



December 16, 2020

To the Students, Staff, Families and Community of the Ann Arbor Public Schools:

The COVID-19 pandemic has created historic challenges for our district. We are all aware of the toll that it has taken on students, parents, teachers, staff, and the broader community. The Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education remains steadfast in its commitment to return to face-to-face instruction at the earliest moment that it is safe to do so. The Board will continue to put science at the center of the conversation, receive guidance from experts, respect the insights of concerned citizens, and adapt as new evidence emerges.

Unfortunately, as in many communities across the country, COVID-19 and the determination of the appropriate time to resume face-to-face instruction, has become a polarizing issue. The Board values commentary from members of the community, considers suggestions, and reaches carefully considered judgements on how to improve daily operations. Trustees are sympathetic to the needs of families who are undergoing a great deal of frustration and stress from being in virtual mode, and we appreciate feedback about their experiences. In addition to the advice of health experts, we consider the operational, logistical, and equity implications of every decision. We have shared our progress multiple times per month since March, and the administrative team regularly communicates with families and the general public via email, op-ed, and the AAPS website.

Trustees believe it would be inappropriate to resume face-to-face instruction at a time when COVID infections are at or near their highest levels and the virus continues to disproportionately sicken and kill historically underrepresented and vulnerable members of our community. Too often the loudest voices calling for reopening are not from the families who face the highest risk. The Board is confident in its adoption of empirical metrics and processes that allow us to assess safety. We remain committed to adjusting our strategy as we learn more about the short- and long-term effects of the virus, and the availability of vaccines.

We fully understand and respect that some disagree with our assessment of the evidence and our timing for reopening schools. Thoughtful disagreement is every citizen's right, but we will not change our strategy based on increased volume, publicity campaigns, or political pressure. Doing so would make our decision political, rather than based on best practices, and would erode public confidence in the safety of our buildings when we decide to return.

The Board wants to thank AAPS students, parents, teachers, and administrators for the strength, innovation, and dedication demonstrated during this challenging time. Rest assured, the Ann Arbor Public Schools Board of Education is committed to resuming in-person learning, starting with our youngest and most vulnerable learners, as soon as we believe we can do so safely and sustainably. We will get through these challenges together.

Sincerely,
AAPS Board of Education