



Teachers, Parents, and Patrons United

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To the Idaho Falls School District 91 Board of Trustees:

Over the last several months, a team of teachers, administrators, and parents has worked diligently to craft a school reopening plan. While this was a difficult and tedious task, they were able to design a comprehensive plan which allowed for families to make tough choices, for the important work of education to move forward, and for the necessary school safety precautions for students, teachers, school staff, and all of our families to be implemented.

On Wednesday, August 12th, the Board of Trustees made a mockery of this achievement when it decided, just a few short weeks before school resumes, to unilaterally undercut all of those safety measures. The Board, whom we entrust with the direction of our local educational infrastructure, ignored all of the most reliable scientific information and expert opinion by deciding to forego any real safety measures in our schools come late August.

In short, the Board of Trustees decided to not impose a limit on the number of students who will cram into hallways, common areas, and classrooms when school resumes. This means that students will not physically be able to practice the imperative safeguard of social distancing. Classrooms are simply not big enough, halls are not wide enough, and lunchrooms are not able to accommodate this necessary practice.

The Board of Trustees took steps to devalue the guidance of Eastern Idaho Public Health despite the previous plan's reliance on this body's expertise and science-based recommendations.

Despite clear guidance from every reliable expert including our local Health Board of Directors, they decided to make face coverings a matter of "teacher discretion". Effectively, they have abdicated their role as leaders and pushed the responsibility to provide necessary safety precautions onto individual teachers; the same teachers who are already suffering under the anxiety of returning to school during a global pandemic. Certain Board members have made it clear that not only are they willing to sacrifice the safety of students, teachers, and administrators, but they're also not willing to endure the backlash from the least informed members of our community who resist face coverings.

Rather than protecting students, the Board decided to protect sports programs. Rather than protecting teachers, the Board decided to protect their individual reputations among a loud

minority. Rather than being leaders and making the unpopular but right decision, the Board cowered behind the false cover of “getting back to normal”.

There is no normal. Nothing about this global pandemic is normal and we cannot continue to act as if it is. It is not normal for 160,000 Americans to die from a viral outbreak. It is not normal for nearly 1,000 students and teachers in Georgia to be forced into quarantine after their school boards pushed for a “normal” reopening plan. There is nothing normal about a small group of seemingly well-intentioned people deciding to flippantly expose an entire generation of students to a disease which is proven to have lifelong health effects including lung scarring, kidney and heart disease, and even brain damage. These are irreversible injuries that the Board is willing to impose on teachers, other staff, students, and their families. This is complete unacceptable.

We the teachers, school staff, parents, and patrons of Idaho Falls School District 91 are angry now. Some of us don't know how to express it or how to process it, but we are angry. We are sad and we are shocked. We are bewildered and gutted. We are livid that the majority of Board of Trustees members has failed in their responsibility to rise to the occasion and provide the necessary protections to keep us safe in our schools. To the two Board members who did stand up to support the safety and health of the D91 community, we thank you for your courage.

Yes, we are afraid. We are afraid for the health and well-being of students, teachers, administrators, families, and the entire community. That is why a plan that involved stakeholders in the D91 community was carefully crafted over several months--so fears could be mitigated. The reckless actions of the Board last week bring those fears back to the forefront.

We all want to get back to normal. Teachers want to teach! Parents want their kids in school! Patrons want to see their property taxes used for the essential mission of public education! However, we must all recognize that we cannot return to normal. This is not easy to accept and is deeply frustrating. We are all suffering through the depression, anxiety, and hopelessness that comes with quarantining and social distancing. We must turn to each other for support and comfort during this time. We must not charge into danger at the peril of our children, teachers, and families.

Teachers are willing to rise to the challenges associated with staggered schedules, blended learning, and promoting social distancing. They remain committed to providing high-quality education to all students even when the State gutted our funding by \$100 million this year. Teachers stepped up and adapted to online learning when the Covid-19 outbreak shut down schools earlier this year. Teachers consistently demonstrate a commitment to the mission of public education because they believe in this work and they love their students. The vast but quiet majority of parents appreciate and support teachers.

