

Don Burress

Hello colleagues on the school board.

While you may be heartened by the announcement that the DOH decision tree has been modified, I don't believe that the folks who will face the brunt of that decision feel the same way. In fact, I'm not sure you really believe that schools are safe enough for larger groups of students.

If you actually thought schools were safe, you would have visited some of our special education, early education, MLL, and other staff as they worked with students in these supposedly safe environments. You would have published pictures on the BSD website that showed you well within 6 feet of students, admiring the learning they are risking their lives and the lives of anyone they come in contact for. There are a number of photos of educators in this scenario but none of admin, directors, or school board members.

If you actually thought schools were safe, wouldn't the school board have already been meeting in person this whole time? Why are your meetings still virtual? Wouldn't you be able to fit at least 30 people in the Rainier Room at a socially distanced 6 feet and using all the same safety protocols you are asking of educators?

If you actually thought schools were safe, you would have asked our staff working with students if they felt the same way and worked tirelessly to make sure they do. Unfortunately, you have proceeded the way Bellevue always does and simply told our staff members that they are to return to the buildings even if they don't trust that the safety protocols are able to be reliably implemented. We all know that past performance doesn't guarantee future results, so what assurances have you been giving educators so that they are on board with the plans others have made?

Because of your unwillingness to step up and lead by example, I don't think my colleagues believe you when you say that schools are safe. I don't think they have faith in the protocols or past performance, given that data is unavailable and not reliable. I don't think they believe you care about teachers because you would have loudly and publicly advocated that vaccines should be a priority for school staff, you would have adequately compensated those virtual educators with caseloads and class sizes that can only be described as exorbitant due to the virtual/hybrid split, and you would have spent more of your time reaching out to us, acknowledging the reality of this situation, and working with us to find solutions instead of just thanking us and wishing that the odds may ever be in our favor as we are asked to increase the risk of permanent health issues or even death for educators, students and the families and communities of everyone that works in this district. I just received another email informing me that a student will need some time to process the loss of a close family member. I think that is 5 or 6 of my students now... I've lost count. How can we believe that it is safe to go back to school?

Three months ago, in my last message to the board I asked you to personally apologize to educators for the unnecessary trauma caused by the decisions that created overloaded classes, late schedule changes, problematic communication, and the expectation that education will continue as normal during a pandemic where 300,000 people have died in this country and numerous others will face lifelong health problems due to COVID. Now, I'm asking you to somehow make us believe, despite all evidence to the contrary, that when you force us back to school, not a single educator, student, or community member will join those statistics because of it. We want to believe that the safety protocols and the probabilities will keep us as safe as we were when we were fully remote and schools were closed. Of course, we want our students to have the best education and recognize that remote learning is not that. However, we can't provide the best education if we die during this pandemic. As it stands now, our fear for our lives and the lives of those around us has not been acknowledged or addressed in the slightest. When you say schools are safe, we don't believe you.

Don Burress (He/Him)

Sammamish High School, Room 325

National Board Certified Math Teacher

BEA Executive Board High School Representative

[BEA Signup Form](#)

Patrick Van Dyke

To Dr. Duran and Bellevue SD School Board:

My name is Patrick Van Dyke, and I am in my 19th year of teaching here at Bellevue High School in the Bellevue School District, and I'm writing to you today to urge you strongly to reconsider plans to do a broader reopening of schools for our students in grades K – 2. I have never felt compelled to write before about school-related issues, as I have often trusted the general direction of the district, but the current dangers in reopening further cannot be ignored.

I know what you might be thinking: With all due respect, we're following the science. As a teacher of AP Statistics that works with students to recognize parameters that might make their data not represent what the data appears to say, I'd like to examine a few notions of the science collectively with you.

