larger amount of exposure. Without the immense responsibilities that in-person learning would require of counselors, administrators, and school therapists, well-checks and home visits are more of a frequent reality. As Dr. Hall stated in the board meeting, schools do provide essential services, but what she failed to connect is that those same services can be provided in different ways than in a hybrid model. We may be able to provide them even more effectively if we are not weighed down by the intense anxiety and labor of hybrid schooling during a pandemic where warning signs and crises are less likely to be spotted than they were before the pandemic. Let's do one thing and do it well. Let's build and reconnect online relationships with our actual students in a way that is safer for everyone. Let's make the decision to shift to 100% remote learning until the rate of transmission is actually trending downward in Missoula so that teachers can start planning and gathering resources immediately to make this situation as successful for as many students as possible. In the meantime we can also better prepare for what in-person education will look like once it is factually safer and we can have adequate protocols and guidelines in place. Let's reevaluate quarterly so that teachers and parents can plan ahead for more consistent childcare needs. I am including links to some of the scientific claims I made at the end of my letter for your perusal. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Erin Ensley

#### Harvard Epidemiologist Speaks on the Dangers of the Hybrid Model

<https://www.wgbh.org/news/local-news/2020/07/30/harvard-epidemiologist-hybrid-model-for-reopening-schools-is-probably-among-the-worst-options>

#### Social Justice for Black and Brown Children During COVID-19

[https://www.utla.net/sites/default/files/samestormdiffboats\\_final.pdf](https://www.utla.net/sites/default/files/samestormdiffboats_final.pdf)

#### Colorado Study on Aerosols, COVID-19, and the Performing Arts

<https://www.nfhs.org/media/4030003/aerosol-study-prelim-results-round-2-final.pdf>



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Please reconsider reopening

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Jennifer Bucher <jlbucher@mcpsmt.org>

Sat, Aug 15, 2020 at 8:39 PM

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

With deep respect for the work the board has done, I must ask that you reconsider opening schools, even in the hybrid model. I am a high school teacher, and I have been in my classroom trying to space the desks out enough, and tend to all the details, and quite honestly, it is just not possible. I think parents would be pretty shocked if they actually saw what it will look like for their kids in the classroom.

It is not safe, and I am very concerned students, teachers, and staff will get sick, and even die. I am a dedicated teacher, but I feel very worried for what is about to happen. Please let us teach remotely, and keep our students alive.

Thank you, sincerely.

Jennie Bucher

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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## Remote learning

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**Nicole Chaffin** <nicolejchaffin@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Aug 16, 2020 at 1:31 PM

My name is Nicole Chaffin, I have two wonderful high schoolers at Hellgate High School. I am contacting you concerning the decision to have kids go back to in class schooling for the school year. I feel that that is a bad decision considering the Covid numbers are even higher than the end of the school year last year when it was all remote learning. I understand that you need to try to accommodate all parents and not all find it possible to remotely learn, but we need to protect the children and teachers from Covid 19. If anything, I urge you to start the year remotely and then a "soft" school opening. I just wanted my opinion to be heard. Thank you.  
Sent from my iPhone

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## return to physical school plan

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Jenny Owens <jpowens@mcpsmt.org>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sun, Aug 16, 2020 at 2:46 PM

Hello.

I am writing to tell you that as a teacher (and parent), I support the plan that Rob laid out in his video message on August 14th. I feel that getting kids back in the classroom is best. I realize that some families have circumstances that preclude them from participating in physical school at this time. The online academy is a great alternative for them.

Thank you.

Jenny Owens  
Russell Elementary  
2nd Grade Teacher  
728-2400 ext. 4836

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire,"--Yeats

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Please Support Missoula County Teachers

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**Jill Johnson Fritsen** <writestarts@gmail.com>

Sun, Aug 16, 2020 at 4:36 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

We are worried about our teachers. Please support Missoula teachers and stick with a remote learning model until COVID 19 transmission rates in Montana are actually lowering. This will provide more time to come up with a very safe and effective model for reopening schools.

Thank you.

Jill M. Fritsen

Michael B. Fritsen

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**Supporting teachers and revising meeting agendas to reflect public concerns**

1 message

**Emily Withnall** <emilywithnall@gmail.com>

Sun, Aug 16, 2020 at 10:48 PM

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

Dear MCPS School Board Trustees,

I am writing again as a parent and visiting classroom teacher in support of full-time MCPS teachers. I was one of many parents and teachers who called in during the public comment period during last week's meeting, and like many, many teachers, I believe that the first phase of opening the schools should be delayed until the Covid-19 numbers drop to a much safer level. It is my understanding from the comments teachers gave during last week's meeting and through the organizing that many of the teachers are now involved in, that a large number of teachers are in favor of beginning the year in full-remote learning with quarterly re-evaluation. I stand with the teachers who ask for additional time to prepare protocol and guidelines for future in-person learning when active Covid-19 transmission rates are actually declining in Missoula. According to a recent union survey, teachers are overwhelmingly experiencing high levels of anxiety and as a parent I support their requests to delay in-person learning for long enough to allow for creating plans and guidelines that will make learning safer and less disruptive. As a visiting teacher with Missoula Writing Collaborative, I also share teachers' concerns about how to effectively stay physically distanced when trying to help students with activities like reading and writing. The pleas from teachers to not open have remained with me since last week's meeting and I sincerely hope that despite the vote to begin with a hybrid model that there are options for re-assessing this plan based on public comments and the increasing rise in Covid-19 numbers. However, if plans continue, I urge you to do everything in your power to provide schools with all the cleaning supplies, PPE, and paid sick leave, and/or hazard pay that teachers will need.

I am aware that the agenda is already set for your upcoming meeting but I hope that if time to give public notice allows, you will consider revising the agenda to allow time at the meeting to discuss the comments you heard from the public last week. It is unclear what is done with public comments or what the purpose of them is. The vote to proceed with a hybrid model that immediately followed three hours of comments asking for the board to not proceed with this option has left me and many other parents and teachers unclear about whether public comments are simply procedural, or whether we have a voice. I have looked at the MCPS website and have not been able to find any information that addresses the purpose of public comments and how they are or aren't used in decision-making processes. This information should be clear, easily accessible, and widely dispersed so that teachers and parents can understand how and when our voices are taken into consideration, and whether public comments are ever addressed.

I am aware that MCPS, like school boards everywhere, are making very difficult decisions with insufficient support and resources from state and federal governments. I am also aware that schools could lose funding if enrollment drops. I am a firm believer in public education and I do not believe the school board or teachers should be asked to be miracle workers. But I do think clear, frequent communication and addressing public comments and concerns will go a long way towards retaining parent and teacher trust in the decisions that are made on our behalf.

Thank you for all of the time you have spent on these complex considerations.

Emily Withnall

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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**Reopening Plan**

1 message

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**Aloni George** <aloni.george@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 9:12 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

I am writing this email as a plea to reconsider the parameters in which school reopens.

As an educational facility, MCPS should stand as an example to the community. We educate, we evolve, we plan. We are data driven. We believe in science. We challenge ignorance by being role models worthy of respect. We do not respond based on political leanings, community demands or emotional reactions. The current pandemic demands the best of us. And while temporary interventions such as masks, physical distancing and remote learning present challenges in the world of education, it will be temporary. We are a pillar in our community, and as such must value, respect and promote the contribution of each and every member of our educational team to our students' successes. From custodian to superintendent.

Consider trends and transmission rates. Follow the guidance of the Missoula City County Health Department. Respect your employees. Do what we ask of our students. Use the data, use science to determine and facilitate an educated response. Be a leader for our students, staff and community.

Thank you.

Aloni George, BSN, RN, NCSN  
MCPS RN Case Manager

Sent from my iPhone

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**Schools MCPS**

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**jmveteto22@gmail.com** <jmveteto22@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 10:04 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hi!

I am a teacher at Sentinel HS. You have heard from so many teachers, and I am hugely disappointed that You won't listen to our point of view and request remote learning this semester. We have so many concerns that have not been addressed, that I feel disrespected and not valued for what I do and and for my Life.

The fact that you are willing to place my life at risk, knowing the facts and science behind Covid-19 is beyond belief and understanding.

COVID-19 cases have been consistently on rise or steady for the past month, the virus is here in Missoula stronger than ever - Rob Watson explicitly stated, that we would Not return to school under those circumstances.

So why are we returning to school?

We are not ready for the many different scenarios that may occur during this time.

We do not have safe ventilation and circulation in our schools.

We do not have safety measures in place - masks, barriers, etc.

We don't have the ability to efficiently test and trace for Covid-19.

We don't have protocols in place on many levels - class room space, what do we do if the teacher gets sick? Who takes my students? We don't have subs.

We are in the middle of a Global Pandemic !

Why can we not acknowledge this and teach our children and young adults the various ways we all work together to get through this as a community.

We could have spent this summer making remote learning fun and engaging- we have wasted enough time trying to piece this school year together.

Let's keep us all together- give teachers their classes and let us do what we do Best! Teacher our students !

Our dedication is not the question here - this decision is solely about acknowledging this pandemic, keeping everyone safe and alive, and allowing teachers to teach safely.

Thank you for your time!

Jeanne Veteto

Sentinel HS

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## Reopening Considerations

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Kristin Zschaechner <kbzschaechner@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 12:46 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Superintendent Dr. Rob Watson and MCPS Board of Trustees,

As an MCPS parent and teacher, I am writing today to urge you to reconsider reopening schools, basing decisions on data from the Missoula Health Department. The MCPS website states that "MCPS is committed to following a data driven dialogue process to focus on school improvement, develop strong instructional practices, and build skills in using evidence-based practices and data." If we can use data to drive our educational decisions, why can't we use them to drive our return to school plan as well? As educators, we use proficiency scales to assess student achievement. When considering reopening, why do we not have a similar table based on data that provides concrete requirements for moving from phase to phase?

The MCPS website also states that "As educators, we know the importance of safety and the critical tie to student success. We know that students can't learn when they don't feel safe. In our classrooms and schools, we strive to create a safe environment so that all kids can learn. During times of unrest, frustration and injustice we can all do our part to create that feeling of safety in our local community." If staff members do not feel safe returning to school, how can we instill a sense of safety in our students? A major part of what we do is educate. If students and staff do not feel safe, it defeats the purpose of reopening. Learning will not happen as effectively as a temporary, safe "at-home" learning environment. As my own children enter kindergarten and 2nd grade this year, I also wonder how safe they will feel as they stare at a teacher covered in PPE, while they themselves will be required to wear a face mask and not come into physical contact with other humans.

MCPS families, a large part of our community, are effectively being forced into a learning option that may not feel comfortable. Yes, MCPS has provided an online alternative to learning. However, the Online Academy is simply not accessible to MCPS staff children. As their parents are being forced to return to work, MCPS staff children are being forced into in-person learning as well as a district provided childcare situation. It is unclear whether MCPS staff children will be provided with a quality educator in this care situation that can help them with their remote learning. And it is unreasonable to expect teachers and staff to facilitate remote learning after a full day of teaching. Teacher and staff children should *not* be an educational sacrifice for the "greater good".

In my tenure as an MCPS teacher, I have attended 11 meetings regarding our health insurance. Every year I have attended, Human Resource staff tells us that "MCPS takes care of our own." As countless MCPS parents, staff, and students beg for you to reconsider your guidelines for reopening, how is MCPS taking care of their own? District emails have stated that Covid-19 *will* enter our schools. With the knowledge that students and staff will at some point contract a disease that can be life altering, I ask again, how is MCPS taking care of their own?

I would like to point out that MCPS is forcing many staff members to return to work, despite their level of comfort doing so. There is always the option of applying for leave, but for many that is not a financial possibility. In turn, staff are forced to choose between financial stability or protecting their health and safety. In these difficult times, we should all have empathy for others. By forcing staff members to choose between these two extremely vital aspects of life, we as a district are failing our community.

In closing, I urge you once more to reconsider the guidelines under which MCPS reopens. This choice should not be based on politics or opinions. Plain and simple, I ask you to use "evidence based practices and data." Lead by example. Prove to our community, especially our students, that we are truly who we as a district claim to be.

