



Solidarity Justice Professionalism

July 6, 2020

Dear Board of Education and Superintendent Thomas,

Like other plans across the state, the shape of D11's re-entry to instruction program this fall—*Return to Learn*—must maintain flexibility as it encounters the shifting expectations that come with an evolving health landscape. Teachers understand that the Governor and County Health Department dictate many of the parameters within which D11 responds to health and safety concerns, and that those dictates change with challenging frequency. Of course those are minimums, and there are many decisions D11 itself can and will make regarding re-entry to education and schools.

The District has stated unequivocally that the health and wellbeing of our students, staff, and community are the Board's highest priority. This comports with statements and expectations laid out regularly by the Board. Such sentiments are always welcome, of course. That D11 believes the psychological health benefits for families of in-person school attendance outweigh people's physical health risks represents an appraisal of costs, however. Within that framework of finding a balance in risking people's health to achieve a benefit, we must assume assertive, consistent, and comprehensive steps will be taken at every turn to *minimize* the risks for all people in the school. Otherwise we would be treating people's wellbeing capriciously.

We all must share in today's costs of health and safety to achieve our goals and use reason, science, and compassion in order to maximize benefits to students while limiting risk to the community. This means avoiding half measures that are inconsistent. Specifically, requiring adults to wear masks, but not children, does not minimize risk for children or adults. The practice of safety does not fall to one group alone, or safety does not exist. Call it health equity to do what is needed so that everyone participating in the educational process in D11 has the same opportunity for healthy outcomes.

We believe that if the requirement exists for one, it must exist for all. Students *all* must wear masks, along with staff. For some not to wear masks—a standard, best practice—undermines any value in the staff's wearing masks in the first place, and it compromises everyone's safety. Hundreds and even thousands of potential carriers in confined spaces with a masks-optional protocol simply does not address minimizing risks and valuing everyone's health, and of course young people *do* get COVID infections, too, as states such as Oregon are documenting with alarming frequency. The acts of encouraging students to wear masks and encouraging adults and students to stay home if they or family experience symptoms of a devastating, world-wide disease are insufficient responses that shift the systemic responsibility for safety and wellbeing of our students, staff, and community to the judgment of individual parents. These are not questions of choice, or preference, or convenience, but of public

good—and too frequently of life and death. Expecting staff to choose between employment or exposure to an environment where basic safety precautions are subject to the vagaries and impulses of children cannot be the Board's intent, but it is unavoidably the result of this policy. Fold in those students and staff who are especially vulnerable to contagion, and such a choice is grim indeed. We must plan for the health of all concerned, and all must share in achieving that goal.

District 11 this spring showed its humane and thoughtful sensibility in approaching the uncertainties of the pandemic. When we *do* recognize certainties amid the chaos—such as the benefits of wearing masks, keeping our distance, and staying home if we're sick—we need to seize upon them. We need to do so publicly sooner than later. How can we do less?

Sincerely,

The CSEA Board of Directors