



City of Elko

City Hall

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October 13, 2020

Dear Board of School Trustees,

I apologize that I cannot be here this evening to participate in person, as I have a City Council meeting that is currently in progress.

We are engaging your board this evening because the community has spoken very loudly to elected officials at all levels. The public is demanding that the District resume in-class instruction. While not unanimous, the overwhelming input that I've received is in favor of ditching the distance learning, and transitioning to back to school, where students belong.

Academically, our students are falling further behind each day that they are out of the classroom. Some kids have "slipped through the cracks," and are not participating at all, for a variety of different reasons. Pediatricians have reported an increase in child abuse and accidental injuries during school closures. The longer that the distance learning model persists, the greater the damage will be.

The school closures have wreaked havoc on the District's enrollment, as parents have sought other educational alternatives. This is having a very detrimental effect on the District's per-pupil based funding. I know of lower seniority teachers that have been informed that their employment may be terminated, due to reduced class sizes. The longer the closure continues, the more teachers that will be negatively impacted by the revenue shortfall.

While we're on the subject of teachers, I know that they are extremely stressed, and they're having to work harder and longer than ever before to adapt to the challenge of a completely foreign method of instruction. There is burnout, despair and despondency because they are not able to be in the classroom.

Every kid that I've encountered is eager to return to school. Distance learning is not effective for elementary level instruction and is exacting a psychological toll

on students, parents, families and employers as everyone has had to make radical changes to adapt to this non-sustainable model.

Lower income families have been impacted disproportionately as they have had to choose between their jobs, or staying home to watch over and assist their children with instruction. Out of economic necessity, some parents don't have the option of skipping work, leaving some kids home alone without parental supervision.

There are risks associated with virtually every choice that a board makes. I believe there's a greater risk associated with continued closure vs reopening. If the board waits until a "perfect" plan is developed, we may still be talking about reopening well into 2021.

I hesitate to involve myself in another board's business. But in this case, on behalf of the community and the unique circumstances, I feel compelled to do so. We are approaching your board in a spirit of cooperation, absent of any hidden agendas.

My conviction is that it's time for the Board of Trustees to move deliberately forward with the resolve to support a reopening strategy and timeline tonight.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Reece Keener', with a stylized, cursive-like script.

Reece Keener

City of Elko Mayor