Sincerely,  
Kristin Zschaechner

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**School reopening**

1 message

**Gary Brooks** <glbrooksie81@gmail.com>

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 3:51 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees,

I am writing to ask that you reconsider your recent vote to open schools under the phase one hybrid model. As a retired teacher with 35 years of experience, I find way too many danger points to re-open schools in anything other than the full on-line model.

Until very late in the process, Dr. Watson and other administrators were committed to re-opening only when disease indicators suggested a safe return to school. Their triggers for opening included infection numbers being on a decline and a lower number of community-spread cases in and around Missoula. There are more infections now than when schools closed in March, and community spread is on an upswing. There is credible evidence that one Sentinel football player was exposed by a family member, and he then went to practice, potentially infecting the entire team. That kind of potential exists throughout the school. Data seems to indicate MCPS should not be reopening in phase one now.

There are few instructional models available that will allow a safe face-to-face return to school. Teachers cannot effectively move about the classroom to help students as they work. Classroom sizes will not allow for more than about six to ten students if social distancing is to be maintained. Even with the hybrid model, this may not be possible in many classes. Further, there are certain classes that by their nature become more risky. Music classes may be virtually impossible as students are required to powerfully expel their breaths to perform. How can their potentially dangerous lung exhalations be contained? Lab-based classes expose students as they move about the room and touch equipment. I also don't see how elementary grade level specialists can safely do their jobs. If they are to move from class to class throughout the school (and often between several buildings), those teachers may either carry the disease from room to room or be exposed to every single student. Another consideration is how substitutes might be used. Many substitutes in this district are, due to age, in that "more vulnerable" category. I have been a substitute in the district for two years, and there is no chance I will return to that role under current conditions. I suspect the number of substitutes will decline this year. For those who remain, they may easily be in multiple classrooms per week, or even in a single day. There are no instructional models that will work well at this point.

Safety for staff and students should be the first consideration. As a former teacher, I can tell you the social distancing hopes will not last, at any grade or age level. Imagine students getting to their lockers, even if only once or twice a day, while maintaining a six-foot distance. The custodial staff will be overwhelmed with the amount of extra cleaning and disinfecting. Bathroom use becomes a potential problem for spreading the disease, regardless of bathroom schedules. Also, how do students and staff safely eat lunch? If students eat in the teachers' classrooms, everyone is potentially exposed as they remove masks to eat. High school students who are allowed to eat off campus will, potentially, be exposed and return to campus to expose others. Safety first becomes safety hopes only.

As for the disease itself, the spread of bacterial and viral diseases is bad enough in a normal school year. Those of us who have taught know what a petri dish schools can be. Your model for a return to school exposes every staff member and every student to a potentially deadly disease. By extension, your plan also exposes every sibling, parent, and every other extended family member. One child carrying the disease home could infect dozens of people. This seems an unnecessary risk. We know now that younger people can carry and contract the disease; they are neither immune nor safe. A secondary risk exists. Scientists and medical experts now know the long-term effects that accompany this disease. Lung, heart, vascular, and brain involvement are very real and may affect a person's health forever. How many deaths are you ready to own by sending everyone into a dangerous situation?

Phase one is a well-considered plan, for some day, not now. Thank you to all the people who worked so hard to implement a variety of plans. Your decisions have not and will not be easy. However, evidence suggests in-person instruction in this country have not gone well, and they will probably not go well here. There are just too many

potential problems. I watched the last Board meeting; only two people who spoke were in favor of an in-person return. That speaks volumes. Reopening in phase one seems dangerous, risky, and irresponsible.

Sincerely,

Gary Brooks

**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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## Appreciation from a teacher

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Darci Coffman <dcoffman@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 4:06 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To the MCPS trustees:

I want to express my gratitude for your decision to reopen schools in the hybrid model this fall. I am convinced that the educational, socio-emotional, and even physical health rewards far outweigh the risks, and it seems you believe that, too. I trust you and the administrators of the district and my school to make the complex decisions necessary to protect the well-being of our kids. I also trust you, in consultation with our unions, to deal fairly with the employees who will be "on the front lines" this school year.

Please stay true to your pledge to be guided by health metrics (rather than emotions), and please know that you are appreciated. I'm wishing you the best as you move us all forward into uncharted waters.

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*Darci Coffman*

Hellgate High School

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**Amend the motion**

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Nancy Thibo &lt;nmthibo@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 5:19 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

To the Board of Trustees,

Thank you for meeting to address this heated issue of reopening the schools safely.

You've got a lot of fires to put out tonight. Issues are heated as people feel less trust in their leaders and public servants. It is my intent to weigh in on the way the MCPS wants to return to a healthy and unified educational system focusing on these three considerations:

First, trust needs to be restored. Please amend the motion and revert back to Mr. Watson's original plan to reopening schools based on the three data points. After participating in several teacher meetings, Rob has lost the trust of many. As a result the flight position is to teach as if your life depended on it and only the teachers can keep themselves safe. Or teachers are freezing and not doing anything. Some have just begun to fight back. A month ago, there was hope of unity. Today, there's wreckage that won't go away until the board acknowledges sound leadership.

Second, secure a plan for changing phases. In the case of moving to phase 0, the decision needs to be quick and well-defined. In the case of moving to phase 2, the decision needs to be forthright and practical. Just as teachers are depending on Mr. Watson to lead, students are depending on teachers to guide them through the inevitable changes that are in their futures. Eventually the desire to comply to masks, distancing, and sanitary practices will lessen. Human beings who train to be teachers are human beings first; they will give up caring when the situation feels futile and overwhelming. If the adults don't model effective organization and practical best practices, then what message does that send to our students? Do as I say, but not as I do?

Third, amend the starting date. We are not ready to begin school next week. The mental health of the teachers is a concern. There are too many questions unanswered. We're being set up for failure and it feels disenfranchised. What once felt like a cohesive, powerful work environment, now has become a fearful, incisive work place. Mentally, we're defeated before we even start.

Take a pause. We will be judged by the next generation for how we solved the problems of today.

Nancy Thibo

Big Sky High School

English Instructor

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

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## Re-opening schools

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Julie Brooks <jgbrooks2808@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 5:25 PM

August 17, 2020

Dear School Board Trustees,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding your recent decision to reopen Missoula County Public Schools using a hybrid model of instruction. As a bit of background, I am a retired MCPS speech-language pathologist. In my career with the district, I worked in 6 different buildings and was blessed with meeting and working with many of the district's amazing staff and students. From my experience in working in the schools, I am very concerned with the decision to start the 2020-2021 school year in a hybrid model.

At this point in time, in-person instruction seems very risky for a variety of reasons. Social distancing will remain difficult even with half of the students attending each day. Many of the classrooms simply are not large enough to accommodate even 12 students at a safe distance. I know the plan is for mask use, but I also know that proper fit and use of masks will be very hard for everyone to attain. Proper cleaning of materials and the environment has not yet been explained to the public, yet I don't see how it would be physically possible to clean all of the buildings/equipment as they should be cleaned, without significant additional support (manpower and money).

Returning to in-person instruction is nearly guaranteed to result in additional community spread, if it hasn't already occurred through some extracurricular activities. The infectious disease experts explain that children do not seem to be impacted as severely, which is certainly a good thing. However, many students (symptomatic or not) can be carriers to more vulnerable population members, including their own family members (grandparents, etc.) and teachers who may be more at risk. I worked with many families who lived in extended family situations where older adults would definitely be more vulnerable.

I am also concerned about educational issues with the hybrid model. I totally believe that in-person instruction is crucial to the best education possible for students, and I am sure that every teacher dearly longs for a return to that teaching. However, the hybrid model allows for only twelve days of face-to-face instruction in a semester and that instruction will be so "sterile" and "different" as to not be worthy of the risk to lives. During the last school board meeting, I did NOT hear one comment from a current teacher supporting the hybrid model. The staff members want to protect their students and families, themselves and their families, and the community at large. This can best be accomplished by staying at Phase 0, online-instruction only, for another quarter. Staying in this phase would also allow families to know what to expect and for how long, as well as give our community additional time to get the pandemic under better control.

I sincerely hope that the Board will reconsider the motion that was passed last week and discuss the issues again.

Sincerely,  
Julie Brooks, MA-CCC.Sp.  
Retired MCSP speech-language pathologist



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## New Threshold?

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**Autumn Johnstone** <adjohnstone@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 9:17 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello,

I have three kids attending MCPS schools and I am a teacher at Paxson. I want to applaud the Back to School committee for their thorough work and planning this summer. When the plan came out, I was impressed by its clarity. I felt like the district had provided specific guidance for what to expect when COVID cases rise or fall. I felt safe, as a teacher and a parent, knowing that there was a clear and reasonable threshold for when schools would open and close.

After last week's board meeting, I lost that sense of safety. The threshold is being ignored. According to the committee's graphs, we are in the zone where schools should be remote. However, we are opening in person. We are ignoring our own carefully constructed plan.

My question is, why has the threshold changed? Please let the community know the new plan and give us assurance that it will be followed. As UM students return, we can expect COVID cases to rise. When will schools close? What can we as teachers and parents expect as numbers rise and fall?

I desperately want to be back in school with my students, and I want my own kids back in school. We all need socializing and normalcy. But we need to go back safely and we cannot ignore our own metrics.

Autumn Johnstone

Sent from my iPad

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**return to work**

1 message

**Robin Hamilton** <rbdy@hotmail.com>

Mon, Aug 17, 2020 at 8:02 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Hello – I am a Title I Para with the district. I love my job and I love working with the children. I am also a retired teacher as well and in a higher risk category due to my age alone without factoring my health issues. I have significant concerns about returning to in person learning when the cases are so active in Missoula.

Experience has taught me that children return to school healthy and within a week to ten days they are sharing strep, colds, stomach bugs and many other viruses. Just a typical occurrence of children returning to school. Throwing in COVID-19 could prove to be deadly, even one unnecessary death would be too many. I also know that as a parent the first thing you do when your child has a fever is to treat the symptoms to bring the fever down but instead of keeping the child home some will send the child to school with no fever detected right away, this could be a recipe for disaster.

I know children can be taught to wear masks safely, wash hands, and so forth. There is more to staying safe. I know what I do to keep my family safe but have no idea how or if our families follow these same protocols at home or out in public. What exposures are they bringing into our schools? I believe children, teachers, and staff have a right to be safe at school. We all go home to our families. My husband is at extremely high risk due to age and other health factors, this weighs heavily on my mind every day. We can help children to learn remotely and make up missing skills. We cannot make up a lost life.

Thank you

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

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**reconsider and amend the motion to reopen schools**

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**Mary Lyndes** <mlyndes@mcpsmt.org>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 12:02 PM

Dear Trustees,

As a veteran teacher I understand the importance of in-person learning for all students. Getting back to school and working with students is clearly a priority for teachers, however it is essential that safe working conditions must be in place first. The ability to social distance is at the top of the list. The hybrid model, Phase I posed by Dr. Watson will allow for social distancing, in most settings. We will have to be creative in some situations but after teaching Ramp Up, I believe that with the small group sizes in Phase 1 we can all stay safe as long as we follow the previously stated plan to monitor the data (seeing a decline or a static number of new cases, rate of transmission and active cases). If we switch to Phase 2, the Modified Schedule, where every student attends school every day simply by the number of students in a classroom, social distance will not be possible. This will put students and staff at risk.

I would ask that as a board, you reconsider the motion of the August 11<sup>th</sup> board meeting "that MCPS restart in-person education in a hybrid (Phase 1) model on August 26" and modify the motion to keep the hybrid model in place for the entire first quarter. Not only does this help ensure that we can keep our students socially distanced, it also gives teachers and students time to implement and practice plans and protocols for both the in-person and remote settings. By early November, the end of the first quarter, we will have a better idea of the impact the return to school will have relative to the safety of students, teachers, families, and our community.

