

July 20, 2020

Good afternoon President Raymond, Superintendent McNeill and WCSD Board of Trustees,

We, the undersigned Collective Bargaining Unit Leaders, representing the majority of employees of the Washoe County School District, are opposed to the plan for the reopening of our schools for the first nine weeks of the 2020-2021 school year. Many of the concerns brought up in this letter have been voiced in public comment/letters to the Board of Trustees the last several weeks, as well as in numerous private discussions with the WCSD Executive Committee and Central Office administrators. We recognize WCSD Leadership and staff have been working around the clock attempting to get answers/clarifications to numerous questions and concerns, however, the fact of the matter is, it is simply unsafe to open schools while we are in Phase 2 of a pandemic. As Governor Steve Sisolak stated in his press statement July 19, 2020, "...our State is in a **dangerous situation.**"

The overwhelming concern is safety. Employees do not feel safe nor do they feel confident in returning to the school sites. There are too many questions and unknowns when it comes to ensuring a safe work environment, including concerns of spacing, upkeep of the physical distancing, transmittal of the virus (or virus carriers), questions of what happens if a student decides NOT to follow the social distancing and mask wearing protocols, questions around the cleaning materials we will be expected to utilize, questions around the decision to depend solely on screening at home with no entry screening, and numerous other items which directly relate to the safety of the employees. Some of the largest items which need to be addressed are the following:

1. Washoe County has had an increase in newly diagnosed COVID-19 cases for more than 10 days, and numbers are NOT decreasing. From the Reno Gazette Journal July 18, 2020, the total number of daily confirmed cases "jump 103 to 4,054." Furthermore, there have been a reported 102 COVID-19 related deaths in Washoe County. We want our students and staff to be safe. The number of positive cases diagnosed is not going down in Washoe County. These numbers clearly show a return to classroom instruction is putting the health and safety of employees, students, and our community at risk.

Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics clarified their position of reopening schools in a joint statement with the National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the School Superintendent Association (AASA) July 10, 2020: "Returning to school is important for the healthy development and well-being of children, but we must pursue re-opening in a way that is safe for all students, teachers and staff. Science should drive decision-making on safely reopening schools. Public health agencies must make recommendations based on evidence, not politics."

2. A detailed plan is needed for what happens when a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19 (which could include when a member of the household tests positive). WCSD Administrative staff have been working with WC Health Dept to develop these plans, yet the written plan has not been shared with the recognized bargaining organizations. There needs to be a recognized, consistent plan in place, so staff members and students feel safe at all school sites. As one employee stated, "I am willing to accept that risk as long as the school district follows through on its commitment of putting student and staff safety first. To me, that commitment needs to start with a plan that the district has developed with our health department. To go on talking about what

the school is going to do as far as providing PPE and facilitating social distancing without the ability to describe what happens the moment someone in the school community is positive for COVID-19 is putting the cart before the horse. "Safety first" means that WCSD and the Health Department have thought out this most basic scenario enough to feel confident that actions can be taken to prevent one infected person from turning into a school-wide outbreak and that they can communicate this information to students and staff in the form of a plan."

Without a detailed plan, families could be contacted on a random Wednesday night and told "no school tomorrow, you need to figure out a different plan for your child." Parents need time to be prepared for this. Having the first nine weeks be distance learning will allow for families and employees to plan ahead.

3. In addition to safety, there continues to be numerous questions as to what exactly the "in-person" learning will look like at the school and classroom schedule. Teachers, counselors, principals, administrators, Education Support Professionals – all educators are superstars and want to help students succeed and create positive learning environments for our students. The realities of time and continually changing expectations to complete in the less than four weeks before school starts is almost insurmountable. There is no consistent plan for the school sites, and so many principals are attempting to do what is best for the size of school they have as well as considering the needs of the students, the faculty and the staff.

4. There are also numerous unanswered questions regarding personnel related issues, such as non-paid leaves of absence, COVID impacts on personal sick leave, employee options for distance learning positions, etc.

We are requesting for the current plan of utilizing in-person teaching in the Elementary School and the hybrid model for Secondary be reconsidered for at least the first nine weeks of the 2020-2021 school year. There is no question we want to go back to the physical school setting, however, the safety of students and employees must be the priority and, at this time, we believe the only way to do so is through full distance learning. We recognize the difficulty in making this decision and the ripple effect it could have on our families and community. Going back to school buildings (whether through the hybrid model or all in-person) should not be considered until it is safer to return.

Thank you,

Natha Anderson,  
President, WEA

Tom Stauss,  
Executive Director, WEA

Don McHenry  
President, WSPA

Lana Bell  
President, WESP