

August 11, 2020

It is with regret and sadness that the Executive Board of the Littleton Education Association (LEA) announces that it cannot endorse the 2020/2021 school reopening plans at the elementary, middle or high school levels of Littleton Public Schools (LPS). There is not yet enough information known to make an assessment regarding the reopening plans of the preschools in LPS. The officers of LEA concur with the above-stated opinions.

This announcement is made without animosity or acrimony, yet with gratitude to all of the individuals (including hundreds of LEA members) who have tried valiantly since June to create a safe and workable plan for reopening LPS schools in person. Few school districts in Colorado have partnered as closely with their educator associations over the past three months as LPS has partnered, and the Memorandum of Understanding between LEA and LPS regarding COVID-19 plans is excellent. It is disappointing to realize that all of that amazing work has not endowed the broad LEA membership of teachers and special service providers (SSPs) with confidence in our ability to reopen schools safely in person at this time.

LEA, an organization to which 76% of current LPS teachers and SSPs belong, has surveyed its members three times, with survey windows from July 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, July 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>, and August 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>. Survey participation was extremely high; for example, 80% of LEA members took the most recent survey, which was only open for 25 hours.

LEA leaders wish to acknowledge that the survey results at the elementary level are slightly less decisive than the survey results at the middle and high school levels, and elementary teachers and SSPs indicated a stronger bent toward starting school in person than individuals at the secondary level. Yet, only 43% of elementary, 38% of middle, and 39% of high school respondents said that they think that LPS (broadly) and their own schools (specifically) can reasonably assure LPS students and their families, LPS staff and their families, and the broader community in which those families live, that adequate health and safety measures related to COVID-19 can and have been put into place. Again, this data should not be read as a condemnation of the efforts to make LPS schools safe enough to reopen in person. Rather, it should be read as an acknowledgement of the health and safety dangers to students, staff, families, and the greater LPS community, which have been created by this global pandemic.

When asked what decision they would make regarding the restart this coming Thursday if they were sitting on the LPS School Board, 51.5% of collective respondents chose a remote start, almost 29% chose a hybrid start, and almost 20% chose an in-person start. While percentages did vary across levels, a plurality of elementary respondents and a majority of secondary respondents indicated that the choice they would make as individual LPS School Board members would be a remote start, rather than either an in-person or hybrid start.

The questions on the survey related to educator effectiveness for students, and the number of weeks that respondents expect to be able to deliver in-person instruction under the current LPS restart plans, appear to collectively indicate a slightly higher belief in the potential rewards, compared to the potential risks, at the elementary level than at the secondary level. In other words, a combined 52% of respondents think that COVID-19 will force school closures within the first three weeks of the school year, a combined 84% of respondents think that the virus will force school closures within the first six weeks of school year, and there is not a significant difference of opinion regarding the effectiveness of hybrid versus remote learning. (It goes without saying that respondents think that in-person instruction is more effective for most students, although some students certainly thrive in an online environment.) In other words, if we were not in the midst of a global pandemic, already-existing models of in-person school for most students and online learning for a small percentage of students would of course be preferred.

Educators, especially collectively through an association such as LEA, have an ethical obligation to assess the educational needs of their students, as well as the risks to health and safety posed to their students, their colleagues, all families connected to their school district, and the broader community in which those families live. While some LEA members (more concentrated at the elementary level) certainly believe that the current LPS restart plan is safe enough to proceed, the officers and Executive Board members of LEA interpret the collective judgement of LPS teachers and special services providers to be that the health and safety risks posed by COVID-19 are greater than the educational rewards posed by the current LPS restart plan.

Because LEA and LPS have a Collective Bargaining Agreement in place which explicitly prohibits a strike on any date before August 1, 2021, this statement should not be read as a call to strike. However, the officers and Executive Board members of the Littleton Education Association intensely hope that on Thursday evening, the School Board of Littleton Public Schools strongly weighs the health and safety risks of COVID-19 against the potential educational rewards of the current LPS restart plans. Many School Board decisions are important; this decision is the most consequential that the current LPS School Board will make.

LEA Executive Board: Corey Brueckner, Lisa Calkins, Jamie Carroll, Shante' Dallapiazza, Jay Lukes, Gayla Ruckhaus, Katie TeKippe, Brian White

LEA Officers: Amanda Crosby (President), Tom Andrews (Vice President), Alberta Maybee (Secretary/ Treasurer)