Moving slowly, to ensure safe working and learning conditions that are sustainable for the 1,100 staff members and 9,200 students of MCPS will give everyone the confidence and security necessary for success in these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

Mary Lyndes

Mary Lyndes, M.Ed., NBCT

Title I Instructional Coach

Franklin School

mlyndes@mcpsmt.org

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**mental health steps**

1 message

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**Julie Parker** <jparker3095@yahoo.com>

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 1:26 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

I am a school psychologist serving two MCPS schools. I am not weighing in on the physical return to school, rather **how** we should be addressing mental health upon return.

I appreciate the time and thought that has gone into academics and our safe return to school. I agree that it is best for many kids to be in school during this crisis if being in school includes structured mental/behavioral health support in addition to physical safety.

**I am alarmed at the significant increase in mental health issues and trauma symptoms among many staff, students, and families as we near a physical return to school. Overwhelmed teachers who worry about physical safety for themselves, their families and their students could negatively impact all students, especially our most vulnerable populations. Traumatized teachers could inadvertently traumatize students. Emotionally regulated teachers facilitate emotionally regulated students.**

Providing teachers with the training to support students in a way that is trauma-informed is critical to student well-being. This training, however, is only part of the solution. Students must have a perception of safety to access the calm and focused mindset that allows their brains to learn. To share these foundations of learning with students, teachers also need to feel safe in their work. To adequately address the well-being of students, we must also address the well-being of staff.

**For example, here are three concrete examples which can be addressed by classroom teachers:**

1. Scripted, developmentally appropriate answers to difficult questions students may ask about COVID-19.
2. Classroom strategies, such as mindfulness, for emotional regulation skills.
3. More information for teachers such as knowing the signs and symptoms of 'typical' and 'concerning' stress reactions (which require different types of support.)

Thank you for considering this information as you re-open schools. If you have any further questions, I can be reached via email or on my cell phone.

Julie Parker, MA EdS  
School Psychologist for MCPS  
406 493-7377 (cell)



Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## **school opening**

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**Dorothy Anders** <dot32clayborn@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 1:26 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing as a Missoula tax payer, a former educator, and a grandmother of MCPS students.

I am very concerned with the decision to open our schools for in-person learning. My worry is for my grandchildren's safety, as well as for my daughter and granddaughter, both MCPS educators, who are required to be at work in their schools.

I am concerned about my own safety from this virus being brought home, as I depend upon these family members for help at home.

Rather than open schools, shouldn't we use our creativity to improve upon on-line, remote learning?

Sincerely,  
Dorothy Anders

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**MOA Public Comment**

AW &lt;kickarsedesign@gmail.com&gt;

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 1:38 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us" &lt;publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us&gt;

I'm going to comment here. On the 10th, my daughter received an email (NOT ME, THE PARENT) that Sentinel HS ID's and pictures were going to be 1pm-4pm today for sophomores. We had important appointments and plans for today that we moved in order to make the ID and pictures. So we show up at Sentinel and were told that the picture and ID was moved to end of October AND they already had flyers with the dates printed out to hand to people. SO THEY KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE CANCELED but didn't send out an email to let us know the change but had the foresight enough to know to print out flyers.

Then, when we registered for the MOA on the 12th they said it started 9/2. Just checked today and it's now 9/8 I sincerely feel like MCPS is gas lighting us at this time. They are changing plans and schedules day by day. I am getting conflicting emails almost daily from either Watson or Sentinel principal on changes. This is complete nonsense and I am so fed up. Either get it together or make everyone do MOA until we know its 100% safe for our kids and you have more time to get your act together!

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**Public Comment in MOA and Apex vs. In person**

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AW &lt;kickarsedesign@gmail.com&gt;

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 1:53 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us" &lt;publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us&gt;

I'm a mother of incoming sophomore student.

It is not fair that If the hybrid model is 2 days in-person that the other 3 days Distance Learning be with a continuation of the schedule and teachers as the 2 days In Person! MOA students are getting the shaft!

Also, How do we choose courses for Apex learning? Do the students choose courses or do the instructors? No one knows! Who's guiding what classes our students should take? I'm not certain what level math, etc. my student should take. She did well as a freshman, but what's appropriate now for her skill, grade and learning level??!!

If things turn out good with the In-Person meaning no one is getting sick and every student follows health and safety guidelines and we choose to go back to In-Person for the Spring semester, how does Apex transfer over credits to Sentinel?

In my personal opinion I feel that using this Apex system and taking away the classes that My student chose last year has completely dissolved the drive and excitement out of learning. That was really the thing that had driven her throughout the summer is that regardless if in person or distance learning she at least got to take the classes she chose last year for this year and that she was so excited about. Now that's gone, it's now taking away the one thing we were all positive about. what are the Apex replacement classes she can take? We don't know what to choose, how to choose, who's choosing them for this year and school is just around the corner.

We are all also feeling bullied into returning to In-Person now because this Apex learning and classes is not what we were expecting and doesn't seem reasonable. Especially if the In-person learners get to have their chosen classes with the same teachers they get to learn with in-class.

So now we have to take the risk of exposing our child to a great risk of Covid when her dad is already at high risk of sickness and exposure or feel completely tossed aside and abandoned by her school.

Your MOA website changes daily, it's confusing and unhelpful. This whole thing is frustrating and infuriating for the student and the parent. I also feel for you the staff, but there has to be some sort of common value that if we choose Distance Learning that we're not also completely abandoning Sentinel High school. We need clear and final answers to make a clear and concise decision. Because I was 100% sold on MOA and now I'm not so sure. It feels like a thrown away afterthought and that's how I feel my kiddo is being treated. So like I said already we feel bullied into doing In-Person now.

I would appreciate clear answers to my questions via an email back from everyone as a whole (so they're is no miscommunication) or individually with effort and thought. I can also be reached via phone 406-207-5178 at any time.

Thank you for your time

Andrea Weitz

## In Person School should start when Online school starts for best results

Lindsay Manzo <lmanzo@mcpsmt.org>

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 8:51 PM

To: javgeris@mcps.k12.mt.us, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Marcia Holland <meholland@mcpsmt.org>, Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Michael Smith <mjsmith@mcpsmt.org>, Sharon Sterbis <sssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, Jen Vogel <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Board members and public,

I am a Science teacher at Sentinel High School and have been attempting to get started with preparations for the school year. I will be returning to school (I believe that is the case at least, I have put in for a telecommute request, but I think others more at risk than myself will be approved before me - and have not received a response at this point). For over a month now, I have been attending training sessions, attempting to collaborate with others, have spent hours trying to create an online presence and also modify assignments for in person and at home learning. Unfortunately, like the rest of my high school Science teacher colleagues, I am stuck with too many questions over very important details that have not been worked out or maybe just shared. I have been at a point for about three weeks now where I am not sure what and how I should proceed with preparations. One lesson I have made (inquiry based social distance science) has taken me five hours + to make, and only covers one in class day of work for one period of students. I am fearful that transitioning all my approaches and learning opportunities will take 60 hours per block of students. It is a daunting task at this point - very worthwhile of course! I want students to still receive a phenomenal educational experience, but I fear I will not have the time or resources to do so at this point.

I have asked many people who should be able to answer these questions and have had no response or varying responses that are inconsistent or incomplete. There are so many details to work out with safety and consistency for our families and students - that are maybe right now being approached? I am glad so many people are being so thoughtful about all of the details - but being stalled has made it so I cannot prepare in time for my students.

I would love for you to consider both in person and online schooling to start at the same time (which I believe was September 8th?) so that we can have paid prep time to work on creating the best in person curriculum possible in the weeks before (paid please).

I currently have no answers for myself or my department (I am also a department co-lead) about many things including:

- 1) Expectations of students at home while the chromebooks are delayed for weeks?
- 2) Whether or we will need to provide all online curriculum (us, not the online moderators) for students who are quarantined in the middle of this hybrid
- 3) If we will have access to school computers for our students in class while the chromebooks are delayed
- 4) If we can have access to online texts like we did in the spring for our two compulsory courses (Earth Science and Biology) so that students can have a clear source to work with
- 5) What size groups can lab groups be? This is important for spacing, supplies and ordering
- 6) Can we have students turn in work 100% electronically so that we can get work back to them timely and also not have to set aside and quarantine a stack of turned in work? - also, if we do not have access to chromebooks for 3 weeks - how do we do that? Or can we require any online work if not all are guaranteed their own computer?
- 7) Can we give deadlines?
- 8) Can we know what is in the online modules so we can attempt to align in sequence so when students come back in the spring they are not relearning the same material?
- 9) We will be teaching and grading in person work for 2-3 weeks without an 'online day' until week 4. When are we supposed to create and grade that work in the first group of students?
- 10) If one section (say periods 3 and 4) have a set schedule that leaves them 7 hours short compared to other blocks - do we cut a whole standard?

There are many more questions that we have at this point. Everytime we attempt to move forward we hit another unknown roadblock and unanswered question.

I am hopeful a delay with clear direction and answers would prepare us for an incredible learning opportunity for students. I know we can not guarantee that before then.

8/19/2020

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - In Person School should start when Online school starts for best results

Thanks for reading. I have many other concerns about this hybrid plan at the moment. I thought that we were sacrificing a good educational experience for safety before - but now, with students playing sports with no masks, open lunches, and allowing students to come to school without a mask - risking thier health and the health of others... And now - trying to prepare so at least we can provide a decent go... We just need more time and we need to consider stopping the spread as soon as possible, which means strict standards in the classroom.

Thanks for reading,

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Lindsay Manzo  
Sentinel High School  
Biology/Wildlife Biology  
Murdock Teacher Researcher  
Science Department Co-chair  
lrmanzo@mcps.k12.mt.us

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**Back to school**

1 message

**Sarah Lee** <sarahgreiser@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 9:59 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

I am a teacher and have been excitedly preparing my classroom because I have missed being at school. It has been a long six months and all I want is to be back at school.

There are a few things that I am concerned about:

1. I am a huge fan of the hybrid model but why are we only planning to use it for four weeks? Give us a quarter to settle in and watch numbers and do our very best to teach our students. Changing plans every four weeks is not what is best for students, families or teachers.
2. As a fifth grade teacher I have 29 students on my list. I know this will change once the online academy gets going but how can I possibly practice social distancing without enough space? (Another reason to stay in the hybrid model.) Shutting down abruptly in the spring was so hard on all of us so let's take it slow this fall so that we can try to stay healthy and stay open.
3. Can we please close enrollment for the online academy before school starts next week? I know that the online teachers will need time to prep for their courses but how can we get an accurate count on class sizes and staffing? There are staff members who are unsure of what and where they will be teaching this year.

Please help us make this the best year possible.

Thank you,  
Sarah Lee

Sent from my iPhone

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## History 101

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Michelle Ellen <meellen@mcpsmt.org>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 6:16 AM

To: Big Sky Staff <bigskystaff@mcpsmt.org>, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, gdecker@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, meholland@mcpsmt.org, ssterbis@mcpsmt.org, vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org

# Here's what happened when students went to school during the 1918 pandemic

By Theresa Waldrop, CNN

Updated 6:26 AM ET, Wed August 19, 2020

**(CNN)** This isn't the first time leaders have struggled with deciding whether to keep schools open in a pandemic.

During the influenza pandemic in 1918, even though the world was a very different place, the discussion was just as heated.

That pandemic killed an estimated 5 million people worldwide, including 675,000 Americans, before it was all over.

While the vast majority of cities closed their schools, three opted to keep them open -- New York, Chicago and New Haven, according to historians.

The decisions of health officials in those cities was based largely on the hypothesis of public health officials that students were safer and better off at school. It was, after all, the height of the Progressive Era, with its emphasis on hygiene in schools and more nurses for each student than is thinkable now.

New York had almost 1 million school children in 1918 and about 75% of them lived in tenements, in crowded, often unsanitary conditions, according to a 2010 article in Public Health Reports, the official journal of the US Surgeon General and the US Public Health Service.



Don Hoover and Joe Sistrunk of Starke, Florida, are ready for school during the 1918 flu outbreak.

"For students from the tenement districts, school offered a clean, well-ventilated environment where teachers, nurses, and doctors already practiced — and documented — thorough, routine medical inspections," according to the Public Health Reports article.

