



NINE MILE FALLS SCHOOL DISTRICT 325/179

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Board of Directors

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Brian L. Talbott, Superintendent

February 10, 2021

Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee

As elected officials, we are writing this letter on behalf of our community as we too represent the constituents whom elected us into office. Before we state the nature of this letter, we recognize that being in an elected position during this pandemic is both arduous and unenviable.

As Board members of the Nine Mile Falls School District, we have locked arms with the school district while navigating all of the mandates and requirements that have been placed before us. We are grateful that we were able to open our schools to a K-12 hybrid model in October. We have been able to maintain this schedule without interruption from the beginning. Our students and staff have been diligent with all of the requirements to be able to return to face-to-face instruction. Through contact tracing, the district has been able to mitigate issues. To date, we have had only one confirmed transmission that occurred at the school house. We will soon be bringing our K-2 students back four days a week with the extra day being used to support those families who have opted to remain remote only. However, the six foot of distancing in the classroom is a barrier that we cannot overcome in grades 3-12.

We are nearing the one-year mark of this new reality; our students and families are struggling more so than we believe is necessary or warranted. We have a number of students who are currently failing their courses when previously they were on target to graduate on time. We have students who are currently on suicide watch and while we continue to work with them and their families, we do not have direct and constant access to them. Outside services for these students are limited at best as there are more needs without more therapists and counselors. While there is more stress and financial hardships on families, our CPS referrals are remarkably low compared to previous years. Is this because families are better equipped to handle the hardships...we think not. By not opening the doors for more access due to the six-foot distancing, we are failing our students and families despite our best efforts.

In your letter to the president of WEA dated February 2, 2021, you stated that "all educators realize that the in-person relationship is magic and essential". If you truly believe this, we implore that you reduce the distancing requirements so that our amazing educators can better address the negative educational, social, and emotional impacts of this past year. We must do better for our children and their future.

Nine Mile Falls School District

...each student will succeed... effective instruction is paramount... quality leadership matters... reflection improves our practice

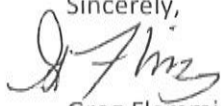
...we are each other's best resource... positive relationships are foundational to our success.

We continue to act in a way that matches our beliefs.

In that same letter you also stated that "in-school environments may be safer for children than out of school". Other states (both close and afar) have reduced this particular barrier with minimal COVID transmissions. We think it is time that the State of Washington recognize that without schools resuming a more normal routine for every child is every bit, and perhaps even more so, as dangerous as the virus itself.

As elected officials and parents of school-aged children, we can no longer wait and watch this failure. We believe that there is a reconcilable opportunity for our next generation. However, time is running out. We respectfully and humbly ask that you work with WSDOH and the CDC to reduce the insurmountable six-foot mandate. Our children are counting on us...and you.

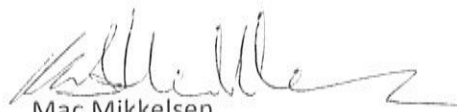
Sincerely,



Greg Flemming
Chair



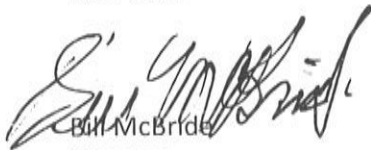
Kyle Yancey
Vice Chair



Mac Mikkelsen
Director



Eric Olson
Director



Bill McBride
Director

CC: Secretary of Washington State Department of Health, Dr. Umair A. Shah

Honorable Senators and Representatives of the 6th and 7th Districts: Senator Shelli Short, Representative Jacqueline Maycumber; Representative Joel Kretz; Senator Jeff Holy; Representative Mike Volz; and, Representative Jenny Graham

Honorable Senators and Representatives of K-12 Leadership: Senator Lisa Wellman; Senator Brad Hawkins; Representative Sharon Santos; and, Representative Alex Ybarra

Superintendent of Public Instruction, Chris Reykdal

Executive Policy Advisor of Education, Madeleine Thompson