



Public Comment &lt;public.comment@isd709.org&gt;

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## Return to Learn Plan

1 message

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**Carol Furchert**

Mon, Jan 18, 2021 at 5:24 PM

To: Public.Comment@isd709.org

Hello,

I am a parent of a 1st grade student in the district. I am very concerned with the return to learn plan for the elementary students across the district. This fall the area saw the numbers shoot up to the point that Essentia and St. Lukes were asking for schools to be closed. That was before a new variant, which the BBC reports is infecting 20 and under at a high percentage (50% of the new variant cases in Great Britain was with individuals aged 20 and under), thus forcing schools across Europe to close after doing all they could to keep them open.

Vaccines are starting to be given to education staff, and the number of vaccinations provided is low. It seems confusing that one would put staff in harm's way and students' families in harm's way by having students return to large class sizes. ISD 709 already has class sizes that are too large and now with a regular 5 day a week schedule, teachers will not be able to keep up social distancing. I know that certain businesses were closed at the same time that schools were closed; however, there is a correlation to our numbers going up and then reversing course when schools and certain businesses were closed. Since 50% of people who are infected with Covid do not know the source of how they were infected, one cannot scientifically rule out asymptomatic spread within schools, especially elementary schools.

I ask that you please reassess your decision with having students return to a 5 day a week schedule for elementary students. You are placing staff members at risk and also the community.

I teach a course that covers Minnesota in 1918 and we read a text that goes through and gives statistics of districts in Minnesota that opened too early during the Spanish Influenza pandemic. My students have read this text for years, but it really stood out in the fall and they were happy that they were learning in an online format. Yes, we learn history to not repeat the mistakes of the past; however, we also learn from history so we can better our present. A life is a life and it can never be replaced. Distance learning is not ideal. It is not desired. Yet, it is helping keep the community and the staff safer.

Thank you for your time.

Carol Furchert

ISD 709 Parent



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## Duluth Federation of Teachers Response

1 message

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Ethan Fisher <

Thu, Feb 11, 2021 at 11:14 AM

To: Jill Lofald <jill.lofald@isd709.org>, Alanna Oswald <alanna.oswald@isd709.org>, David Kirby <david.kirby@isd709.org>, Kelly Durick Eder <kelly.durickeder@isd709.org>, Paul Sandholm <paul.sandholm@isd709.org>, Rosalie Loeffler-Kemp <rosalie.loefflerkemp@isd709.org>, Sally Trnka <sally.trnka@isd709.org>, Public Comment <public.comment@isd709.org>

February 7, 2021

Dear Members of the Duluth School Board;

On behalf of the Executive Board of the Duluth Federation of Teachers and many of the forty members who make up the Building Stewards in each of our schools, I am writing in response to the School Board meeting held on February 4, 2021.

On just the fourth day of synchronous teaching, it was announced to the Exec. Bd. that district administration wanted to discuss a secondary hybrid model. Upon presenting us the plan, we provided many comments and questions circulated. Most of those questions surrounded either safety protocols or the amount of time needed for teachers to work in 3 modalities. In addition to meeting twice as an Exec. Bd., Principals also met with Building Stewards, Department Chairs and in some cases, building CITs. The process culminated in bringing together our Secondary Quality Leadership Team to discuss the plan. Through all of this, dozens of pages of input have been gathered from every step of the process. As of now, virtually none of the input given has been implemented. We continue to be optimistic that our insights will impact the plan, and are hopeful that more conversation is coming so that teachers' voices are heard. Our past experience, however, leaves us feeling doubtful.

An alarming trend that we are seeing at the Committee of the Whole meetings surrounds who is invited to give input as new plans and decisions are being made. When the School Board met on Thursday, February 4, 2021, plans for the secondary hybrid plan were unveiled. Similarly, in the January 14, 2021 meeting, plans were unveiled regarding bringing elementary schools back full face to face. In both of these meetings, there were no teachers present to give input on the decisions. Should teachers be included if you do not have custodial staff, paraprofessionals or secretaries there? If no, then why were principals included in both meetings if this argument is going to be used? Teachers need to be allowed to voice their opinions and concerns to these plans. The meetings felt rehearsed and a best case scenario was presented rather than the complexities of the situation. Board members commented in both meetings that teachers should have been present, and they absolutely should have been.

Safety is probably the number one concern that teachers have right now. Safety for our students and safety for our school staff. The Duluth Federation of Teachers has surveyed our members that are currently teaching face to face in the elementary schools. Data from a survey of early childhood through second grade is alarming.

- Of the 100 teachers that have responded, 85% have indicated that they are unable to maintain 6 feet of social distance from students in their classroom.
- To the question asking if students were able to maintain 3 feet of social distance from other students, 80% said no. Do you feel safe working in the current model? Only 24% could say yes to this.
- When asked if they were in support of students returning to classrooms in full face to face, 27% said yes.

