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Initial Ann Arbor Public School's COVID-19 Return to School Metrics Deemed "Unachievable" by Washtenaw County Health Department

"Reasonable Return" Parent Group Releases FOIA Requested Emails

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — As revealed in [emails](#) obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, the Ann Arbor Public School's (AAPS) draft metrics for "Return to School" were "unachievable" according to the Washtenaw County Health Department. These emails were released by the Reasonable Return parent group, which formed out of concern with the Ann Arbor schools' hard-to-achieve metrics for a phased return to in-person schooling. (<https://tinyurl.com/a2r2FOIA>)

"This communication shows that AAPS has no intention of setting guidelines that would allow students to safely return to in-person school," said Lilia Cortina, Ph. D., spokesperson and group advisor. "The metrics appear to be a bureaucratic smokescreen to appease the parents and children who are hurting in our community by giving the appearance of objectivity."

The Washtenaw County Health Department's feedback was on draft metrics presented to the Board of Education on Sept. 16, 2020. The health department appears to only have been consulted after the draft metrics were already presented at a public meeting, and the response was one of deep concern.

There is not a written record for any subsequent discussions that took place, but there were no substantial changes made to the final metrics presented at the Sept. 30, 2020 meeting. These metrics have been used to keep Ann Arbor as an outlier by not allowing children and teachers back into school even as other districts in Washtenaw County partially or fully reopened.

Nationally, 85% of all school districts have some form of in-person education taking place, according to EdWeek Research Center's monthly coronavirus survey.

"If the goal of the AAPS is to bar students and teachers from in-person for this entire school year or until everyone is vaccinated, we have a right for the Board of Education and Administration to be explicit about this," Cortina said. "Putting out metrics that are unachievable lacks transparency and gives false hope to the many children and parents who are suffering due to online-only learning."

The emails also revealed that the key stakeholder given advanced input on the metrics was the Ann Arbor Education Association, the teachers' union which has taken an extremely hardline stance against reopening. It was not clear whether AAPS consulted with mental health professionals or doctors within the American Academy of Pediatrics, which supports in-person schooling.

Ann Arbor Reasonable Return is advocating for a safe, phased return to in-person schooling, beginning with the youngest and most vulnerable students. The data show that "children are not, in fact, driving transmission, especially in school settings" and that educational outcomes – as well as mental and physical health – are suffering with schools being fully online.