Gov. Inslee, when he released his adjustment to the health metrics, included a diagram similar to this one (I was unable to find Inslee's exact diagram), from the website for the Institute for Disease Modeling (IDM)[[1](#)]:

In order to do effective research, researchers often have to make assumptions about the situation at-hand, especially when working with data. In many of IDM's research papers, they've illustrated some of the many assumptions they've made in generating data. These assumptions include, but are not limited to:

- A COVID-19 detection rate of 50 cases per 100,000 in the 14 days prior. Our current rates, as acknowledged by the District in their most recent Back to Buildings Update[[12](#)], are over eight times this number.
- Many of these studies assumed a baseline model of a transmission rate of $r = 1$ or lower. Currently, King County has an estimated r -value of 1.2[[4](#)], and we only have reason to believe that after the holidays, that number will rise. Every measurable metric according to the King County dashboard indicates that the virus is growing in strength in our area, not weakening.
- That household contacts of these individuals will be removed from school for a full 14-day quarantine period. It is also noted that the additional burden of helping to identify all the contacts may place additional burden on tracing efforts not included in the data. Given that some parents aren't going to test their children at all[[2](#)], we cannot rely on this assumption.
- It was assumed that parents/guardians would not further return to work when students resumed in-person learning. This flies in the face of some of the reasoning many in our parental community have offered for needing schools to re-open.
- It was assumed that students who participate in remote learning are not in contact with anyone in school.

- It was assumed that all students that are learning remotely on days/times not in-session are not in a congregate care setting. Given the two and a half hour sessions scheduled for grades K-2 and the requirements of parental work settings as well as BSD's own offering of child care, this assumption is not valid in our setting.
- That cohorting will be possible and that students from different cohorts will not be in contact with each other. How do you plan to implement this with student restroom usage?

And this is just to name a few.

We're seeing evidence that in many areas where schools are open, they're having to close once again, including in Texas, Utah, Michigan, Georgia, Indiana, and New York City[3], while other states are having outbreaks[7][8]. Recommendations from other sources indicate that remote learning should be enabled for all students, and that all government levels should invest in remote learning[5]. What do we know that districts in these other areas of our country don't? Do we really have the hubris to believe that we can do this safer?

I've heard it said repeatedly from district personnel that the health and wellbeing of our staff, students, and school community is the district's top priority. But as far as it regards the staff, this is clearly not true. Compelling evidence has been provided by BEA leaders that despite district-level assurances to the contrary, a sizeable majority of staff do not feel safe in returning to the buildings. Repeating the assertion that the district has the staff's best interests in mind doesn't make it true in the mind of the staff who have clearly and unequivocally told you that they don't feel safe in buildings working with students. We know this to be true, as our most recent MOU has enabled teachers to work with students in buildings if they desired to do so. How many staff are actually doing this?

We have seen instances already this year where the district's ability to project what will happen as a result of decisions that they made have been inaccurate. One instance that I can personally attest to is the decision of making our schedules for the year, promising families that we would do everything possible to keep students with their home schools and not limiting offerings. What we got instead was students who weren't scheduled in some of their classes for multiple weeks, overloaded classrooms that required a BEA grievance to come to what I strongly feel is still a highly unsatisfactory resolution, as well as counselors and admin working around the clock to shuffle schedules due to an inadequate timeline. Oh, and keeping kids enrolled in their same school? Of the 166 students I'm still teaching this semester (when our class size targets are 140), all but 15 have concurrent enrollment with other schools, most of them with more than one other school. I understand that we're in unprecedented times, and we're going to make more mistakes than usual with best intentions. But you can see that our ability to project what we want to do versus what we are able to do hasn't totally lined up.

Finally, I want to focus on our commitment to equity that we have all collectively said we had, but have clearly done too little about[9]. Given the disproportionate impact of the virus on families of color, but also the outsized impact our remote learning has on that community, it is interesting to see that our families of color have significantly opted for and preferred to stay in the remote setting[10][11]. The

evidence strongly suggests that the willingness to reopen schools comes from a position of privilege, and not from a position of serving our most dramatically underserved populations. We would be better served by finally making a commitment to remote learning (and not the barely noticeable efforts we've received to-date), rather than forcing our K-2 teachers to enter the classroom to engage in yet another unique learning style that they have received precious little training for.