As an Exec. Bd., we have asked multiple times for data showing there are fidelity checks on social distancing and cleaning in our schools. As of today, we have still not had this request met. At the meeting last week it was emphatically stated that cleaning is happening with fidelity 100% of the time. If this is the case, we are happy about that, but teachers want to see that this is happening, and a fidelity check report that employees can see would help put their concerns to rest.

For many employees, receiving the COVID vaccination would instill some confidence in safely entering classrooms. This process for Duluth School District employees has been slow. In addition, all employees should be allowed to get vaccinated without having to use personal sick time. We are considered essential employees and given priority in getting the vaccine, but teachers are feeling underappreciated and disrespected when they are told they have to use personal time to be vaccinated. I would ask if the Superintendent, Principals and Cabinet members are taking personal sick time when their name is called to receive the vaccination? With the amount of extra time all educators are putting in this year to meet the needs of the ever changing landscape of education, our district needs to create a plan that allows for vaccination during work time if necessary without needing to use personal time to do it.

Finally, the secondary plan to roll out a hybrid schedule puts teachers in an impossible and unprecedented position of teaching in three separate modalities. At the School Board meeting on February 4, viewers heard principals and the Superintendent indicate that this plan was really only teaching in two modalities. This could not be further from the truth. Teachers will be expected to continue to teach synchronously to their students and they will have students in the classroom as well. What was not mentioned, however, is the fact that there will still be students that will continue with distance learning. Teachers will need to teach asynchronously to these students as well, which is probably the most challenging to do because these students are often disengaged and take a tremendous amount of time to follow up with. These are students that targeted supports are meant for and are often deficient in credits. Is the administration suggesting we just ignore these students by not recognizing a third teaching mode or delivery? Imagine the teacher that teaches five classes and has three separate preparations with a total of 165 students. Their schedule could include two American History classes, two American Government classes and an Advanced Placement World History class. With this schedule they will be expected to prepare asynchronous plans to upload in Canvas for each of their five classes, teach synchronously to students that choose to engage in that modality for all five classes and teach face to face to those students that come to their classroom. This is an impossible task for any teacher to sustain.

Many times throughout the meeting on February 4 it was stated that this hybrid model follows the contract and the MOU. This is most definitely not the case. The MOU calls for there to be Temporary Secondary Distance Learning Teachers (TSDLT) who would be assigned all of the Distance Learning responsibilities. This is not going to happen. In addition, when crafting the MOU, conversations about Synchronous Teaching were met with assurances by District

Administration that this would not happen as it created an equity issue. If we were following our MOU, a teacher teaching in three modalities would not happen.

The Executive Board of the Duluth Federation of Teachers has been patient throughout this process, but we are growing weary. So are the nearly 700 members that are on the ground doing the hard work necessary to teach in this pandemic. Our paramount objective has always been and will continue to be the education of our students, but we want a voice in this and we want to do our jobs as safely as possible. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board of the Duluth Federation of Teachers

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## Comment for Board Meeting

1 message

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**Maglina Lubovich** ·

To: public.comment@isd709.org

Mon, Feb 22, 2021 at 3:52 PM

Hello:

I am the parent of an 11-year old 6th grader at Ordean. Now that our Covid case numbers have gone down in St. Louis County and Governor Walz has given the green light to open secondary schools in the state, and other schools in our city, region, state, nation, AND world have had some kind of in-person learning for students, can we please think about our 6-12 students in Duluth?

Can we please just isolate them from everything else, just prioritize them for a minute, and consider their needs as we make this decision? (Yes, I'm also thinking of teachers and vaccines, but here want to think about these *students*.) As we all know, they have not been in a school or classroom for an entire YEAR.

While I very much appreciate the exhausting work teachers have put in to distance learning, there is very little distance learning can do for many students any longer. Too many are sad, isolated, depressed, withdrawn, unmotivated, and just going through the motions of Canvas work every week. And yes, even the "A" students who love school and get good grades. (I'm beginning to think that doesn't even matter anymore.)

My request is for you to increase the 2.5 hours to two full days. Give these kids a break from computer screens, so they don't have to go to school for two mornings, only to turn around and come home, where they get to log on to a computer for the afternoon and complete synchronous learning.

I understand and have been told that this plan has already been announced publicly, so that's why it isn't being revised at this time. (That actually is *not* a requirement from Gov. Walz's new state guidelines--a suggestion, but is not required.) It has also been reported that 85-90% of families are choosing the hybrid option, so I have a feeling that not many of them are going to complain if you increase the time their student could spend with a teacher teaching in person.

Get these kids *out* of their bedrooms and houses--and off computer screens--and back to a few moments of normalcy before this school year is over.

Thank you,  
Maglina