

Dear Members,

For all 2,100 of us and for the members of our school community, COVID continues to pose significant challenges. Students struggle to stay engaged in learning, families struggle to support learning from home, and teachers struggle with excessive workloads and an inability to connect with all of their students.

What should our Association do to support each other and our students during this difficult and daunting time?

**1. We can be guided by subject area experts, rather than by politically motivated opinions and rhetoric.**

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of COVID information released daily. Worse, some commentary shared over social media and the 24-hour news cycle continues to be confusing and contradictory. In the 10<sup>th</sup> month of this relentless pandemic, some may find their resilience slipping or a commitment to safety as a top priority waning. Still, in our state, an emphasis on safety endures. Guidance by public health experts has shaped how businesses, organizations, schools, and individuals live, work, and learn during COVID. Specifically, school leaders in King County have sought guidance from public health experts on how and when schools might operate safely.

Overwhelmingly, our members prefer to follow the honest, straightforward, and unbiased guidance of subject area experts instead of the opinions and selectively pruned evidence proffered by groups such as the Washington Policy Center, Freedom Foundation, or individuals on talk radio.

We have yet to encounter any guidance from subject area experts that indicates a large-scale return to in-person school for students would be safe and appropriate for our community. However, we have encountered [guidance from experts that indicates a return to in-person school for some students](#), especially younger students, can be safe and appropriate under certain conditions: low transmission of COVID in the community; careful planning around safety and health; and a reopening of schools that is reduced in scope.

**2. We can continue to plan collaboratively with the District, for both a return to in-person instruction and ways to improve remote teaching and learning.**

As educators, we know about patience, persistence, perseverance, wait time, and grit. We know that in-person learning is best for our students. We know that because our schools are the heartbeat of our communities, the challenges of our communities register in our students. Because COVID is a significant challenge to the health of our communities, we know that, for now, remote learning is the safest option for the majority of our students.

We hear you. You are looking forward to the day when you can be back in school with your students and colleagues. In the interim, our members continue to collaborate, both at the district level and at the building level, on how best to educate students during a pandemic. We are simultaneously focused on how we can continue to enhance remote teaching and learning and how we can plan and prepare for a return to in-person instruction for K-1 students. At both the building and the district level, our members are working with administrators to solve problems specific to our schools and our students.

**3. We can continue to stand together for the [shared principles and interests described in the Trust Agreement](#) with LWSD.**

We would challenge anyone who suggests that LWEA (or LWSD) is blocking a return to in-person instruction or that teaching remotely suggests a lack of principle, commitment, or courage. Our members have always been willing to stand for what is right in public education. The fight for McCleary funding lasted a decade; many of our members spent countless days talking to legislators in Olympia and doorbelling district neighborhoods when the legislature was out of session.

During the COVID outbreak, the extraordinary efforts of our members have repeatedly demonstrated their deep commitment to our students and the LWSD community. Our members have donated and delivered food and materials to students at their homes, and our Association has donated to local organizations that support our students, including local food banks, the WEA Children's Fund, the Boys and Girls Clubs in LWSD, and Friends of Youth. Many members report working long hours to connect with students. Starting in September, LWEA Preschool, Intervention, Learning Center, Transition Center, and Transition Academy teachers have provided in-person instruction. LWSD and LWEA have been discussing how to safely provide K-1 in-person instruction. Educators are driven to do what is right for our students and our schools. We will not shrink from this responsibility.

#### What progress have we made in two months of discussions with LWSD on a return to in-person instruction for K-1?

When assessing bargaining progress, it is important to note that both health authority guidance and outbreak data have changed significantly since our discussions began September 25<sup>th</sup>. At that time, King County was at the end of a 3 month decline in daily new COVID cases. Since then, the rate of new infections has tripled and now exceeds the rates seen last spring. The CDC, OSPI, and PHSKC have issued a series of new guidance documents as well.

As you know, each the District and the Association agreed to divide our K-1 LOU efforts into three bargaining sub-committees – Instructional Model, Staffing, and Health & Safety. Each of those teams has been meeting several times weekly to identify the issues/concerns, discuss interests/motivations for addressing those issues/concerns, then capture solutions that would meet those interests/motivations.

Below is a brief overview of the topics discussed for a K-1 return. *The details of each draft proposal are embargoed, so we are not able to provide further details, nor should you seek details or information from any member of a bargaining team.* Please note that "draft" means draft; discussion is not complete on these topics.

- The **staffing** group is working to finalize LOU language related to substitutes, leaves, job assignments and placement, meeting procedures, and missed planning time.
- The **instructional model** group has developed draft proposals related to instructional models for Kinder and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, the procedures for transitioning between remote and in-person instruction, expectations for curriculum/assessment during COVID in-person instruction, and instructional materials practices.
- The **health and safety** group is developing draft proposals related to the remote assignment teachers who wish to work on campus and student and staff health precautions. Some of the topics being discussed include PPE, safety supervision, staff notification, classroom physical distancing, sanitation/cleaning/ventilation, safety PD, and communication with students/families.

As you can see, our bargaining groups have discussed a broad range of topics and concerns over the last two months. When planning and preparing for instruction during a pandemic, whether it's remote or in-person, we have found that everything has to be reconsidered, redesigned, or reinvented.

As always, our thanks to everyone that has reached out to the LWEA staff and bargaining teams to make us aware of your concerns, experiences, and ideas. Although we are not always able to write back in a timely fashion, your input informs our bargaining work and is very much appreciated.

In Solidarity,

Howard and Katie

P.S. [We've updated our FAQ on evaluations](#). The changes are highlighted in yellow.