Repeatedly, I've heard district-level staff indicate that they're going to be listening. Given the compelling evidence around us, is now – with case numbers rising, with a vaccine already starting to be distributed, with a solution *on the horizon* – is now really the right time to be gambling with the lives of our staff and students?

Thank you for your time and your attention to this matter.

Patrick Van Dyke
Bellevue High School, Math Department
National Board Certified and Renewed
BEA Building Representative

Rocio Gonzalez

To Dr. Duran and Bellevue SD School Board,

Amid the flood of COVID-19 misinformation, new state regulations, policies, and advice, I offer a simple message of solidarity and support for my colleague Patrick Van Dyke and his well-supported petition. My name is Rocio A. Gonzalez, and I am in my 18th year of teaching here at Bellevue School District. Like Patrick, I have never before felt compelled to write about school-related issues because I trusted the direction and decision of the district and BEA leadership. However, like Patrick, the current dangers in rushing the reopening of our schools cannot be ignored.

Unfortunately, we all are suddenly learning what a global pandemic requires of us – and it is difficult. It is difficult for students, parents, and educators as well. Students are missing out on each other's company and the familiarity in-person instruction provides. It is difficult for those students who at first were not sure where they could go or how they could learn online. It is also difficult for parents and families, emotionally, practically, and financially. There is no doubt that these are difficult days for teachers too, who are scrambling to reassure students, rework grading policies, create curriculum, and mainstream classes online. Additionally, we cannot ignore the difficult time counselors, psychologists, and support staff across BSD are having striving around the clock to make wise decisions with compassion for individuals and caring for our whole community.

However, as a responsible entity, one must not ignore the cruel reality of COVID-19. The official quantified metrics, according to the King County control panel, show that this virus is growing in strength in our area. Thus, I share Patrick's concern, and many other BSD teachers and staff members as well, as we feel, with your decision, that the health and wellbeing of our staff, students, and school community is not the district's priority.

“Compelling evidence has been provided by BEA leaders that despite district-level assurances to the contrary, a sizeable majority of staff do not feel safe in returning to the buildings. Repeating the assertion that the district has the staff's best interests in mind doesn't make it true in the mind of the staff who have clearly and unequivocally told you that they don't feel safe in buildings working with students. We know this to be true, as our most recent MOU has enabled teachers to work with students in buildings if they desired to do so.”

How can the District claim teachers and staff will be safe when reopened if we are struggling to communicate effectively? District affirms to have appropriate recommendations, norms, and

procedures in place to reinforce them. Furthermore, you mentioned in your email today that we have “comprehensive [risk reduction protocols](#) in place for our back to buildings plan.” However, we are struggling to provide simple and fundamental buckets of disinfectant wipes, as was noticed this morning by a teacher here at BH. The MOU does not clearly explain the role of the people who will be supporting or enforcing the procedures (such as the role of the Verification Lead). Most importantly, the district has not offered, nor mentioned a date to train staff on the importance and requirements of the recommend roles. We cannot simply call them “informal monitoring positions” as the lives of many will depend on the success of the people fulfilling their roles.

Thanks for your email this morning, but at this point, we, teachers and staff members, need to ensure the district is prepared to assist those teachers, staff, and students who might contract the virus, or may lose their lives. As Patrick mentioned in his email, “our ability to project what we want to do versus what we are able to do hasn’t totally lined up.” We need to feel confident that the district and the BS Board is not rushing to reopen to be on the news for the wrong reasons. We need to trust that the decisions of our leaders have the entire BSD body in mind, as well as students and the community at large.

I am certain the disruption of our emails are necessary reactions to a clear, present, and growing danger. We strive and aspire always to be the best... I urge you to listen to those who work directly with students and reconsider your position to bring K-12 students back at the end of January.

With gratitude,

Rocio A Gonzalez

Rocío A. González,
M.Ed., National Board Certified Teacher
Spanish II, IV and AP Lang
BEA Building Representative

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A foreign language is like a frail, delicate muscle. If you do not use it, it weakens. — Jhumpa Lahiri

December 18, 2020

Dear Dr. Duran,

Thanks for taking the time to explain your decision regarding reopening schools. The meeting presented many justifications to return to school. I've been working at Enatai in the Special Education program this Fall and I've made some observations that I think you'll want to keep in mind as we return and vigilantly protect our health and the health of students.

