

GREA Challenging District's New Plan to Double Number of Students for In-Person Learning

Ventilation and Equity are Key among Unresolved Issues

Representatives of the Grand Rapids Education Association (GREA) have been meeting with administrators of the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) to offer feedback on the future COVID learning plan.

The GRPS Board of Education plans to discuss the Return to Learn Update at a special board meeting/work session Monday, March 22, 2021 at 5:30 pm.

The following statement is attributable to the GREA Executive Board in response to the District's movement toward approval of this plan.

While we supported the hybrid Return to Learn plan that was implemented in January and are eager to work with our students in a more traditional format, we are concerned about several aspects of the proposed plan, which would double the number of students receiving in-person instruction each day.

- Ventilation in many classrooms is not safe for increased class sizes when hybrid cohorts are combined.
 - Based on our initial data and GRPS' own ventilation report (which omitted many secondary classrooms), the number of students in **at least 59 classrooms** will exceed the maximum number of people to safely occupy the space.
 - After several requests, GRPS has not provided information on class size or enrollment for in-person learning.
- The proposed plan offers inequitable opportunities to students.
 - Some students will be placed with a new teacher or substitute teacher or may be moved to a new class.
 - Some virtual students will spend half as much time with their teachers compared to in-person students.
 - Some students will have a new class schedule.
- Social distancing recommendations for courses and activities that have higher than normal exhalation rates have not been considered in this plan (Music Ensembles, Physical Education, Lunch, etc).
- West Michigan is experiencing new variants, a spike in positivity rates, and COVID cases similar to the rates in October, which resulted in GRPS choosing to delay returning to in-person learning. In addition, several area schools are closing in-person learning due to high exposures.
- Many of our students and their family members have not had access to vaccines, increasing our community's vulnerability to COVID transmission.

We know that consistency and stability are important for the mental health of our students and their families. Thus far, the Grand Rapids Public Schools have successfully avoided the need to make disruptive changes to our learning models through the use of the current hybrid format. The District's new plan will expose our students and their families to increased risk and anxiety and the potential for disruptions to learning.

Until the above issues are resolved safely and equitably, and the data demonstrate that we are able to fully combine cohorts, which again doubles the number of in-person students, the Grand Rapids Education Association cannot support the plan.

Approved by the Grand Rapids Education Association Executive Board on March 21, 2021.