

June 9, 2020

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

As the WCSD Reopening Committee begins to present information to the Board of Trustees regarding the reopening of schools in 2020-2021, we wanted to thank the WCSD committee chairs and subcommittee chairs for creating a trusting environment of collaboration between the stakeholders. As the Trustees begin to consider some recommendations, we would like to highlight a few items of concern.

The first is safety. We have many educators who are concerned about the learning environment when we return to work. There are so many questions related to the mysteries of the COVID virus. One question is potential exposure to contracting the COVID virus and/or being a carrier of it to our family members. While we know there will always be some risk, we ask that the safety of our educators (students and staff as well) always be prioritized first in each decision that will be made. We ask that the most current and up to date guidance from the CDC and the Washoe County Health District (WCHD) be strictly followed, including district-provided PPEs.

Second, with the many different learning models being considered for the next school year, we ask that recognition be given to the contracts and agreements entered into between WCSD and the WEA, particularly regarding daily contract hours (currently 7.5 hours a day for secondary teachers and 7.0 hours a day for elementary teachers). We all recognize our educators regularly exceed these daily work hours, including before and after school, on weekends, and during the summer; however, the position of the WEA is that new learning models which will impact educator positions must be designed taking these contract agreements into consideration, and positions should not be designed at the outset knowing professional expectations will regularly and consistently exceed the agreed upon contract hours. We know with the current budget situation compliance will be a challenge but can still be accomplished in a balanced fashion.

Third, we ask that since there is no way to ensure a 100% risk-free environment due to how the COVID virus spreads, options and supports be provided to our educators, even if those options and supports are implemented temporarily. We believe this is vital to ensuring our educators feel comfortable returning to work for the 2020-2021 school year. Those options include the following:

First, a Special Early Separation Incentive Plan (ESIP) be offered to educators. Some of our educators are more vulnerable than others for contracting the COVID virus, due to their age or health status. Some are also very concerned about the spread of the virus to those residing in their own homes, due to age or health status. Based on these concerns, we ask that a Special ESIP be provided so educators who feel they would rather retire than risk contracting the virus by returning to the classroom for 2020-2021. We know a Special ESIP will not only benefit our employees but will also result in financial savings to WCSD at a time when those savings are needed.

Second, just like additional options and supports will be provided to our students (for example, a distance learning format rather than a traditional classroom format), we ask similar options and supports be provided to our educators, including special transfer options for educators who need to work in a distance learning environment.

Third, additional non-paid leave of absence options be offered to educators who feel they need to take a non-paid leave of absence for the 2020-2021 school year due to concerns about their own health or the health of those residing in their own homes.

Fourth, educators are concerned about access to and impacts on paid sick leave. It may be necessary to make modifications to how sick leave is provided to employees, including increasing available days due to family members affected by the COVID virus, district-provided sick leave for those who are quarantined by the WCHD or who are requested to remain home from work due to experiencing COVID-related symptoms, etc.

We believe there could be other issues and decisions around employee's work environments which need to be considered, and we appreciate the on-going collaborations between representatives of WCSD and WEA. We thank the WCSD Board of Trustees for its consideration of these important concerns and how they impact our educators, as the working conditions of our WEA members are the learning conditions of our students.

Thank you,

Natha Anderson,
President, WEA

Tom Stauss,
Executive Director, WEA