There is no mystery what we will see if we throw caution to the wind and re-open with this negligent, ridiculous “blue” plan. We will see our public schools become centers of community spread. We will see countless teachers, vital school staff, and students drop into quarantine as this virus fills front offices, hallways, lunchrooms, and classrooms. We will see suffering and death. If we carry on with this nonsense, the toll will be immense. The members of the Board of

Trustees will not have the luxury to hide behind ignorance and claim that nobody told them so – because here we are, telling them so!

The Idaho Teacher Code of Ethics states, “The professional educator provides an environment that is safe to the cognitive, physical and psychological well-being of students and provides opportunities for each student to move toward the realization of his or her goals and potential as an effective citizen.”

By signing the master negotiated contracts, teachers have made an agreement to follow this code, with support from their administration, district leaders, and the Board of Trustees. We contend that the actions taken by the Board of Trustees makes fulfilling this imperative duty impossible for teachers. The Board of Trustees has put the physical and psychological well-being of every student and teacher in peril. Therefore, the Board of Trustees has effectively violated the terms of the master negotiated contract.

Further, Idaho law states “A thorough system of public schools in Idaho is one in which: 1. A safe environment conducive to learning is provided”. The dangers of community spread of Covid-19 are well-known and severe. It is no mystery how this disease is spread, and there is no question as to how we must act to avoid community spread. All of the reliable evidence clearly shows that social distancing is absolutely necessary to avoid widespread infection. The changes the Board made to the reopening plan represent a clear and present danger to a safe learning environment in violation of Idaho law.

According to two local Infectious Disease experts and parents of students in this district, Dr. Martha Buitrago and Dr. Richard Nathan, the plan as it stands does not meet a minimum threshold for basic protections against infection. Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) such as social distancing, hand washing, personal protective equipment (PPE) and appropriate school hygiene have been proven to mitigate the risk of spread of infection. We should have a detailed plan in place in order to protect all at risk. The plan passed by the Board of Trustees simply ignores available data and proven practices to avoid widespread infection.

To the Idaho Falls District 91 Board of Trustees:

Board Clerk Paul Haacke is recognized for his overwrought and strong-handed manner in which he forced the Board of Trustees to adopt these changes. It is a matter of public record that Mr. Haacke used this meeting to grandstand and co-opted the platform to promote unrelated personal moral convictions. He openly stated that he was in contact with Rep. Barbara Ehardt during the discussion on the proposed “blue plan”, well after the period for public input had ended. We call for Mr. Haacke to release, as a matter of public record, the entirety of these text communications. Under the guidelines of the Idaho Open Meeting Law, any information that shapes the discussion or affects the conclusion of a public meeting must be disclosed, in its entirety, during the meeting. If Mr. Haacke had any discussions before or during this public meeting, he is obligated to release that information. Further, Mr. Haacke blatantly ignored the norms and bylaws of the Board of Trustees by refusing to allow for adequate time for input from other board members and Superintendent George Boland. His actions represent a disgraceful

and embarrassing dereliction of duty and he has no place on this Board of Trustees. Mr. Haacke must resign immediately following a revocation of the changes to the reopening plan.

To the rest of the Board, be the leaders we need. Step up to the challenge and make the decisions you're entrusted with. We need a smart plan informed by good science which avoids the catastrophes of other schools that opened without protections in place. This Board of Trustees is therefore called to hold a special session at the earliest possible opportunity to swiftly and unanimously revoke the changes made to the school reopening plan on Wednesday, August 12th. The Board of Trustees is called to remove the nonsensical "blue phase", which was a change made without teacher input or oversight. The Board of Trustees is called to return to the reopening plan that was crafted using the best available science with input from teachers, administrators, and parents. Teachers, staff, students, and citizens of this community will not be used as political pawns.

