



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MTI Demands 2020-21 School Year to Open Using All Virtual Teaching

Students and Educators Deserve Safe Classroom Conditions

TODAY, Madison Teachers Inc. requests that Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) pursue an ***all virtual learning model as the 2020-21 school year begins***. Virtual learning is the best model to ensure the physical and emotional health of our students, staff, and the families in their households.

“As educators, this is a difficult decision for us because we pursue our profession out of our love of working with children -- and that work is done best when we can do work with them in person,” said MTI Vice President Michael Jones. “We are excited to work with our students and families. Commencing September 1, staff will be ready to teach! But we refuse to jeopardize the lives of our children or our families with a reopening plan that relies on magical thinking and unfunded mandates,” Jones added.

MTI staff and leadership continue to engage with the district and community stakeholders seeking information and expressing health and safety, staffing, instructional equity issues, and workload concerns regarding the myriad of plans being considered for the 2020-21 school year.

Following the Science

The American Association of Pediatrics recently released a guidance on public health, the pandemic, and its impact on the lives of children. **“Local school leaders, public health experts, educators and parents must be at the center of decisions about how and when to reopen schools, taking into account the spread of COVID-19 in their communities and the capacities of school districts to adapt safety protocols to make in-person learning safe and feasible.” AAP (7/10/2020)**

Guidance from the Centers on Disease Control states that reopening should occur only if a community is improving in all six of the following areas: The number of newly diagnosed COVID-19 cases, the number of hospital visits with “COVID-like illness,” visits with “influenza-like illness,” the percentage of positive COVID-19 tests, the capacity of hospitals to treat patients, and the robustness of diagnostic testing programs. Locally, according to [Dane County Health Services](#), COVID-19 cases are rapidly rising and Dane County is under a mandatory mask order in indoor spaces to try to curb the spread of the virus. Multiple school districts around the country have [reversed plans to reopen schools and committed to on-line instruction](#) to begin the school year until the virus is controlled. Multiple organizations, including the [World Health Organization](#), advise that there is no timeline for when the virus can be contained.

Too Much Uncertainty

It would be irresponsible and immoral for us to continue to plan for in person learning when COVID-19 numbers are rising in our community as even the most basic questions around daily safety in our schools have not been addressed in the MMSD [reopening plan](#). Using Wisconsin’s Department of Public Health [Risk Assessment Tool for reopening](#), the district’s current plan:

- **Does not** account for safety protocols when a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19. Does the classroom close? Does the whole school close? What about substitute teachers?
- **Does not** include a contingency plan for staff who are at high-risk for contracting and dying from the virus, whether they are immunocompromised, are in an “at risk” group or fall in a susceptible age range.
- **Does not** include a quarantine plan if students or staff live at home with medically vulnerable loved ones or if a family member contracts the virus.
- **Does not** have a daily screening plan for employees, as outlined in the Risk Assessment Tool.
- **Does not** commit to supplying classrooms with personal protective equipment supplies (disinfectant, face masks, paper products, individual sanitary products for bathroom breaks, sinks with hot water) or additional custodial staff to handle the daily cleaning necessary in all spaces.
- **Does not** include safe transportation options for secondary students who take Madison Metro Transit, either with specialized busing or public busing. As of now, Madison Metro conducts daily cleanings of their buses, not cleanings of their buses after each route.
- **Does not** account for the realities of aging school buildings which do not have functional windows or have decades-old ventilation systems.
- **Does not** fund safety measures since state and federal governments have not provided funding for schools.

If the answer to any of the questions contained in the State’s Risk Assessment Tool is “No,” school buildings should not be reopened until you can answer “Yes.” It is important for local and tribal public health officers, school district administrators, and other partners to work together to

determine what is feasible, practical and acceptable given the unique needs and circumstances of the local community.

Equity Concerns for Our Low-Income Students and Students of Color

Equity is a major concern. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many inequities in our public education and healthcare systems. The underfunding and undermining of public schools has always been a plague on our collective community as society has chosen to shortchange public education and public health which disproportionately impacts low income communities and communities of color. The disparate rate of COVID-19 infection, severe illness, and death among people of color and working communities further spotlights the structural racism and economic inequality that exists. Returning to school in-person puts our Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) children and families at greater risk without a promise of greater support.

Our Demands to Keep Our Schools Safe

Our educators are ready to work on September 1. We are ready to work with our children and families even though earlier virtual learning was a stressful for many of our students. But we must balance that experience with the trauma of watching a classmate, an educator, or a family member suffer and perhaps die because we did not take preventative measures. For the health and welfare of our children, staff, and families, we call upon district leadership to commit to the following measures:

- **Commit** immediately to all virtual learning for at least the first quarter of the 2020-21 school year and until Dane County Health Services reports **zero** new cases for fourteen (14) consecutive days. Committing now allows everyone involved to plan for all contingencies.
- **Commit** to a full referendum that prioritizes funding safety of students and staff. We applaud the Board of Education for moving forward on the referenda, but the operating referendum has been reduced by \$8 million since last fall and budgets have been cut. State and federal governments have not dedicated funding so we must rely on ourselves for the money our schools need during this extraordinary crisis.
- **Commit** to funding in-person safety supplies and protocols when we are able to return to our school buildings. Staff and families deserve to know that they will not carry the financial burden of safety supplies in order to survive.
- **Commit** to assuring that all students have age-appropriate electronic devices and access to the internet to effectively participate in virtual learning prior to September 1.
- **Commit** to shared leadership with employee representatives and the school community by sharing information, involving others, and being transparent *before* making decisions on matters of significance.

We look forward to teaching and helping our children learn and grow this fall, but we have to do so in the safest way possible. We expect that all decisions will be made to maximize the physical and emotional welfare of everyone who is part of the Madison school community.

MTI is a member-led and democratic organization that represents 3,000+ employees who work for the Madison Metropolitan School District. MTI has maintained a strong voice on wages, benefits, and working conditions while advocating on issues of racial and social justice.

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