1. In the kit of PPE, we need more gloves, and apparently you need to budget more than you would in a typical year. I am regularly wiping noses and bodily fluids. When I asked the nurse for gloves her response was the following: [We have a very limited supply as the supply chain is not great and the price of gloves has skyrocketed to 7 dollars a box. If you are going to be in contact with significant bodily fluids then you need to wear gloves, however, if you have a sufficient barrier such as tissues, you just need to wash your hands after wiping up the snot/drool. You can use 10 tissues and that is still cheaper and more available than 1 glove. Normal glove usage is still the standard of use.](#)
2. One of the important aspects of the plan is the use of attestation forms. I have accidentally forgotten to use the link occasionally. I know other colleagues have also forgotten. One teacher even laughed because she had misread the question and clicked on 'yes' for several items on the list. No one has ever called me to follow up. No one called my colleague for weeks regarding her suspicious answers either. Is there really anyone monitoring the attestation site?
3. I was initially provided with a surgical mask and shield. Then, after one month of data showing that I was rarely beyond arm's reach of my students I got the notification from Carrie Lang that said, 'you have been determined to fall into the High-Risk category as determined by the Department of Labor and Industry because in the course of your work you may be in sustained close contact with others, usually exceeding 10 minutes in an hour within 3 feet of another person'. So, now I've been fitted for the N95 mask and I wait to receive my district issued mask. I think that all staff will find that they meet the criteria for High-Risk and you might as well budget for quite a few more expensive N95 masks. I've known since the beginning that I'd be within three feet, so I've been buying the masks for myself and my paras. In fact, all my family (health professionals) on the East coast has been buying and mailing me N95 masks because they cannot believe BSD didn't provide them from the beginning.
4. We will need more janitors. I can speak from my experience, that cleaning and sanitizing my classroom after the small group of three to five students leaves is very time consuming. If we are going to do a cleaning in between Group A and Group B, then we need more janitor support. They are running around wiping door handles and bannisters. I need help in order to get desks, mats, physical therapy equipment, and whiteboards prepared. As it is,

I use almost an hour and I currently only have a fraction of the students that will be coming in January. The General Education teachers will need to have students using the Purell wipes or additional time for cleaning.

5. We will need to train the substitutes and make sure that they are receiving all the same communications around health and safety expectations. My usual para took a vacation to California over Thanksgiving. She quarantined after returning to WA. The para substitute that took her place told me, 'ha! That's interesting. I had a family trip and big Thanksgiving dinner with my children. We ate outside. It's fine.' I was furious. She had not heard about the reason my para was required to be absent. The substitute had no idea that she was supposed to stay home after attending a large gathering. Substitutes need to follow the same health and safety precautions as all BSD staff

I'm in favor of re-opening schools, but only if we can do it safely. The necessary safety measures are expensive. Please don't send everyone back if BSD doesn't have the funds to get face shields and N95 masks. Every meeting we've had since October has forecasted a grave situation regarding the budget. I'm very worried that we'll get back to school and be unable to maintain a safe environment. I prefer the small groups of Special Education and 'special circumstance' children. We are doing amazing things for the kids in this district. Please don't disrupt the learning with a plan that we can't afford to execute.

Sincerely,

Regan Edwards

Special Education teacher, Enatai Elementary

Dear Dr. Duran and BSD Board,

I am a middle school art teacher in Bellevue School district. I have two of my own children at school in the district as well. My son is a 2nd grader at Eastgate, and my daughter is a 6th grader at Tillicum.

I received the email for k-2nd grade parents last night that included a "survey". Calling this a survey was very disingenuous. A survey would have given families a chance to provide feedback and to communicate concerns.