The city was one of the hardest and earliest hit by the flu, said Dr. Howard Markel, a medical historian and director of the Center for the History of Medicine at the University of Michigan. He was a co-author of the 2010 Public Health Reports article.

"(Children) leave their often unsanitary homes for large, clean, airy school buildings, where there is always a system of inspection and examination enforced," New York's health commissioner at the time, Dr. Royal S. Copeland, told the New York Times after the pandemic had peaked there.

Students weren't allowed to gather outside school and had to report to their teacher immediately, according to Copeland. Teachers checked students for any signs of the flu, and students who had symptoms were isolated.

If students had a fever, someone from the health department would take them home, and the health official would judge whether the conditions were suitable for "isolation and care," according to Public Health Reports. If not, they were sent to a hospital.



Influenza patients in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1918.

"The health department required families of the children recovering at home to either have a family physician or use the services of a public health doctor at no charge," the Public Health Report article said.

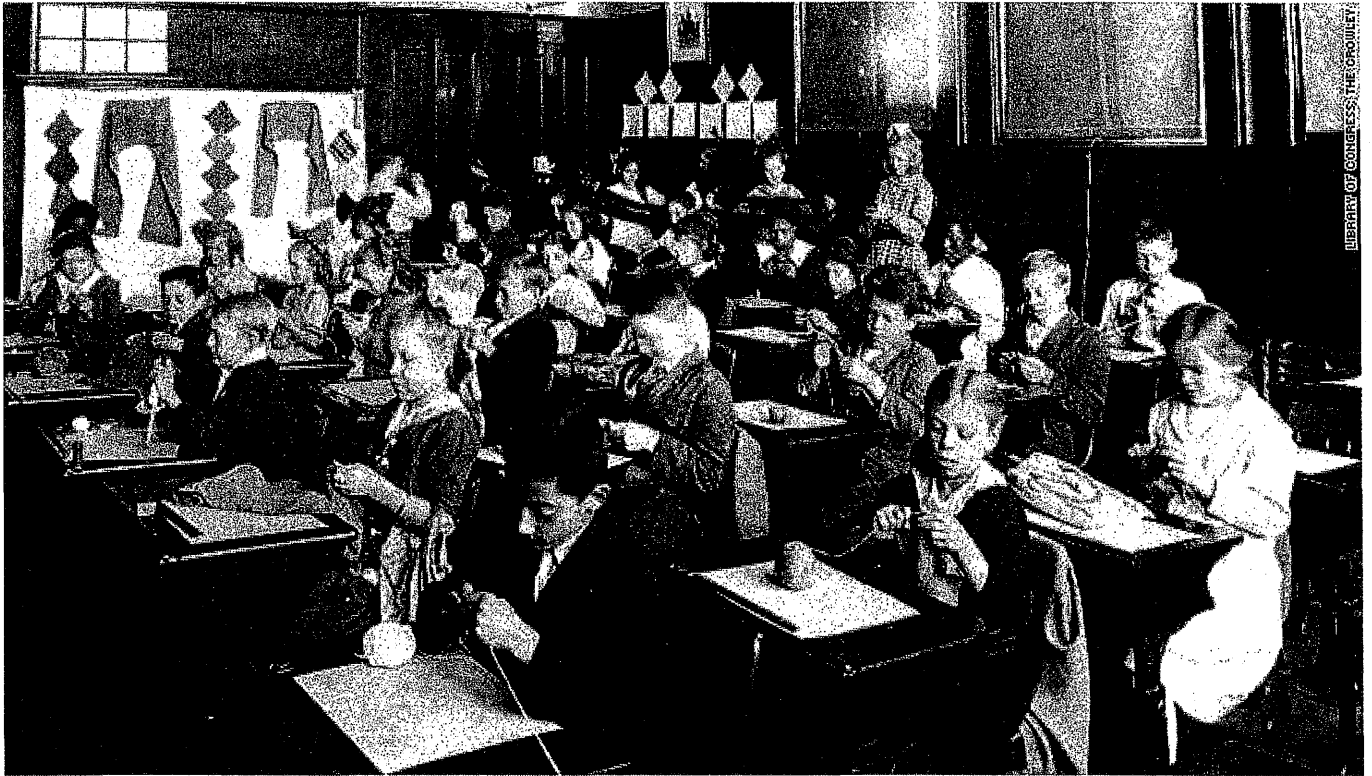
The argument in Chicago for leaving schools open for its 500,000 students was the same: keeping schools open would keep the children off the streets and away from infected adults, the reasoning went.

If social distancing was helpful then, it would have been made easier by the fact that absenteeism in schools soared during the pandemic, perhaps because of what one Chicago public health official called "fluphobia" among parents.

"The absentee rate was so great, it really didn't matter" that schools were open, Markel said.

Part of Chicago's strategy was to ensure that fresh air was circulated. School rooms were overheated during the winter so that windows could remain open at all times, according to a 1918 paper by the Chicago Department of Health.

The paper concluded that an analysis of data showed that "the decision of keeping the schools of this city open during the recent influenza epidemic was justified."



A fifth-grade class knitting for a Junior Red Cross project in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1917 or 1918.

And in New York, then Health Commissioner Copeland told the New York Times: "How much better it has been to have the children under the constant observation of qualified persons than to close the schools."

Markel, who with other researchers pored over data and historical records in looking at the response of 43 cities to the 1918 pandemic, isn't as convinced.

New York "didn't do the worst, but it didn't do the best, either," Markel said, adding Chicago was slightly better.

Research showed that cities who implemented quarantining and isolation, school closures and bans on public gatherings fared the best, he said.

"The cities that did more than one" of these measures "did better. School closures were part of that contribution," Markel said.

Public health experts, including Markel, are quick to point out that Covid-19 is not influenza, which was a well-known disease in 1918. There is still a lot to learn about the novel coronavirus and the disease it causes, Covid-19.

The right decision today, Markel said, is school closure.

"It's better," he said, "to be safe than sorry."

*Michelle Ellen*

Big Sky High School  
728-2400 ext. 8629

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## School Reopening Plan

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Tyler D. Bowen <tdbowen@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 9:11 AM

I hope this letter finds you all in good health.

Thank you for taking the time to take my comments into consideration with our current reopening plans. I can't wait to be back in the classroom with my students, but it's imperative that we be able to keep students and staff safe if we are to reopen the schools.

I am concerned about the seeming lack of a comprehensive plan to ensure student safety from COVID (I have been given zero direction on how we will socially distance students in classrooms, sanitize between classes, prevent students from gathering in large groups before, during, or after school, how we will prevent spread in crowded hallways between classes, how we will ensure proper air circulation in parts of the building that are not on line with the school's new HVAC system, what plans are in place in the event of an outbreak which the district has openly stated will happen, etc.), as well as the district deciding to move the goal posts on what needs to happen for schools to be reopened.

Previously, we had the requirement of 2 weeks of downward, or at least leveling off cases. We are currently showing a steady increase in cases both in the county and statewide. Previously it was stated that we need to have the ability to test and screen for the virus if schools were to reopen. From my understanding, the district has no current plans to test students or staff. Testing in general is not sufficient to meet this need in Missoula County currently, as you must be symptomatic to get a test done. Not even close contacts can get a test without the presence of symptoms. Furthermore, just a couple of weeks ago, the turnaround time on testing was between 10-14 days, and even the current 3-7 days can present issues with contact tracing. The most recent update I've received is that students will be screening themselves at home each day and staying home if they show any symptoms. This is problematic at best. Many students will not complete the screening and there's no way to hold them accountable to conduct the screenings. Even if they do conduct the screening, they are expected to work on the honor system and stay home if they are symptomatic. I have had students come to school after vomiting in the morning before school. I have had students come to school with fevers. I have had students come to school with any number of symptoms that would necessitate them staying home to avoid exposing others, but they come to school anyway, whether it's due to pressure from parents, fear of falling behind in their classes, or general indifference to others' health. Additionally, many people with the virus are asymptomatic, or have minimal symptoms. In this case, even if a kid screened themselves, they could still potentially come to school and spread COVID to their classmates and staff.

Before more research was conducted, it was thought that students would not get severe cases of COVID, and they were unlikely to infect other people, even if they themselves became infected. More recent findings have changed both of those beliefs, as children between 10-19 have shown to spread COVID just as easily as adults and there have been cases where students, even those with no underlying health conditions, have had severe cases of COVID, with some dying. A paper this week in JAMA Cardiology found that 78 of 100 people diagnosed with COVID-19 had cardiac abnormalities when their heart was imaged on average 10 weeks later, most often inflammation in heart muscle. The effects on the heart seemed impact those who had minimal to no symptoms just as often as those who had severe symptoms. They are finding that some young and healthy individuals even suffer from a condition called myocarditis, which can cause

sudden death. Early indicators are also showing possible permanent damage to lung tissue in people who have contracted COVID, and research is ongoing to determine the long-term effects of this damage.

Another aspect I'm concerned about is the district fulfilling its obligations to FAPE (free appropriate public education) as I have heard that many electives will not be offered to students who choose the online learning option, and will continue to not have the opportunity to take those classes, even if they entire districts moves to online learning. This does not seem fair or equitable to students who have health issues necessitating them staying away from the large groups that school brings, particularly in the event that those classes are offered to the general population in the event of universal online learning.

The final issue I have is the plan to re-assess reopening phases on such short intervals, and how the district will quantify their decision making in transitioning between plans. We need to have some actual data and numbers on the table to guide decision making rather than going on current whims or pressures from various sides. What percentage of community spread necessitates closing schools? What percentage of student or staff infection necessitates closing schools? These need to be data driven decisions using the most recent science available. Students don't do well without a routine. Changing between phases every couple weeks does not allow for anyone to develop any sort of routine, and that's in the best case scenario where we don't have immediate closings of schools due to an outbreak like we have seen in other school districts in the nation that have already opened up. In addition, the constant unknown of what will change in a couple weeks does not allow families to plan for childcare.

I want to be back in school, but not until it is safe to do so. Teachers, staff, and students deserve a safe learning environment. I implore you to consider my concerns. I urge you to start the year remotely, until our community gets our infection rates moving in the correct direction, and I also ask that you provide more stability with reopening plans by making decisions on a quarterly basis with plenty of forewarning time for families to they can plan accordingly.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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

(406) 728-2400 Ext. 7083

[tdbowen@mcps.k12.mt.us](mailto:tdbowen@mcps.k12.mt.us)  
<http://www.mcpsmt.org/>

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

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**opinion letter**

2 messages

**njshepard@aol.com** <njshepard@aol.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 12:06 PM

Reply-To: njshepard@aol.com

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Dear Board of Trustees

Attached please find my letter expressing my concern and opinion regarding the opening of the schools in Missoula County.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Janis E. Shepard, MDE

**School board letter - Coronavirus.docx**

15K

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

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 12:10 PM

To: njshepard@aol.com

Thank you for submitting your public comment. Just like comments made in person at a public board meeting, the comments you submit through email are public record and are available for any member of the Board and public to read. Please refrain from referring to confidential student or staff information, or making derogatory comments about students or staff members. If you do provide private confidential information, we will redact that information before placing it in any public document. Please refer to Board Policy 1441 for more information about public comments in general. Thank you!

August 18, 2020

To: The Missoula County School Board

As a concerned mother of a local high school teacher, mother-in-law of a local elementary school teacher and grandmother of 3 children attending MCPS I am highly opposed to a face to face school start. Until there is evidence that our infection numbers are flat lining or going down & will stay down anything other than distance learning is a threat to the safety of our students, teachers and families in general. I do not think the school environment is a safe place nor can it be made safe as the protocols for safety will be difficult to enforce.

My husband and I moved to Missoula in order to be hands-on & helpful grandparents. With a hybrid schedule, childcare is next to impossible for our teaching families with young children at home. In today's market there is a necessity for both parents to be out in the work force/ it is virtually impossible for a single income family to make ends meet otherwise. In the Spring when schools were closed our daughter was teaching on-line while having a 7-year-old and a 4-year-old to care for, entertain, keep busy, & follow up with their schoolwork. Our son and wife, both working from home, one teaching, and fielding calls and texts from 6 teachers for their high school student and a number of middle school teachers for their younger child. And yet, this was better than the alternative of running the risk of infection by being in the school setting.

