

President's Update 9-14 to 9-18

Dear Members,

The bulk of this correspondence is the letter that MEA Leadership sent to the MUSD Trustees, to be read as part of the public record at Tuesday's meeting. MEA Leadership insists that the school board listen to our voices, develop a more nuanced understanding of what blended learning will really be like for TK-5, and, most important, take responsibility for their decisions. To be fair, the District is diligently following all of the processes mandated by the County and the State. It is our School Board that decided to pursue the TK-5 waiver. The District is responsive to the School Board, and the School Board represents the citizens of Moorpark. MEA has a legal right to negotiate our working conditions. This is how our local democracy works.

Briefly, I want to explain the Waiver process for TK-5. Before I do, grades 7-12 cannot open until Ventura County's COVID numbers decline to acceptable levels as defined by the State. After VC reaches an acceptable level, our County must stay at this level for two weeks before a school can consider reopening. After the two-week period, a District can begin a transition to repopulating the campus. We are not there yet.

Where are we? SPED teachers are on our campuses testing kids. Twelve TK-5 SDC teachers will return to campus on Monday. As for TK-5 General Education teachers, on Tuesday of this week, MUSD Trustees voted unanimously to continue the waiver process and they set a target reopening date of October 5th.

The District now must continue its application that they must send to the State. According to the Waiver process, MEA had a "consulting role." A two-question survey sent to TK-5 teachers was the extent of our membership's role in the process. Please trust that I spoke with the SB Present and the District at length. After these conversations, I decided not to involve teachers in a public argument with Moorpark parents. This is a fight we cannot win.

When they finish the application, the District must send the waiver to VCOE. If VCOE approves MUSD's application, it then goes to the State for their rubber stamp on it. According to Jake, once a county approves the waiver, there is no instance **so far** when the State has rejected it. Just because MUSD has an approved waiver does not mean that MUSD has to use it. Also, October 5th is a target date. It is not etched in stone. In the meantime, MEA has asked members to let the MUSD Trustees hear our individual and collective voices for or against reopening. Yesterday at MEA's Executive Board meeting, our leadership approved issuing a survey of all members. This will inform MEA Leadership how our members want us to proceed.

MEA's goals are to deliver an excellent curriculum to our students that balances the kids academic, social, and emotional well-being as well as assuring our members that our workplace is safe. Stay tuned. The rules seem to change overnight. I will do my best to keep you updated and represent you with all my might.

Brian

Open Letter to MUSD School Board 9/17/2020

Dear MUSD School Board Trustees:

The MEA Executive Board understands the multiple pressures that you face as you attempt to respond to all segments of the MUSD community. As an elected representative of our community's public schools, you have been *entrusted* with providing leadership for children, the school district, and all of its employees. This is a tough task even when not serving in office during a pandemic.

On September 15th, 2020, in a County still on the State's watch list, during a virtual meeting, and on a day in which 1400 Americans died from COVID, you decided to initiate a process that will return Moorpark's children and their teachers to their respective campuses for in-person learning.

A crucial element of leadership is setting direction, otherwise known as *vision*. The intent of this letter is to help you *see* the learning matrix you have authorized. MEA's Executive Board asks you to envision what school will be like for children ages 4-11 if you initiate blending learning for TK-5 on October 9th:

- Teachers and students will meet one another for the first time behind masks
- Student and teacher movement will be limited and scripted. Children will walk in and out of buildings in a singular direction
- Kids will be confined to desks; learning will still take place via computer
- Student-Teacher interaction will be for 2.5 hours from behind masks and barriers
- Teachers will not be able to walk the room or give individualized instruction
- There will be no lunch
- There will be no recess. They can only look at the swings and playground equipment, not use them
- There will be no interacting with peers from any other class or cohort
- There will be no centers; no group work, no sharing of items such as manipulatives or class supplies
- There will be no field trips, no class celebrations
- Teachers cannot comfort a scared and crying student who would otherwise receive a hug
- Teachers cannot console a student who clings to their parents or help move them from their parent
- Teachers will not be able to wipe noses or help with protective devices
- Students, their peers, and teachers with links to COVID will be isolated, if not quarantined
- Parents will not be allowed to volunteer
- The amount of time it will take for the students to all wash their hands before entering the classroom while they socially stand 6 feet apart will create a line that is 72 - 90 feet long and take away from valuable instructional time.

Every stakeholder wants kids back in the classroom where they belong; yet, a heavy majority (70%) of TK-5 teachers told you that returning at this point is a bad idea because they did not think it conditions are safe enough for a return. While we cannot be certain when it's the right

time to return to our campuses, we do know that you disregarded many teacher concerns and opinions prior to making your unanimous vote.

An equal number of teachers believe that blended learning may be pedagogically inferior to distance learning. They asked, is this “hybrid model” really better for a young child’s academic, emotional and social development? They think that the exhaustive list of restrictions indicates that a return to campus may be traumatic for the kids in their care.

Another reason why teachers objected is that they felt that they and their students just started to get in a rhythm from a distance. Your decision further disrupts the learning process, what one teacher calls “the yo-yo” effect. Are you prepared for a scenario that shuts down schools again and sends them back to distance learning?

Blended schooling will take place as the specter of COVID haunts every masked breath. MEA Leadership asks, do the merits of opening up schools while it is not safe enough to eat indoors or conduct in-person school board meetings in Ventura County outweigh the costs if a child or a teacher gets sick?

You made your decision; you own it. MEA Leadership must trust that State, County, and local officers possess the knowledge, will, and judgment to exercise the powers that they have been granted. MEA Leadership believes that most of our trustees do. With this authority, however, comes responsibility. MEA Leadership will hold the Moorpark Unified School District Trustees accountable for your September 15th vote. We strongly encourage you to journey beyond the confines of the school board chamber or your homes to monitor the working conditions that you mandate, and, in the interlude between your plan and its activation, that you foresee the possible consequences that your decision has created.

Sincerely,

MEA Executive Board

Ellen Bailey, Brian Friefeld, Eusebia Grajeda, Kim Lemons, Lisa McCarter, Dyan McIntosh, Rosana Meisterling, and Kristin Swenson