I am very concerned that you are even considering bringing kids back to buildings now. In October you were considering it, but then numbers surpassed 75 per 100k and we stayed remote, thankfully. Now Covid numbers are at 409 per 100k and you think it's safe to bring kids back to school? This is ridiculous. Why are you pushing back to school? Why aren't you following the protocol set up at the beginning of the year? There is no award at the end of this school year to the first district back. You say, "To date there have been no cases of spread within our schools or facilities." Isn't that because most kids are NOT at the schools? Clearly safety is not a concern. My trust in top leadership is gone.

I've been putting my family first throughout this pandemic since March. We only leave the house for food pick up or groceries. We are making sacrifices for the greater good. Putting kids in schools will surely raise transmission rates. Kids will be spreading covid to their loved ones at home (many of which are high-risk). Let's also think about staff and teachers. How many teachers will get sick or die? Are you prepared for lawsuits as families lose loved ones?

I am asking you to keep students remote until the ORIGINAL metrics confirm it is safe. **If 75 per 100k was the marker before, then it should still be the marker.** I know remote learning is NOT ideal for anyone. Kids are missing out on a lot of learning and engagement, but I would much rather my kids be behind in learning than any of our family members sick or dead.

Thank you for hearing my voice

Hello-

I am writing to you to share my thoughts about the plan for in-person learning and the district communication during this crisis. I am a middle school language arts teacher at [school], ASB advisor, and BEA representative, all positions for the past 5-8 years. I have been very blessed to work for such a wonderful school, however I do not always have the same confidence in the district as a whole.

I understand in counties where cases are between 50 and 350 per 100,000 residents, districts can consider the commencement of in-person learning, according to Jay Insee. However, your announcement for return to in-person for K-2 came prior to the governor's announcement without joint communication, or collaborative discussion about the announcement with the BEA. I'm confused as to why this is. Teachers have such great power to communicate the vision of your leadership, yet, more often than not, our voices feel unheard and under acknowledged. We feel unsafe. We fear our family's safety, our colleagues' safety, and our student's safety, and their families safety. We know our schools' limitations as far as adherence to health and safety measures, like wearing masks, maintaining six feet of physical distance, increased cleaning and improved ventilation. We have seen not enough evidence for a safe return to school at our workplace.

As of December 4 when I visited my classroom, very few measures have been made to make my classroom safe. The only change I saw was a realignment of desks and all my books and papers tossed. Never could I have 15 students in that classroom safely. I observed no changes in the ventilation system. I believe my school is one of the oldest buildings, thankfully due for a rebuild, but I believe only after the rebuild of the central office. Our building is ill-equipped for reopen, and I thought this was done back in August when the district planned to start the school in-person. All in all, I can't make sense of why decisions are being made, directed, and communicated when not working closely with who really puts on the show- the teachers.

Fortunately, at this point we are still 100% remote, but I'm sure that will soon change in the coming months. In order to extend equity across the district with various building surety, I hope the district will diligently ensure the state assumes responsibility to pay for the costs of ensuring safety in our schools as outlined in the Labor and Industries (L&I) health and safety requirements.

What else I need from you as our district leader- I need a sense of inclusion and ownership of decisions being dictated. I want to be heard. I want to be cared for. I don't want decisions being made as a result of school board pressure, a Board that should be more a representative body of educational professionals and the former to best understand the Interests of staff and students. I don't want to feel like I am part of a competition to roll out a plan to reopen first because it shows your deep commitment to equity.

A deep commitment to equity would better be communicated through regular programs and education as promised in the MOU: "Period 8 is intended as additional time for students, educators, and families... will have this time available to engage with items including, but not limited to: equity work, ...Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), mental health strategies.."
Unfortunately, I haven't seen any of these offerings from the district to the listed parties, and we are nearly half way through. I would like to see follow through on the roll out of programs and education as promised in the MOU.

Thanks for reading and your consideration-

Oct. 13, 2020

Hello,

I'm Courtney Mack, an English teacher at Newport High School. This is my eighth year teaching in the district, and I am writing to share my perspective on the transition to hybrid in-person learning based on the wisdom I've gained studying and implementing online pedagogy since schools closed in March. At this point, it is likely that classroom teachers have the most experience of anyone in the district teaching online; we have more experience than our admin, than the district staff, than some of our union leadership. I know you are working incredibly hard to support our students, but given that only classroom teachers from March until now have lived the nuances of online instruction vs. in-person teaching, I feel it is appropriate to offer you this feedback directly as you are important decision makers. I will first share my concerns and then an idea for how to successfully and safely bring secondary students and teachers back in-person.

