

12/20/20

Dear Dr. Duran and BSD Board,

We are writing to you as the faculty and staff of Enatai Elementary. We are united on the positions noted below and are fundamentally against the plan outlined by Dr. Duran to return to the classroom in January 21, 2021.

We cherish our positions as teachers and want the best for our students and their families. We *do* want to teach students in-person when it is safe, at this time we do not believe that it can be done in a way that prioritizes the safety and academic, social, and emotional needs of our students and their families.

Lack of Safety

While Bellevue School District declares it is ready for a safe roll-out, we have seen evidence to the contrary. Our special education educator who returned to in-person learning several weeks ago did not have disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer or gloves available to her or her class. When she requested gloves, she was told they were “too expensive” and that she should use a handful of tissues instead.

We are in the midst of a pandemic. Our current infections in King County are the highest they have been since the pandemic began. We are currently over 400 cases per 100,000 and rising. The current guidelines are telling Washingtonians that it is not safe to gather in groups of more than 5, while at the same time telling teachers it’s safe to go back to classes of 15 for hours a day with no chance of enforcing distancing rules with 5-7 year olds. We are dedicated to our students well-being and growth, but are not okay with being recklessly put on the front line of this health crisis.

Negative Impact on Student Learning

If we are going back into the classroom, it must be done in a safe manner and it must contribute to student growth. The proposed in-person model will reduce direct instructional hours from approximately 15 to 17 hours to only 11 hours a week. This loss of 76 instructional hours per student over the course of the remaining 19 weeks of school is untenable. This reduction in teaching time leaves just 1.5 hours for literacy and 1 hour for math each day. This leaves no time for science, social studies, and social emotional learning.

Burden on Families

The proposed in-person model requires increasing asynchronous time from 1.5 to 2.5 hours per day. We can see that students with supportive, financially stable families may be able to take up the slack by helping students with learning, but students farthest from social and economic justice will be disproportionately impacted. Asking already overwhelmed families to take on still more responsibilities for their child’s education is not realistic and will result in a greater academic divide with lasting repercussions throughout our students’ lives.

Student test scores are the same or higher than normal

We want you to know that Enatai students are actually performing better in some areas during distance learning than they did when they received services in the building. In looking at data points in LEXIA, ANET, STAR and DIBELS, we have learned that our students are academically thriving.

Returning to in-person learning at this time threatens the successful academic momentum and classroom communities we have built - in favor of an inferior and flawed model that does not serve students or their academic or social development and does not promote equity. Students choosing to stay remote will be rehomed to new classes, alienating them from their friends and teacher. Classes will be broken up. Teachers will be moved to different classes or cohorts. Teachers may be assigned to new grades or schools. And all will be exposed to an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. Ultimately we will be creating social dissonance, instead of social reunification.

We are asking Bellevue School District to do the following:

- Redact the statement that we are resuming in-person learning on January 21, 2021 and wait until March at the earliest when infection levels are below 75/100,000 and/or until teachers and families have been vaccinated.
- Create an inclusive steering committee of teachers, specialists, board members, administrators, BEA representatives and families that focuses on setting realistic guidelines for returning safely to in-person learning.
- Create a safety committee that realistically addresses the costs, concerns, and complexities associated with teaching in-person during a pandemic.
- Focus resources on making distance learning the best that it can be instead of rushing to return to in-person services,

We look forward to your response.