Grandparents such as ourselves, having multiple risk and complicating health factors can no longer fill in the gaps and step up to the plate as we have done in the past prior to Coronavirus. That certainly leaves these families hanging. Also, with working parents trying to locate childcare for the under school aged children, it widens the bubble for contact.

Some evidence points to numbers going down, but with increased contact will they stay that way? If a vaccine is not yet available face to face classroom instruction does not seem responsible.

Please reconsider the school board decision, going virtual until there is solid evidence of lowering infection rate numbers and a vaccine is in sight. Looking around the country many schools that have opened are now shutting down, doesn't this tell us something. At least delay a school start, or go virtual where everyone is on the same page, any other decision for opening school is arbitrary and capricious.

Janis Shepard, MED

**Re: History 101**

1 message

Michelle Ellen &lt;meellen@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 12:14 PM

To: Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, Jen Vogel <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Marcia Holland <meholland@mcpsmt.org>, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Sharon Sterbis <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>

Trustee Old Person,

Thank you for responding. I was originally going to address this letter only to you, but I believe every trustee needs to hear this.

I was very disappointed by the vote last week to re-open our schools. It seemed to me that most of the trustees had made their minds up long before the meeting and did not take the teachers' concerns into account at all. There are so many gaping holes in the current plan that there is no way we can be guaranteed a safe and secure work environment. Cases in Missoula are not decreasing and we are not following Dr. Watson's original plan which was to only return to school once cases were on the decrease for at least 2 weeks. Helena School District and Whitehall school district both had positive cases during their summer school programs when only a few students and teachers were in the building together. They were forced to quarantine staff and students and move their summer school program to an online program. All across the country we have seen schools and universities re-open and just as quickly close down.

Last spring was not true remote learning. It was emergency learning during an emergent pandemic. Yet we made it work. I urge you to please take a step back from the rush to re-open our schools and give us all a chance to teach our students in the best and safest way possible, fully remote for at least the first semester.

We have already had far too many experienced staff resign, retire, or request leaves of absence over this unsafe decision to re-open the schools. This will only continue. Currently teachers at Big Sky are being asked to not only give up their contracted, 45 minute, duty free lunch and replace this with a 30 minute time frame during which we are expected to sanitize every touchable surface in our rooms. We are being asked to teach in two different platforms, both online and in-person. We are being asked to be ready to pivot without notice. Further, we are being asked to teach additional classes with absolutely zero time to prepare because teachers who have been approved to telecommute will not be teaching their own classes, rather they will be teaching the Alex program online.

If we were to go fully remote, students will be safe, staff will be safe, teachers will be safe, and true learning can happen. Learning cannot happen when teachers feel scared, traumatized, panicked, and uncertain. You are asking us to put our lives on the line every day, yet the trustees are unwilling to even hold a public meeting. You sit in a meeting around the periphery of a room, 6-8 feet from each other, wearing masks, and only communicate with your constituents via Zoom. Yet we are asked to be in a classroom where students are assumed to be healthy, they are unable to stay 6 feet from each other, and administrators tell us that we don't need to keep our kids six feet apart as long as they are wearing masks. More and more data is coming out of the CDC and the WHO telling us that children are carriers, that we don't know the limits of Covid 19, that the best way to be safe is to continue to socially isolate, wear masks, and practice good hygiene. I can promise you that this will not happen in the schools.

Every year I have 17 year old students who still pick their noses in the classroom, don't wash their hands after using the bathroom, and have no idea of how to cover their mouths when they cough. I have had many many students come to school sick and contagious because their parents refuse to allow them to stay home or they were worried about missing a test or an assignment. Now I am supposed to believe that those same students are going to be checked at home by their parents, kept home if they are showing any symptoms, remember their masks, wear them at all times, practice social isolation (which we are not at all set up for), and practice good hygiene? I would love to teach in that fantasy school but it doesn't exist. We know that schools are Petri dishes of contamination and contagions. Let us not allow them to become Petri dishes for this Pandemic. The public is being told that all measures are being taken to keep the schools sanitized and safe. This is simply not true. I challenge each of you to call any school in Missoula and ask them what their procedures and protocols are and what supplies they are still missing. Ask the teachers who will be the boots on the ground if they feel safe and secure going to school. Ask the administrators if they still plan to send their children to school.

Please do not treat the teachers, staff, and administrators as if we are disposable, as if our physical, mental, and emotional health, our very lives, don't matter. Please do not force us to make the impossible choice between working in an environment where we all know the coronavirus will spread or taking a year's unpaid leave of absence, resigning entirely, or retiring before we want to. Please take a step back and allow us to do our jobs while protecting ourselves, our families, and our students. Please reverse the decision you have made and let us return to the safety of teaching remotely for at least the first semester of this year.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I hope you will take our concerns seriously.

**Michelle Ellen**

Big Sky High School  
728-2400 ext. 8629

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**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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

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## Parent comment

1 message

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**Liz Shoen-Slater** <lizshoenslater@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 12:21 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Board Members -

I am a parent of an MCPS high school student. I am writing to request that you reconsider your decision to reopen schools in the Phase 1 hybrid model and instead reopen with Phase 0 remote learning until cases of COVID-19 are reduced to a safer level in our community. Thank you!

Liz Shoen-Slater

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## Teachers being displaced or losing positions?

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**K M** <ktmaunz@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 3:52 PM

Dear Board of Trustees,

Today I heard that teachers in kindergarten, first, second and third grades at Lewis and Clark Elementary school will be displaced or lose their positions. And then heard that other schools are also going to be affected. This breaks my heart. This is not a time for teachers to be losing their positions. If anything right now we need more teachers...to make sure class sizes can be as small as possible. I really hope that this is not something we are seriously doing. You should not be opening schools and getting rid of teachers. Parents who can are keeping their children out of school so others can be safe in school. Teachers should not be punished for this.

I hope this is just a really bad rumor. If it is not please make the right choice for our students.

Thank you,  
Katie Maunz

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## MCPS parent frustrated with lack of advanced planning

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**Beth Morey** <eamorey@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 3:58 PM

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

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees,

As a parent of two Franklin Elementary students, I'm very frustrated with how the MCPS administration and school board (as well as higher levels of government leadership) have been lax regarding this coming school year. You did such a wonderful job protecting our students, teachers, and staff in March. Why are you rushing to reopen when Montana and Missoula cases are higher than ever with no signs of slowing down?

You had the entire summer to plan this school year's reopening. Why are these massively difficult decisions only being discussed now, at the very last minute? I feel that the board has not been transparent or trustworthy given that teachers, staff, and families are still largely in the dark about what's going down with reopening.

And things are continuing to change, even a week out from in-person reopening. For example, Lewis & Clark and Lowell are displacing teachers, meaning that grade levels are losing classrooms. Why are we stuffing more kids into fewer classrooms when keeping distance is vital? Lives are literally on the line.

Teachers, staff, and families have cried out for a different path, one that does not endanger the lives of all our community members, and especially those who are immunocompromised. Why has the board not found ways to ensure the ability to teach from home from all staff and teachers who desire it and whose lives will you will have put in jeopardy by pushing in-person hybrid reopening?

Also, why are the school board meetings conducted via Zoom instead of wholly in person? If it's safe enough to reopen our schools, surely it's safe enough to conduct an in-person public board meeting. Why are you willing to risk your staff and teacher's lives but take the same risks yourselves?

Superintendent Watson emailed last week saying that in recent in-person ramp up events, students and teachers were happy to be back together in person. How does he know this? Was there a survey of staff? I'm curious what his metrics were.

Regarding remote learning, I'm grateful that you are offering the MCPS Online Academy. I'm thrilled to be able to enroll both my elementary-aged children in it while maintaining their enrollment at their local school for when the pandemic has passed. However, I'm frustrated with the near complete lack of information about it. Who is teaching it? What is the schedule? What will my children need to participate? What is the format? Literally the only thing I know about the online academy is that it exists. Again, this information should have been available months ago.

I know that this is an unprecedented time. This is a truly difficult task that you've been presented. However, it feels that your solutions to the problems presented by COVID-19 are slap-dash and rushed, thrown together at the last minute. So many of Missoula families, staff, and teachers have so many questions, and I don't feel that the board has provided satisfactory answers or transparency. When will this change?

The wellbeing and lives of so many beloved community members of all ages are in your hands. I hope you will treat this responsibility with the respect that it deserves. At this point in time, I feel that you are not. I beg you to please reconsider your decision and consider reopening in Phase 0.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Beth Morey  
MCPS parent  
Former MCPS employee & substitute  
Director of Wondertree Preschool, closed indefinitely due to COVID-19

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## Music teachers

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**Marcia Storer** <marciacorys@yahoo.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 4:24 PM

I have heard that the plan is to have music teachers cover recess duty, lunch duty, and for teachers who are sick. Please do not sacrifice these teachers' health because you can't find another solution. The teachers may be forced to resign rather than risk their lives. There SHOULD NOT be in-school learning at this time. Why risk our children and teachers when the numbers are much higher than when school was cancelled in the spring?

Marcia Storer  
549-4207

Sent from my iPad

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Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## Elementary & class size

2 messages

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**L Hayhurst** <lhayhurst@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 4:43 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS School Board Members:

I'm writing as a parent of MCPS students as well as an employee of the District. I was compelled to write to you after reading Randy Z.'s (Elementary band teacher) post on FB. Please consider offering 5th graders a chance to choose and play an instrument. Why not have the teachers' do online/virtual lessons for kids?

Because L&C has a large number of families electing to have students go online, it has been presented classes are going to be consolidated. Please reconsider. Why not have smaller class sizes for those in person and the teachers as well as have the class and teachers ready to go when/if all kids can return to in person class?

Thank you,  
Lisa Miller Hayhurst  
406-546-6002

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## School Re-Opening

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Carleen <clch4@aol.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 6:36 PM

Reply-To: Carleen <clch4@aol.com>

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

August 19, 2020

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees and Superintendent Watson,

Thank you for the time, effort and energy you put into the work you do on behalf of the Missoula community.

My name is Carleen Hathaway and I have been a Para Educator with MCPS for 30 years. This is the start of my 31<sup>st</sup> year. I have worked with students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, some of the most challenging kids in our population. I have been bitten, kicked, stabbed, had my hair yanked out of my head. I have been sworn at and spat upon. But I was never afraid to return to school day after day, year after year, to work with our kids, to teach and help them grow, learn, develop and prosper. That is not the case this year and it has nothing to do with student behaviors. I AM scared to return to school. And I am scared for our students and staff alike. Greatly concerned for the entire Missoula community.

Last week, MCPS chose to move the decision(s) about the re-start of school into the hands of the Trustees rather than solely in those of the Administration.

After over 3 hours of public comment at which many, many, many concerns were raised about the structure/set up of our return, about the desire to revisit the options for remote learning to start the year, you surprised the majority of us with your vote to go ahead with the hybrid model, thereby negating what Superintendent Watson had originally told staff and the public; that is that we would not return to school in person if COVID cases in Missoula were not level or declining. Cases are not level nor declining and we are now returning to school.

So incredibly many questions remain in place unanswered. So many concerns not addressed.

I am asking you to modify your motion from last week so there can be better structure, predictability and time to make shifts between phases. We will need time to plan for the practice of safety protocols and plan for how and where we educate our students.

Currently, I have seen nothing presented to our custodial staff which has been under great stress and pressure with their need to not only perform their standard work but to ramp up sanitization. We are woefully short-staffed in that area. There has been little to no communication with those employees as to how they are to maintain the level of safety that is being touted as 'in-place' for the start of the year. There has been no training of that staff on how to effectively use the materials provided and proof of whether or not those materials (chemicals/cleaning agents) are effective.