Based on the information from our October 9th professional development day, I am passionate in my belief that the hybrid model as presented will fail in to promote equity in student learning. To quote my colleague, Caryn Landau-Walter, "It seems we are so attached to the idea of making school more 'normal' for all students that we are actually failing to develop creative solutions that are focused on equity."

Some specific equity concerns I have:

- **Loss of instructional time:** taking student temperatures as they enter, monitoring social distancing, and differentiating for students learning online and in-person that day will all take time away from learning itself.
 - I plan my use of class time to the minute; I imagine these extra protocols will add at least 5 minutes, especially navigating the technology challenge of connecting with students online that day.
 - If students lose 5 minutes of "live" instructional time in every class per day in our current schedule, that amounts to 70 lost instructional minutes per week and a whopping 2,520 minutes or 42 hours of lost instructional time in a school year (70 minutes lost per week x 36 weeks of school remaining in the year).
 - 2,520 minutes is the equivalent of around 50 live class meetings in an online format, which is the equivalent of 25 weeks of classes.
 - Therefore, **I strongly believe we are better serving students at the secondary level by providing them with 25 more weeks' worth of instructional time in the online learning format than losing 42 hours of instructional time to safety efforts.**
- **Conflicting pedagogical methods for online and in-person learning will likely lead to lower academic performance:** Online courses are structured completely differently than in-person classes in how students learn.
 - In most in-person classes, new skills or content are taught during class

meetings, and students practice or apply new material as homework.

○ In online learning, that is flipped: students engage with new content asynchronously at their own pace and meet in live classes to practice, apply, or clarify their understanding. Since this summer, teachers have worked so hard to learn how to “flip” their classrooms and leverage technology to engage students in asynchronous learning.

○ Pedagogically, I believe online learning has made many classes significantly more equitable. For example, when students are working at their own pace, they can pause material, watch with closed captions, translate materials, replay or redo portions of lessons as needed, providing huge supports for students with disabilities or homelives that may cause them to miss class occasionally.

○ **Nobody has presented best practices for hybrid instruction that reconcile the different pedagogical approaches of online and in-person lessons.**

§ Will students still be studying new content asynchronously, or will we revert to the in-person method, which would mean students online are simply watching class with less chances to engage?

§ Will student homework loads increase significantly, since it's difficult to imagine how students will collaborate when half of them are in the room and half are online?

§ To understand my skepticism about having students in the classroom collaborate with students online, try having multiple people be in the same room during a Teams meeting...there are horrible audio feedback issues.

○ In short, I fear a hybrid version of online and in-person classed will be a worse of both pedagogical models: chaotic, undifferentiated, and inflexible.

Based on my experience, **the only way to leverage the benefits of both online and in-person instruction at the secondary level would be to maintain the online learning format while offering in-person meetings during asynchronous time for students who need us most.** This would maximize instructional time during live classes, as well as prioritize the needs of students furthest from educational justice, as they would have the option to study asynchronously or in-person in a small group. While it has not been the focus of this email, maintaining the online learning model but offering in-person instruction during asynch time would also address the significant safety fears many secondary staff have about staying safe while being exposed to over 100 young adults per day during a global pandemic.

To once again quote my colleague, Caryn, “As a teacher I am ready and willing to work hard to support my students, but I want to do it in the way that has the most positive impact. What would it look like to put the focus on the students who need us the most?”

It would not look like the proposed hybrid model, as I understand it.

I am sending this feedback to various BSD and BEA leaders, and I am going to encourage my colleagues to do the same to ensure more teacher voices are heard throughout this process. Please feel free to forward this feedback to other stakeholders. Thank you for considering my recommendations, and I welcome hearing your thoughts or feedback.

Sincerely,

Ms. Courtney Mack (she/her)

Teacher

English Department Chair

Newport High School