[DATE]

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[ADDRESS]

Dear Members of the [INSERT CITY NAME] School Board:

As we approach the 2020-2021 school year, it is increasingly clear that we must reopen our classrooms for regular in-person instruction five days a week. To do anything less – virtual instruction, only two days a week in classes, or draconian social distancing rules that deprive children of human interactions – would be a profound disservice to our children and would have potentially lifelong consequences for them, as they struggle to regain their academic footing.

In order to evaluate the harms caused by closing schools, we must first understand that children are in the lowest risk category, and pose zero risk of asymptomatic transmission. These two facts combined are a powerful reminder that school closures were an overreaction to a potential risk, which has never materialized.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the current risk of fatality to children is 0.0%. In fact, the COVID fatality rate in the United States is so low that children are at a higher risk of death from traveling to school than that which is posed to them by COVID. CDC has noted that “the Covid-19 fatality rate in the U.S. for anyone younger than 19 is so low it is calculated as 0.0%.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Furthermore, the Director of the CDC, Dr. Robert Redfield clearly stated that all schools should reopen this year. Below is his exact quote from the White House’s national dialogue on safely reopening schools on July 7, 2020.

*CDC encourages all schools, all schools to do what they need to reopen, and to have plans that anticipate that COVID-19 cases will occur. When I look at it, I think it’s important that the guidance that we’ve put out, as the Secretary mentioned, is guidance, and I want people to see it as guidance to reopen. Nothing would cause me greater sadness than see any school district or school use our guidance as a reason not to reopen.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

Another risk factor that prompted school closures, asymptomatic transmission, has also not occurred. Asymptomatic adults and children are also not spreading the disease. A study in May found that of the nearly 500 people who were exposed to an asymptomatic COVID positive patient, zero people got sick. This result was replicated in Missouri in June when two hairstylists served 140 customers without causing a single person to become infected.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Children, in particular, are not contracting COVID and becoming asymptomatic transmitters of the disease – a concern that initially helped fuel the school closures. The World Health Organization recognizes this simple fact, and the title of a recent press release makes the point: “No child is known to have passed COVID-19 to adults.” In that research, the World Health

Organization performed contact tracing and found precisely zero children had passed the disease to family members or others.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Despite the facts that children overwhelmingly are not at risk of death from COVID, and are not known to transmit the disease, schools were shut down for three months in the spring. Nearly fifty-five million children across America were out of the classroom during the spring. We now have the benefit of studies that show the consequences of this lost classroom time. According to a recent Brown University study on the effects of closing the classes, students only experienced 63-68% of the learning gains in reading relative to a typical school year, and a paltry 37-50% of the learning gains in math.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Looking at broader issues than simply the academic deficiencies of online education, the American Academy of Pediatrics now argues that schools must be open for children for full-time instruction. The Academy, the primary medical society representing 67,000 pediatricians, concluded that it is not safe for children to be denied full-time classroom instruction. In a recent statement, the academy argued:

**“[T]he AAP strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school**. The importance of in-person learning is well-documented, and there is already evidence of the negative impacts on children because of school closures in the spring of 2020. Lengthy time away from school and associated interruption of supportive services often results in social isolation, making it difficult for schools to identify and address important learning deficits as well as child and adolescent physical or sexual abuse, substance use, depression, and suicidal ideation. This, in turn, places children and adolescents at considerable risk of morbidity and, in some cases, mortality. Beyond the educational impact and social impact of school closures, there has been substantial impact on food security and physical activity for children and families."[[6]](#footnote-6)

Parents across the country and our city are concerned about the instruction time their students have missed. According to an EdChoice/Morning Consult poll, 80 percent of parents are concerned about the gap in in-person instruction.

These parents have good reason to be concerned. A large "COVID slide" is appearing that dwarfs the normal summer slide, and it is most severe for less advantages groups, exacerbating societal inequalities.

Many students across the country were simply missing from online instruction. And the students who most needed additional services were the ones hurt the most. Teletherapy sessions are not the same as in-person sessions, and have not proven effective for many students who have special learning needs.

An often overlooked tragedy of the shutdown is the damage it is causing for vulnerable children. Less time in school means a greater chance that child victims of abuse will not receive the help they need. Researchers from the University of Michigan and Florida State University found that in March and April alone, an estimated 212,500 allegations of child abuse went unreported because of school closures.

Their report states: "Our findings suggest that a vulnerable population—children at risk of maltreatment—are separated from a valuable resource when schools close, and this separation manifests as a reduction in maltreatment allegations. When schools are not in session, whether for regularly scheduled breaks or in response to catastrophes, cases of child maltreatment are more likely to go unnoticed and unreported."[[7]](#footnote-7)

As parents, as educators, and as members of the community, we have a moral and civic responsibility to ensure that children are in schools, receiving the best education possible. I strongly urge members of the school board to open our classrooms for all students to attend in-person instruction five days a week.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

1. Centers for Disease Control, “Provisional COVID-19 Death Counts by Sex, Age, and State,” Updated July 8, 2020.

 <https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Provisional-COVID-19-Death-Counts-by-Sex-Age-and-S/9bhg-hcku> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQG835FyulE> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ming Gao, Lihui Yang, Xuefu Chen, Yiyu Deng, Shifang Yang, Hanyi Xu, Zixing Chen, and Xinglin Gao, “A Study on Infectivity of Asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 Carriers,” Respir Med. 2020 Aug; 169: 106026. Published online May 13, 2020.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7219423/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Alix Culbertson, “Coronavirus: No child known to have passed COVID-19 to adults, global study finds,” Sky News, April 30, 2020.

 <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-no-child-known-to-have-passed-covid-19-to-adults-global-study-finds-11981111> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Megan Kuhfeld, James Soland, Beth Tarasawa, Angela Johnson, Erik Ruzek, and Jing Liu, “Projecting the potential impacts of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement,” (EdWorkingPaper: 20-226). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/cdrv-yw05>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. American Academy of Pediatrics, “COVID-19 Planning Considerations: Guidance for School Re-entry,” June 25, 2020.

 <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E. Jason Baron, Ezra G. Goldstein, Cullen T. Wallace, “Suffering in Silence: How COVID-19 School Closures Inhibit the Reporting of Child Maltreatment,” SSRN, May 14, 2020.

 <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3601399> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)