I apologize if I missed it but I haven't seen exactly what will happen when (NOT IF, but WHEN) our first cases of COVID appear in a building. Are we in shut down for the whole building? If not, how do we ensure the safety of staff and students IN that building that it's been 'traced' and we're all ok?

MCPS has set in place an on-line academy for which I believe certified staff will be trained in the use of. Have the Para Educators been included in those trainings? Though Paras don't usually present new ideas/standards etc. but reinforce what has been taught by a certified teacher, what role will Paras play in this on-line world? It will, I presume, be very different than what our roles were in the spring with the sudden shut-down.

And why is the on-line academy being given the extra time before start but not those of us working in person?

I have so many more questions and so few answers.

I would have preferred that MCPS stay in remote mode through at least the first quarter of our school year, keeping a close eye on cases in the area. I would have preferred, if that was not possible, to remain closed until after Labor Day – as what is being done with the on-line academy. I would have preferred to follow what we were originally told – that we would not return unless cases in Missoula either remained level or declined.

I am appreciative (though it is not a need for me personally) that MCPS has in place day-care options for MCPS employees with children. I am sure that helps.

Thank you to the two board members who voted against the motion last week. I appreciate your support and understanding of the concerns that were raised.

I along with many others, are asking you to modify your motion of August 11 before moving forward into the school year and revisit the needs of staff, students and parents.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Carleen L. Hathaway

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Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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## 5th grade band

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**Brigette Dawson** <brigette.a.dawson@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 6:47 PM

5th grade is the highlight of the end of elementary school when the kids get to pick their instruments and learn to read music. The kids are so excited to get to do this. There has to be some way that the 5th grade music teachers can be allowed to teach the 5th graders online through zoom.

In this dreadful year please don't take the music from our 5th graders. My kids were blessed to start Missoula schools in 4th and 5th grade. The music program, with it's amazing teachers, had a profound impact on their lives. Please help us keep this vital and vibrant option available to MCPS 5th graders. #BandMomForLife.

I will spread the word, so that other former band moms and kids can let their voice be heard. See you at the meeting tomorrow night.

Best,  
Brigette Dawson

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## School opening plan

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Isaac Kantor <imkantor406@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 7:20 PM

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

Dr. Watson and Board of Trustees,

I am a parent of three children in MCPS (two at Washington Middle School, one at Hellgate High). After watching the most recent meeting, in which opening schools in "phase one" was approved, I am concerned that the decision was made even though at the time Missoula County did not meet the stated criteria (declines in a number of COVID metrics) to open schools at all. It was further indicated MCPS would progress to "phase two" on September 21 if those numbers were "static" and that MCPS would "monitor" numbers rather than commit to its previously stated plan of basing the phase it chose on the numbers. Although I appreciate that you are all in a very difficult position, it appears the goal posts have been moved compared to the information we were previously provided. I request that the MCPS commit to a fully transparent, number and statistic based policy for how and when schools open.

I'm also disappointed that it appears weeks and months were not used to earlier develop the online academy, which my children will be enrolled in. I have no doubt that the teachers and administrators in the academy will do their best, but it's apparent this was left until the last minute despite the availability of months of prep time. I'm also disheartened that middle school children in the online academy cannot participate in extra curricular activities, while apparently high schoolers may be able. Please don't punish children in the online academy by excluding them from participation in extra curricular activities. I ask that this be added as an item on the agenda of the meeting tomorrow, and that the board of trustees vote on whether to permit children of all grades in the online academy to participate in extra curricular activities.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Best,

Isaac Kantor

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**MCPS music issue**

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**Darci Coffman** <ddawnc@msn.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 7:39 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

To the MCPS trustees:

I'm writing because I'm dismayed to hear that MCPS has cut 5th grade beginning band and orchestra this year.

I understand that it may be unsafe to have Mr. Zschaechner and Mr. Belski visiting so many schools and students each week. Luckily, Mr. Z and Mr. Belski are prepared to teach these subjects remotely, which is the safest way to introduce band and orchestra this year. However, I've been told that they are not being allowed to do that because "other teachers have been told no" when they asked to run their programs remotely. This comparison is unfair. Are those other teachers' programs being completely cut from our schools, like 5th grade band/orchestra are? If there is no other option for band and orchestra, why not keep these very important programs by letting the teachers teach as they have prepared to do? I'm very, very sad for our music students. The decisions made by this district to alleviate COVID concerns have already affected music classes so much: elementary music teachers are teaching from carts and being reassigned as classroom aides, while middle school and high school music students are losing electives and having to drop their music classes. We have amazing music teachers in our district, and their talents are being wasted. For Mr. Z and Mr. Belski to be told one week before school is starting that their programs are being cut completely (and, at the time of me writing this letter, they still don't know what they're going to be teaching next week) is disheartening and seemingly unnecessary.

Please keep beginning band and orchestra in our 5th graders' lives. Again- music students in this district are already losing SO MUCH this year.

Respectfully,

Darci Coffman  
Hellgate High School teacher

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## Concern over reduction in teachers

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amanda.duguid@gmail.com <amanda.duguid@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 8:08 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

I just received this message about a reduction in teachers/classrooms at Lewis and Clark and am very alarmed that we would choose not to have the smallest class size possible.

"Teachers at Lewis & Clark Elementary found out \*yesterday\* that the Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade classes will be reduced from 4 classrooms per grade to 3 classrooms. They still dont know which teacher will be displaced and where he/she will go or what they will teach! Many parents chose the Online Academy to help lower class size and instead of using this as an opportunity to keep children and staff safe, they are cramming kids into classes, some over capacity, DAYS before school begins!!"

I fear you will have even more issues filling classes if you decide to eliminate teachers/classes and overfill classes. This is not helping us trust the school district with our children!

Amanda Turpen  
Lewis and Clark parent

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August 19, 2020

William Ellen  
2204 Wyoming Street  
Missoula, MT 59801

MCPS Board of Trustees  
Superintendent Rob Watson

Dear Trustees and Superintendent,

I am writing to address some concerns I have about the reopening of Missoula's school. Before I address my concerns, let me express my appreciation for the work that you do. I know that you all are between a rock and a hard place. There is no good answer to this dilemma.

I watched the school board meeting that was held last week. The first thing I noticed was that you, the members of the school board, were in a large room with no one else present. I also noticed that you all had masks on and were sitting six feet apart. You were in this position while discussing forcing the teachers and students back into the classrooms. That seems to me just a little hypocritical.

The second thing I noticed was that after hours of public input concerning reopening the schools, you held a vote that took virtually no time to complete. It was abundantly clear that you had all already made up your minds. The public input was a complete and utter waste of time. Let me repeat that. You had clearly already decided and the public input was disregarded.

Let me express my opinion concerning reopening Missoula's schools. *Do Not Do It!* You are putting everyone in the school system at risk, yes, even the entire community.

I will close with one last thought. Have you ever seen the acronym KIS? That's short for Keep It Simple. The hybrid school idea cannot work. It is entirely too complicated. Please reconsider this reopening plan. It cannot work and it will increase the transmission of coronavirus in our community.

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## Opening Schools

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**Sara Flanery** <saraflanery@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 8:35 PM

Dear Missoula School Board,

I've been an MCPS employee of 6 years plus a few years as a sub. I agree with many previous comments that we should start the year completely online.

Some of the criteria you are using to make your decision is found on the Missoula County Health Department website. I keep checking to see the 14 day rolling average of cases because this is one of the measures that is supposed to be important. It is important, despite high percentages of positives suggesting we are not testing enough. It's still important to use the data we do have. The rolling average has not gone down and has gone up from 6 new cases a day to 7.

We are not safe in school right now, especially given our insufficient testing. In Missoula you can only get a test if you are symptomatic, and the percentage of positives reflects that we are surely experiencing a much higher number in reality. We just still don't know the long term health impacts. Here is an article I just read, sobering.

<https://www.wired.com/story/new-data-on-how-many-kids-got-that-covid-mystery-illness/>

If we open schools we will see an increase in cases. As an MCPS employee you will not see me working in person because, like an estimated 1/3 of staff I'm at higher risk for life threatening complications from the virus.

The problems with the details are endless. We often couldn't find subs before covid. We took care of sick kids whose parents couldn't pick them up. As educators our biggest concern is for the safety of our students and now you ask us to put them and ourselves in harm's way.

Please reconsider your decision to do a hybrid model! It isn't a sustainable thing to do given our numbers. It's not worth a few weeks of school in grim conditions just to go remote after making the situation so much worse. Don't undo all the hard work we've all done to slow the spread and save lives.

It's not too late to do the right thing.  
Thanks for your time.  
Sara Flanery

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**Lewis & Clark Elementary**

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**Kasey Wright** <kasey.boeve.wright@gmail.com>

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 9:32 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;, Kasey Wright &lt;kwright@meetingsnorthwest.com&gt;

Dear Board of Trustees,

It has been brought to my attention you are removing and displacing teachers from grades K-3 at Lewis & Clark. This is irresponsible. What is your plan when students return to the school?

You expect our teachers to pack up their classroom and move to another school or classroom a couple of days prior to in-person teaching. On top of facing the fear of the virus, they now have even more uncertainty – in a school where they already removed a well loved principal from.

This is not leadership.

I chose and advocated to my peers for reducing the number of students in the classroom to keep our staff and students, that really need to be in the classroom, a little more safe. Instead, you are over stuffing the classroom making already overloaded rooms more full.

I have a hard time believing the other schools grew that much in the last three weeks, that you need to strip our school of the teachers we moved into our neighborhood for.

Please reconsider the safety of our students, faculty and staff.

Kasey B. Wright

Lewis & Clark Students: Abigail & Augustus Wright, Grade 2

kasey.boeve.wright@gmail.com

Tel: 406.214.5907

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**2020-2021 School year**

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**Bryan Berndt** <bryanb@bryanb.net>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 12:00 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dr. Watson and Board of Trustees,

I am very upset at the School board decision of Aug. 11, to re-open schools with any in-person learning. This is an absolutley insane decision, to risk the lives of students and faculty. You have the technology, resources, staff to do safe online learning. If its so safe for our kids and teachers to attend in person schooling, why do you continue to have online, virtual School board meetings? Do you realize how ironic that is? Many other school districts around the country are going online only, and those are aren't are returning to online one, far too late. Learn from their mistakes. You have to realize that this is a species extincting sickness. We can't just pretend to go back to normal because you want to.

Please reconsider this decision.

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Bryan Berndt  
bryanb@bryanb.net

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## Re-opening concerns

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**Rachel Kantor** <patteecanyonoutdoorschool@gmail.com>  
To: rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us, publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us

Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 6:44 PM

Dr. Watson,

Please delay the start to in-person classes, or move all students to remote learning until a specific, science based plan is in place. There are many reports of teachers who do not feel safe, and as parents, we have yet to see an actual plan. To open next week is dangerous.

Before my children attend school, I need to see a specific and public plan that ensures they remain in small groups for the entire day regardless of grade, that there is a mask enforcement plan, sanitation that does not involve dangerous fogging chemicals, but rather is based on fresh air, ventilation and hand washing, specific plans for when we will move in and out of phases based on science not economics, a plan for when and for how long students/teachers will be quarantined when there is a positive case, and finally, that teacher's concerns have been addressed and that they are allowed to have a voice in policy development.

I propose that you delay reopening or move to remote only and if it is necessary, please add this to the board meeting agenda so that it can be discussed and allow for a re-vote as our schools are not ready to open next week in a safe manner.

Thank you,  
Rachel Kantor

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**Robert Watson** <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 7:50 AM

To: Rachel Kantor <patteecanyonoutdoorschool@gmail.com>, Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Hi Rachel,

Earlier this week we released our MCPS COVID-19 response plan, which is available on our website. It includes many of the specifics regarding our procedures that you are requesting.

The response plan does not include a specific decision making process for moving between phases. I will be taking my guidance and making recommendations based on county health. I would assume that if they felt it was unsafe to move between phases, they would let me know that. Yesterday, county health held a press conference with experts from UM Public health regarding the current state of COVID-19 in our community. I would encourage you to watch this video if you get a chance: <https://youtu.be/ntlrx6QnO1E>

As educators, we are not trained, nor have the expertise to make medical decisions around how to respond to the pandemic or current COVID-19 data. I will continue to rely on guidance and expertise from county health.

