



February 11, 2021

An Open Letter to Dr. Carlton Jenkins, the Madison Metropolitan School Board, and the Madison community.

The Board of Directors governing Madison Teachers Inc. recognizes and appreciates being present for Wednesday morning's discussion led by Dr. Carlton Jenkins and MMSD leadership. Since Dr. Jenkins' return to Madison, we have appreciated the significant increase in discussions and good faith efforts to repair deeply-harmed relationships between the district's administration and our Union. We look forward to continuing this relationship respectfully and transparently. While many districts have succumbed to the wishes of the often-privileged classes when it came to making their decision to return to in-person instruction and work at school sites, we recognize that Dr. Jenkins, the MMSD Board, and leadership have taken the science seriously, developing sound and reasoned re-entry criteria, as well as the concerns of students, families, and staff during this traumatic and uncertain time.

Our district has remained virtual since March, 2020. We have done our best to center our questions, concerns, and actions around the health and safety of our children, educators, and families, in particular, those whose voices have not always been recognized and valued in our system. Since September, [our community has already experienced young people, staff, and families who have contracted the corona virus even in small-group and specialized instruction.](#) We recognize the enormous sacrifice face-to-face staff at MSCR Cares and who work in special education units have already committed to support children. It is in this spirit that we ask the following questions and present our expectations for the norms of collaboration regarding the decision-making process for re-entry:

- As of [today](#), 13% of our community has received the first dose of the vaccine. However, only 4.9% of those in Dane County have received the second dose. There is also a disparity in who is receiving the vaccine, as 4.8% of Hispanic-identifying residents and 6.6% of Black residents have received the vaccination, compared to 12% of white residents. Elected leaders at all levels of government have failed to lead when it comes to the production and distribution of the vaccine to abate the pandemic. **Can the district and the BOE state with certainty that their decision to re-open the schools was not influenced by the Republican-controlled Senate Joint Finance Committee's**

decision to fund school districts holding in-person classes? Are MMSD's actions being dictated by financial concerns rather than scientific ones?

- MTI members are committed to the equitable and fair distribution of available vaccines in our community, following the prioritization of guidelines from the federal Center for Disease Control and Prevention: [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#). The elderly, seniors in long term care facilities, working people on the front lines (MMSD staff already working in close contact with students), healthcare, transportation, and grocery store workers, must all be afforded access to life-saving vaccinations first. It is important to remember that the vaccine supply is limited and vaccinations are targeted to specific groups of people with a higher risk for COVID-19 infection. It will take time to reach all people within each priority population and phase. **Yes, educational employees need immediate access to the vaccine, and those working in close contact should be moved to the front of the line. Therefore, are the district and county committed to expediting this process for our employees who are either already conducting in-person instruction or will be part of the instructional group scheduled to return to school buildings on March 1?**
- According to our MMSD vaccination plan, elementary employees are placed in Group 3 (after Special Education staff, Educational Assistants, and other staff who are essential and have already been supporting children face-to-face). Based on this timeline, a large majority of the returning Elementary staff will not even be in the lottery for the vaccine when Kindergarteners are expected to return on March 9. In addition, local and state supplies of the vaccine will still unsatisfactorily low. **The district has stated that it will not amend its plan based on its re-opening announcement, so why are we accelerating the re-opening timeline if the vaccination timeline remains stagnant?**
- Dane County guidelines recommend that in order for K-2 schools to open, the county ["should see a 14-day average of 78 cases or fewer that is sustained for 4 consecutive weeks."](#) Although our community's statistics are trending in the right direction, our last 14-day average (1/28 - 2/4) was **126.5** new cases. **Therefore, why has MMSD announced a re-opening of schools, when the numbers still aren't in a safe zone, according to county health officials?**
- Following the science, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** published its findings on February 2, 2021. You will note that closing schools and childcare settings from March-September 2020 made positive cases rare in school settings. Upon re-opening, September through November, 2020, [Wisconsin schools become the #4 setting for COVID, surpassing food processing plants](#). **Therefore, our question is whether or not the health experts from Dane County and MMSD took this information into account when planning for the return of Elementary students and staff in less than three weeks' time?**

- While the district is admirably attempting to improve its building systems and has dedicated \$300,000 to that effort since the beginning of the current school year, educators are still seeing inadequately-supported facilities and a backlog of work orders that have yet to be addressed by an overworked and undersupplied facilities maintenance staff. We have widespread reports of no hot water in buildings, insufficiently heated and ventilated spaces, and school environments that have not been modified to ensure proper social distancing. While the district has assured us that all air ventilation and building facilities are satisfactory according to their metrics, they have yet to share those metrics or confirm which buildings' ventilation and water systems have been updated to adequately support the health of children, families, and staff. Considering that our district has had a long [history of inadequate facilities](#), hence the need for our community to pass a significant facilities referendum just last November, this concern is valid. **No more defensive rationalization, please; show us your metrics and what building-by-building steps (renovation and remediation) have been taken, in order to assure all stakeholders that when the children, families, and staff of the district return to their classrooms, that they will be in a safe educational environment.**
- Many members of our community have spoken up about the social/emotional toll the pandemic has had on our children. We could not agree more. But in the district's re-entry plan, we have yet to see any substantial plans for giving educators and students the time and space to heal from the collective trauma caused by the pandemic and being away from each other. We are instead tasked with conducting standardized tests like Fastbridge and the upcoming ACT to satiate the system's need for compliance, as opposed to taking care of our own mental health needs. **Has the district committed to providing time, resources, and support for all students, families, and staff to process the past year of trauma, or are we expected to return to academic instruction immediately? And will this include joint discussion as part of the decision-making process?**
- As we plan any return to school buildings, what are the guarantees that re-entry teams will include staff and community members who will ensure that each wave of return will be safe and equitable for all students and staff? We have already received reports of some building administrators sharing re-entry information with staff, while other staff have not heard anything from their administrators. Some staff have been welcomed on school re-entry teams, while others have been denied because they're not particularly close with the principal. **What is the district doing to commit and ensure that communication between administration and staff and the community will be transparent and equitable at all times during the re-entry process?**

These are just some of the questions that we have asked the district to respond to repeatedly, yet we have not received satisfactory answers. We acknowledge that we have a seat at the table to be involved in the decision-making process, but we are not here for ceremonial purposes. We intend to use our collective voice to protect our educators and our community's most precious resource, the children of Madison. If these and many other questions are not

answered satisfactorily and publicly by MMSD and the Board of Education, we cannot and will not encourage our members to support any district plan for re-entry..

Sincerely,

[The MTI Board of Directors](#)