Sincerely, the Undersigned:

Jeremy Plothow	Jennifer Pickett	Haley Baker
Sara Plothow	Amber Mahoney	Lisa Keegan
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Julie Archibald	Honore Storms	Nancy Velloff
Jessica Nichols	Betsy Sherman	Roger Gottlob
Emily Kvamme	Amy Keck	Kelcee Christensen
Caroline Likar Walline	Anna Christine	Sarah Browning
Karen Jayne Young	Airica Staley	Hollis Hunter Henry
Billy Pederson	Hope Gihring	Meighan Perry
Karen Peck	Dr. Martha Buitrago	Jim Perry
Jolyn Thomas	Susan Scherr	Dr. Richard Nathan
Wendi Straub	Meggan Irving	Julie Braun Williams
Zola Jensen	Lisa Sweetland	Teri Gottlob
Holly Frazier	Becky Robinson	Rebecca Beck
Jessi Donnelly	Ruth Casper Byron	James Beck
Becky Page	Jennifer Haas	Melanie Seneff

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Alan French	Katie Shinsky	Erica Mauro
Jeffrey Walline	Alison Noble	Rich Straub
Andrea Womack	Diana Thompson	Kimi Monte McCall
Melissa Martinez	Kelsey Bischoff	MaryAnn Smith
Heidi Guza	Rob Maynes	Kathi Oliver
Heather Siemers Youinou	Heather Maynes	Bobbe Sue Crapo
Shannon Meacham	Sharon Oliver	Jo Thomas
Mickey Theil	Jill Beck	Greer Saechao
Jeanie Robson-McCoy	Judy DeRoche	Eric Fleischmann
Samantha Gillihan	Kortny Rolston-Duce	Claudia Pine
Catherine Canavan	Harry Rollins	Tiffany Redden
Barb Miller	Carla Rollins	Michael Taske
Daniel Atkinson	Kim Stoddard Aron	Casey Braastad
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Kristina Batalden	Amanda Garcia Jacobsen	Lisa Tabereaux
Chris Smout	Kyler Tolman	Amy Siuda
Maryann Smout	Kathy Duplessis	Mary Kaufman
Anne Marler	Madison Hatch	Michael Womack
Ralph Moncrief	Dr. Ronald Boring	Dr. Nichole Stricker
Linda Moncrief	Wendy Boring	Phillip Cox
Austin Guza	Isabelle Hatch	Arlo Stansbury
Lindsey von Bargaen	Carrie Hatch	Jennifer Jackson
Andrew Wilson	Karen L. Juell	Vanessa Kokrda
Robyn Buchanan	Deanna Batte	Karen M Ker
Heywook Chung	Jaquelyn Hatch	Karen Conlon-Empey
Taesic Yoo	Luke Hatch	Lisa Christenson
David Hampton	Christine Hatch	Rev. Lyn Stangland Cameron

Kris Braskett Burnham	Matt Jacobsen	Matthew Kress-Weitenhagen
Steve Burnham	Linda Marler Wahlquist	Claude Kimball
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Kira Ulrich	Nancy Veloff	Sandra Crowley
Rex Redden	Steve Peters	Amanda Smith
Teryn Gunderson	Sue Glick	Dain White
Bryant Bingham	Arantza Zabala	Angie White
Andrea Bingham	Kristen Kress Weitenhagen	Kaitlin Bolewicz
Mary Noble	Gayle Peters	Dan Norton
Kenzie Adegbenro	Elizabeth Joy Krell	Rebecka Norton
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Dr. Joshua D Fishler	Ryan Jackson	Amanda Nickels Byrd
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Liz Beaman	David W Ker	Steve Bailey
Kristy Miller	Gail Birdsong	Brandi Jackson
Jenni Shirts	Buc Rogers	John Jackson, Ph.D.

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Rob Merrick	Marcelene Frederick	Alysha Rhondeau
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Stacey Hill	Tim Williams	Stephanie Cole
Kaycee Byron	Julie Williams	Allison Hicken
Felicia Wright	Shaun Mitchell	Kyle Hicken
Karrin Allen	Kathryn Mitchell	David Gerritsen
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Kellie Webber Bell	Marnie Havas	Daniel Vega-Delgado
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Mindy Shurtliff	Tina Friesen	Perla Delgado-Romero
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Gavin Grey	Ronald Combs	Ashley Jenkins
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Kathy Nobles	Roxane Rohweder-Garza	Robin Villareal
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