The board meeting this evening does not include any discussion about the reopen plan on the agenda. The agenda is set 48 hours prior to the board meeting, as required by MT state open meeting law. The board cannot add anything to the agenda at this point. They can add a discussion about the reopen plan the next board meeting on September 8, if they want to continue the discussion.

Thanks again for your comments. Rob Watson Superintendent

On 8/19/20, 6:44 PM, "Rachel Kantor" <patteecanyonoutdoorschool@gmail.com> wrote:

Warning!

This message originates from OUTSIDE the District's email system. Please verify the sender and contents before opening attachments or clicking any links. Contact the IT Help Desk <mailto:%20helpdesk@mcps.k12.mt.us> at 406-728-2400 x7777 with any questions.

[Quoted text hidden]



Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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## Rethink reopening

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**Jess Coulter** <jess.c.coulter@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 8:13 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Trustees-

I understand that the school board has to consider many factors when deciding when and how to reopen schools. I know that schools are the place where some kids get their most nutritious meals, feel safe, and are cared for while parents work. I know that you are balancing needs and wants of administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

I know all that, however, I am terribly concerned about the things I am seeing and hearing. I have selected the online academy for my children. I did this both for their own safety, but also because I was hoping that doing so would reduce class sizes for students and teachers who need to be physically in person for any number of reasons. Now, however, teachers are being moved away from schools, resulting in INCREASED class sizes. While I understand that some teachers may have to move around to the online academy or to other schools, I am concerned that school starts in less than a week and some teachers don't know where or how they will be teaching, and I am deeply concerned that this has resulted in bigger classes. Nothing that has been done can justify that. At the very least, school opening should be pushed a week, and class sizes should absolutely not be increased.

You told us there were certain parameters for safely opening schools. We answered the survey and made our choices based on those parameters. Now the bar has been moved. This is unfair to families, teachers, and staff. Please reconsider.

Jessica Coulter  
MCPS parent of a kindergartner and 2nd grader

Sent from my iPhone

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**MISSOULA COUNTY  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Public Comment <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

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**(no subject)**

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**Linda Biando** <slbiando@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 8:48 AM

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

Dear Board Members,

As a grandparent of five public school students and as a registered nurse I am appalled at the decisions made regarding the opening of schools.

Not only was the policy passed unfair and chaotic, it was also in complete disregard to what the teachers were trying to tell you.

I believe schools should remain closed for one semester and all planning should be devoted to on line education for all students. That would ensure safety and equity for everyone. The situation should then be reviewed for the second semester.

It is your job to make decisions for our students that are in the best interests of our students and their teachers. Please do this.

Thank you.  
Linda Biando

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## Back-to-school concerns

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Janel Chin <janelfalk@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 8:48 AM

Dear MCPS Board of Trustees:

I wrote to you almost 4 months ago with questions regarding how Missoula's children might safely return to school. It is with a heavy heart that I reach out again as most of the questions I posed months ago remain unanswered. Like many families, we found remote learning to be challenging but I am afraid that the careful thought and planning necessary to safely resume school has not been undertaken on a large enough scale.

The following are topics I would like to hear more information about:

1. I have noticed that many people in our community do not practice social distancing. In light of this it seems like outdoor learning and small class sizes will be key factors in determining whether teachers and staff are able to keep everyone participating in in-person learning safe. I am nervously awaiting word of how large of class sizes my children will be in and what the ratio of teachers to students will be in their classes. When I provided public comment on this topic 4 months ago I inquired about whether MCPS properties such as Mount Jumbo in East Missoula and Prescott in the lower Rattlesnake would be utilized to provide extra space to assist with distancing. I asked and will ask again: What would need to happen in order to utilize those schools?

2. I recently attended an outdoor kindergarten orientation event at a MSPS school and noticed that there was resistance from parents on 3 points of concern to me as a fellow parent of MCPS students:

- A small minority of parents were upset that the event was held outside as they were unaware of the significant increase in risk being indoors poses in terms of public health at this time. This left me concerned about how many people in our community somehow missed this key point.
- A small minority of parents were incredulous about the requirement that symptomatic students not attend school in-person at this time. This left me concerned that if my children attend school in-person they will be repeatedly exposed to symptomatic individuals in indoor settings which seems unwise given what we now know about COVID transmission.
- A small minority of parents refused to provide cloth face coverings to their children so that their children could safely enter indoor spaces for a brief time. I think we all know that it will be difficult for staff and teachers at our school to enforce Montana's requirements regarding cloth face coverings being worn at this time. In light of this it seems that we should be exploring alternatives and back-ups to protect teachers and staff while they are interacting with students in-person such as plexi-glass shields and/or enclosures. I have posed the question of whether this has been explored as an option to this Board on April 28th via an email to this address but have not heard whether this is something that has been explored as an option in our school district.
- Overall the event left me deeply concerned about what we are asking MCPS staff and teachers to do and the level of resistance they may encounter from families in trying to do their already difficult jobs. I am left wondering as a parent: What can I do to support MCPS staff and teachers during this time?

As a parent and community member I want to do what is best for my children and my community but I am concerned that in-person school may not be a safe choice for either.

Thank-you for your service to our community and consideration of all the concerns that are being raised.

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Janel Chin

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**Public Comment re: Covid 2020-2021**

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N. N. <nnaiden@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 8:57 AM

To the MCPS School Board and Administration

I am writing concerning the "reopening" of public schools in Missoula and its impact on staff, teachers and students.

I worked for 25 years in 23 different public schools here via an education Cooperative, as well as in the Polson SD. Most of those years were on the reservation and we routinely had outbreaks of disease including novovirus and pertussis as well as multiple suicides in small communities. I have an endorsement in school psychology and school counseling. I am also a professional counselor - I have advanced training in developmental and behavioral interventions for autism and similar disorders as well as training and experience in treating the effects of trauma on individuals and communities.

Covid has created an ongoing situation that is going to evolve over time. As the information and data changes the measures we take to deal with it will also evolve and shift, masks are one example. This is a complicated and changing situation that is guaranteed to create uncertainty and distrust of institutions because of changing recommendations.

Human beings are notoriously poor at assessing risk, and we are notoriously bad at thinking we do a good job of it. We don't like to admit that we don't see risk rationally. This creates a challenge for you in deciding how to support and create a new paradigm for education that meets the needs of the community while keeping the staff - who you depend on to deliver the education - feeling confident and secure. It is the staff of the school that ensures children will be taken care of.

I've worked in a lot of school districts. Institutions are notoriously resistant to change. The past approach to staff support and education has typically been one of whack-a-mole, give them one or two trainings and we'll call it good. The concept of being trauma informed followed this pattern - a couple of trainings and the issue was set aside. Yet the work I've done with trauma-informed communities was a multi-year process across all community stakeholders.

Even in academic change the value of one workshop is minimal - I had the luck to work in a school with the Reading First program grant. For 3 years the government oversaw a complete overhaul in how the school taught, thought about, and taught reading - even down to scripted curriculum cues. In two years the special education referrals dropped to less than 5 a year, reading scores went up, behavior problems diminished. The program involved monthly education sessions, assigned readings outside of the reading curriculum on poverty and social change, and weekly support groups with staff. It was an astounding thing to watch - everything got better. Everyone felt better. It continues today - the district kept the program going when the grant ran out, and the district continues to benefit. But it was not a one-shot deal with some outside professional lecturing staff for a few days before disappearing.

Please don't make this mistake with Covid. The task for schools is a hard one - everything you have done previously to deal with the needs of staff and students will not address this. This is not a shooting. This is not a drug scare. This is not bullying. This situation forces the incorporation of context into the school environment - you are no longer MCPS, an academic island. You're now part of the whole-ball-of-wax, the virus, the concerns it creates, and the need to build hope and action in the face of that fear are far more important than any academic content you will provide. You could be a leader in this - stepping to the front in terms of positive and ongoing action to mitigate the negative aspects and reactions.

But not if you do one workshop. Not if you do one training. Not if you patch together a hodgepodge of online and in-class scheduling that is impossible for working people to manage.

Please don't do a workshop to address this. Don't do a training on grief and loss - Covid is not about loss. Epidemics are about building community actively in an ongoing way. To do that means supporting staff with new information on how human beings develop and what hinders their growth in the face of chronic uncertainty and stress. Teachers and staff would feel empowered with ongoing support and information on how to recognize emotional dysregulation in themselves and others, how to physically engage with someone who is distracted and upset to help them correlate and get back on track. There are concrete steps that can be taken to build hope and diminish fear. I build hope every day in my private

practice and my clients are families who are in your school system. Every day I hear about MCPS from parents, teachers and children.

Expand your view. Don't use the stale approaches to support and education for staff that have been done for far too long. To build community you must interact directly with stakeholders - since this is about the impact of mental health on education don't just talk to the providers you know, have an open forum. Reach out to mental health professionals who know the school system - there are lots of us in Missoula and on line. Ask yourself, if I were a teacher and facing some 10-20 kids in a classroom now, what types of new information and tools would give me hope and the ability to do my work?

Start with the foundation that developed a developmental educational approach. Profectum Foundation has an educational working group and focused support for schools, teachers and professionals in understanding how developmental response changes under stress. They would come to Missoula if asked. They have free online training available and are working to address the situation now - their website is [profectum.org](http://profectum.org). Profectum actively vets other information on the web and posts the evidence-based programming up on their extensive site as well.

Don't do what you've always done. We all know where that leads.

Sincerely,

Noelle Naiden  
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor  
406-640-3984  
Sweetgrass Counseling Services  
200 N. Adams Street Room 301  
Missoula MT 59802

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**Public Comment** <[publiccomment@mcpsmt.org](mailto:publiccomment@mcpsmt.org)>  
To: [nnaiden@gmail.com](mailto:nnaiden@gmail.com)

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 8:57 AM

Thank you for submitting your public comment. Just like comments made in person at a public board meeting, the comments you submit through email are public record and are available for any member of the Board and public to read. Please refrain from referring to confidential student or staff information, or making derogatory comments about students or staff members. If you do provide private confidential information, we will redact that information before placing it in any public document. Please refer to Board Policy 1441 for more information about public comments in general. Thank you!

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## PLEASE DELAY SCHOOL OPENING

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**Brandon Prinzing** <brandon.prinzing@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 10:42 AM

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

Hello,

My two kids attend Lewis and Clark Elementary.

I am a bit surprised and confused about the school plan to reopen. I have heard from teachers (directly) that the plan is rushed, not safe. My wife and I kids are attending the Online Academy but we are very concerned about our fellow classmates, friends and especially teachers. It seems that the class sizes are not being reduced?! Why are there 20 kids still in a room? The whole point of the Online Academy is to REDUCE class sizes. Why is this not happening? I was told that the School Board didn't even know some of this information when you voted to approved school reopening.

I think the bigger question for me is why hasn't a plan been in place for weeks and weeks now? We've had 5 months to plan for school reopening and there is chaos a week before school. It seems to be very poor planning.

At the beginning of this pandemic, I was complimentary of the work you all (MCPS) did to scramble and find a way to teach online. Now, I am becoming very disappointed with your leadership.

Please consider delaying school reopening by at least two weeks (or more) so that a better plan can be made.

I recognized these are strange times, but this just seems careless. I've never written or spoken at a board meeting before but this time I feel it's important to voice my concerns for the sake of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Brandon Prinzing

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**reopening schools**

1 message

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**Anneke Hilvert** <annekehilvert@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 11:54 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS School Board Trustees,

I am writing as a parent of two high school students and as a high school teacher with concerns for the coming school year. It does not seem safety standards have been adequately accommodated for returning to school face to face. With a senior taking IB classes, staying home is not an option.

How will air quality be controlled in schools? I am also concerned with students maintaining six feet of distance at all times, in the hallways, cafeteria's, bathrooms etc.,. Lunch time is another concern as there will be over 50 students together at one time; it seems highly likely that the virus will spread and be impossible to track. How are these issues of safety justified for students and teachers returning to school?

Sincerely concerned parent and teacher,

Anneke Hilvert

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**MCPS School Openings**1 message

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**Julie Edwards** <bitterroot1@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 1:31 PM

Hello MCPS -

I am writing to ask that the district consider safety measures when thinking about reopening schools. As I understand it, teachers weren't given an opportunity for input, there are no real safety measures in place, and there is inequity between what families are being offered.

Schools shouldn't reopen in person unless there are dedicated safety plans and measures for students AND teachers. Instead, teachers should be encouraged and supported in moving their courses online so that students can still learn and be safe.

Regards, Julie Edwards



Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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## School year 2020

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annie watson <annie.schaub@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 2:05 PM

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

Hello,

I am a parent of a Lewis and Clark first grade student. I am writing to voice my concern about the lack of transparent communication in regards to the upcoming school year, and support for teachers and support staff.

Today, we are planning on having our daughter attend school in the current hybrid format. We feel very unsure if this is the best choice for us, but want to try because Margaret, our first grade daughter, is very ready to see friends, teachers, and be on the school grounds. My preference would be for her to participate in the Online Academy, as it would allow us to maintain greater amounts predictable activities. I have considered pulling her from the district, and having her attend a private program, as their plans seem more transparent and include open and clear communication.

I am writing at this time to express my concerns with the current state of communications and lack of transparent communication with schools, teachers, parents, the district, and the superintendent. So many rumors are being circulated, and potential misinformation. I would like to ask for increased transparency and addressing of many of the concerns of parents and teachers. This includes directly addressing the number of students in each classroom, the availability of hand washing facilities, coaching and support for teachers and staff through this difficult time, ect.

As a former district 1 school nurse, I have seen how resources for health safety are thin in schools. I am guessing the increased stress and anxiety of school during the pandemic will increase the need for informed health care decisions in schools. This will fall predominantly on teachers and support staff, in an already stressed environment. I hope this increased burden is being addressed with better communication than parents are getting.

Thank you for your work to make a safe environment for all staff and students.

Sincerely,  
Annie Watson  
(406)599-1001

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Public Comment &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;

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## Reopening Schools

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Mark Anderlik <manderlik@igc.org>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 3:49 PM

August 20, 2020

Dear School Trustees:

I am a resident of Missoula and my now adult son attended MCPS schools. I am happy to do my part to support and advocate for public schools.

However, I am concerned about the scheduled reopening next week. I have been speaking with some teachers and other community members and there is lots of anxiety among them. It seems that many things are not ready for school to begin.

I have heard that school ventilation is still not adequate in some schools, there are no building-specific protocols yet, childcare for staff has yet to be set-up nor the cost to staff revealed, and that only some of the masks and dividers and other safety equipment has arrived. In addition, I heard about issues with staffing the isolation room or how sick teachers will be covered. And I have heard that some at-risk teachers have been left out of the remote learning positions and will be required to work in the classroom despite their health condition.

I'm not saying that these are not being addressed – but the staff I spoke with has not been told whether they are or not. Or what the solutions might be.

I completely understand the unprecedented nature of this pandemic and the thousands of complications it brings up for the MCPS. And it is understandable how staff may be worried.

I would urge you to delay the first day of school until these important issues are resolved. And that parents, children and staff have had their concerns addressed directly, and that is communicated to them, with their questions answered. There is no particular rush to reopen schools if it means putting the physical and mental health of students, staff and the community at risk.

Thank you for all of your hard work for the community.

Sincerely,

Mark Anderlik

8/24/2020

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - Reopening Schools

1617 Defoe St.

Missoula, MT 59802

406-207-1884

manderlik@igc.org



**Letter to MCPS Board 082020.docx**

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August 20, 2020

Dear School Trustees:

I am a resident of Missoula and my now adult son attended MCPS schools. I am happy to do my part to support and advocate for public schools.

However, I am concerned about the scheduled reopening next week. I have been speaking with some teachers and other community members and there is lots of anxiety among them. It seems that many things are not ready for school to begin.

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I would urge you to delay the first day of school until these important issues are resolved. And that parents, children and staff have had their concerns addressed directly, and that is communicated to them, with their questions answered. There is no particular rush to reopen schools if it means putting the physical and mental health of students, staff and the community at risk.

Thank you for all of your hard work for the community.

Sincerely,

Mark Anderlik  
1617 Defoe St.  
Missoula, MT 59802  
406-207-1884  
manderlik@igc.org

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**comment to be read into the record**

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**Leslie and Michael McClintock** <LeslieMikeMcClintock@msn.com>  
To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 4:07 PM

Please read this comment into the record at tonight's public hearing.

First, a comment—In the first hearing, we heard that staff will be responsible for sanitizing rooms and work spaces. Does this mean janitorial staff or does it include teachers? If teachers are asked to sanitize their rooms after each group of students, it seems an unfair burden on them, added to what they are already asked to do to ensure safety of their students and themselves in terms of avoiding contracting Covid-19.

Second, if the teachers are being asked to sanitize their own classrooms, does the District have on hand enough sanitizing wipes or spray and paper towels for each teacher for each day that they teach? One concern about this is that at this point, sanitizing wipes and spray are very difficult to find and are very expensive. Chlorox is not available and won't be for the foreseeable future. We waited weeks to finally find 2 small tubs of alcohol wipes and they cost \$30 each. Could someone please address these concerns?

Also, we were concerned to hear that the District won't be able to observe the six feet safe social distancing rule recommended by the CDC but decided to have the distancing in the classrooms be three feet in many instances. This doesn't meet the recommended safe socially distanced guidelines. Could someone please address this?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Leslie & Mike McClintock

Sent from Mail for Windows 10

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## Disgusted

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**Beth Morey** <eamorey@gmail.com>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 4:21 PM

To: publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us

Dr. Watson,

I am writing regarding your response to Rachel Kantor's public comment on August 19, 2020. She requested more details on your reopening plan. You replied with this:

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Robert Watson <rwatson@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 7:50 AM

To: Rachel Kantor <patteecanyonoudoorschool@gmail.com>, Public Comment <publiccomment@mcps.k12.mt.us>

Hi Rachel,

Earlier this week we released our MCPS COVID-19 response plan, which is available on our website. It includes many of the specifics regarding our procedures that you are requesting.

The response plan does not include a specific decision making process for moving between phases. I will be taking my guidance and making recommendations based on county health. I would assume that if they felt it was unsafe to move between phases, they would let me know that. Yesterday, county health held a press conference with experts from UM Public health regarding the current state of COVID-19 in our community. I would encourage you to watch this video if you get a chance: <https://youtu.be/ntlx6QnO1E>

As educators, we are not trained, nor have the expertise to make medical decisions around how to respond to the pandemic or current COVID-19 data. I will continue to rely on guidance and expertise from county health.

The board meeting this evening does not include any discussion about the reopen plan on the agenda. The agenda is set 48 hours prior to the board meeting, as required by MT state open meeting law. The board cannot add anything to the agenda at this point. They can add a discussion about the reopen plan the next board meeting on September 8, if they want to continue the discussion.

Thanks again for your comments. Rob Watson Superintendent

I find your response inadequate at best, and insulting and irresponsible at worst. You and the board have left decisions that should have been made months ago until the past couple of weeks, and the details are still not set in stone. If they were, why would teachers be wondering what their placements are less than a week before school? Why did my children's elementary school only send out school supply lists today, August 20, just 6 days before reopening? Why are so many parents and teachers writing in regarding their confusion?

Perhaps you really have ironed out the details. However, you have failed in communicating those clearly. Please devote tonight's board meeting to a discussion of reopening and a clarification of every nuance of reopening and remote learning.

We are all depending on you and rooting for you in this difficult time, but it feels like you are shrugging off our concerns and leaving us in the dark -- which is reprehensible, given that people could die as a result.

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Beth Morey

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## Monday in person school start up

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**lbond@bresnan.net** <lbond@bresnan.net>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 4:49 PM

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

I'd like to address tonight's meeting and Monday's start date for school. I'm alarmed that the decision has been made to reopen schools in the Hybrid Stage One format and especially the plan to move to State Two at the end of September. You have no way of knowing what is going to happen. Missoula has new cases every single day and will continue to do so. As the weather begins to get colder and activities move indoor the risk of infection will become greater. I feel that District One's top administration is making a mistake. Unfortunately it is the teachers and families in this community that will pay for it.

I hope you are ready to take the blame for the spread of illness and that you are prepared for the inevitable long term disability or death that this illness may bring. As a community member and as someone who knows the opinions of teachers and staff in Missoula I feel they believe the risks have been minimized in an effort to "get back to normal."

Last night's email from Dr. Watson about his understanding of teacher's concerns, but noting that he has had to move on to other problems dealing with the start up is only one example of this lack of understanding. The email was a callous failure at minimizing the stress that those who will do the work and take all of the risk are under. The teachers I have been in contact with did not feel that this condescension was necessary or called for. To be told that fears had moved to the bottom of a list is the last thing they needed to hear.

Please rethink this decision.

Loraine Bond  
Missoula Community Member

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## Comment on Non-Agenda Item, August 20th

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**Kathleen Kennedy** <kkennedy@mcpsmt.org>

Thu, Aug 20, 2020 at 5:00 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Grace Decker <gdecker@mcpsmt.org>, Marcia Holland <meholland@mcpsmt.org>, Michael Smith <mjsmith@mcpsmt.org>, Diane Lorenzen <dlorenzen@mcpsmt.org>, Sharon Sterbis <ssterbis@mcpsmt.org>, Vicki McDonald <vmcdonald@mcpsmt.org>, Jen Vogel <jvogel@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>  
Cc: Robert Watson <rwatson@mcpsmt.org>, Jennifer Courtney <jccourtney@mcpsmt.org>, Kathryn Ballou <kcballou@mcpsmt.org>

August 20, 2020

Dear MCPS Trustees,

Your meeting tonight is the last opportunity for people to comment publicly before a grand experiment begins in our community. While the health department may be the experts in disease control and prevention, teachers are the experts when it comes to the realities that exist within our classrooms. My hope is that you will adopt a growth mindset as you consider my comments.

At the last board meeting, you listened to countless people describe their concerns about the return to in-person instruction and MCPS's plan. I sent you a document that detailed my own concerns. Thank you to those who read it. I see they are part of the public comment linked to the August 11<sup>th</sup> meeting for anyone else who is interested in reading them. The agenda for that meeting also included the following statement:

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 of COVID-19. This risk needs to be managed so that transmission rates are kept low and the local health department is able to complete contract tracing when there is a confirmed case.

I don't know about you, but that statement gives me pause. Who will get the virus? Will it be me? Will it be my daughter who is an MCPS senior? Might she give it to her dad who is in a high risk category? Will it be a student in my class? Will it be a colleague? This is our reality and none of the choices we are forced to contend with feel acceptable. Yet that cannot be an excuse to set the consequences of our choices aside.

I suppose I would feel more comfortable with the associated risk, if I had confidence that our model of in-person instruction will be worth taking that risk. As a career educator who spent a good portion of my summer engaged in professional development, I continue to have concerns about the model we have chosen. From both an educational and social emotional standpoint, our model presents serious challenges. While not impossible, those challenges will take time and careful planning to address. Currently, we are not being afforded that time. Regardless, many of us have been working diligently on our own time this summer to plan how to teach in this new reality, yet it has been difficult to plan with so many unanswered questions. This is why we have asked to delay the start of school for students. Teachers and building personnel need adequate time to prepare.

I want to be back in the classroom, but I want to feel confident that all safety protocols are in place and that I know how to implement them. Students and parents are trusting that I can and I take that responsibility seriously. I also want to be able to take time to orient students to this new model of instruction to set them up for success. As the calendar stands right now, we are acting as though this is any other start of the school year, when we all know it is not. Our success is contingent on us acknowledging reality. Please reconsider your decision.

Thank you for considering my comments.

8/24/2020

Missoula County Public Schools Mail - Comment on Non-Agenda Item, August 20th

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kennedy

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