



August 23, 2020

To: All Board of School Committee Members

From: Sue Hannan, President on behalf of all MEA Bargaining Unit members

Re: Opening School in Phase 1 only

Recently, you have received some letters from members of MEA regarding the opening of school. They have been encouraged to share their reality with you so you have a better understanding of what impact your decisions really have. We have come to you as the deciding body, because you need to remember that you are deciding other people's fate. If even one student or staff member contracts this terrible virus, or worse, dies, that will be your decision. It will be directly traced back to this Board putting people in harm's way.

Our reasoning for having people send all of you these letters is pretty basic: you don't know what you don't know. You are not in the Autism classroom day after day to see that many of those students cannot wear masks, and cannot remain in one spot all day. You are not in the special needs classrooms to see that students in there need to be toileted, need faces wiped constantly, and need one on one contact. You are not in PreK, Kindergarten and first grade classes to see that play based education cannot happen while employing precautionary measures, that these young students will have very difficult times with masks and six feet, and that they need to play with each other and use all the equipment at recess. You are not in EL classrooms to see how the educators did very well last year teaching EL online, that the entire department is opposed to any students returning to the buildings because the effects of COVID-19 on their students of color is the most detrimental, and how remote learning can help build a better bond with families. You are not in CTE classrooms to see that requiring the entire class of students back to the building 5 days per week brings on space problems as no one has the space with distancing to hold all of their students, that most of the actions in class require close contact and hands-on approaches, and that scheduling and transportation could be a serious issue. You are not in everyone else's classroom where educators, paraprofessionals and others enter and exit, where the majority of educators have health risks or have someone at home with health risks, and where the educators have desktop computers with no camera or microphone or speakers. We are very glad you do what you do, while we do what we do, but now is the time for you to know our environments and how risky this plan truly is.



This summer has been interesting to say the least. It has provided some insight into how we need to be making changes. However, it has not provided the much needed communication to educators, principals, paraprofessionals and support personnel. Educators and others have been included on committees, but not all of the committees have produced these plans before you. The committees had conversations, and started the developments of processes. But they stopped there, yet you have a “plan” anyway. A survey was sent to staff on Thursday (August 20) that was due August 24. This was expected to be done with the threat of not being considered for remote from home teaching if we didn't get it in on time with questions answered a certain way. The survey has many issues that deem it invalid: it was sent to educators and others when they are not on contractual time, it asks for information about Classroom where we don't have to be monitoring Classroom now, and it asks if we have devices and phones to use from home when it should have asked if we had *district issued* devices and phones. I have sent information and offered suggestions about these issues to multiple people on the Cabinet and have received no response.

Employees have been waiting all summer for responses as to whether or not they had a ADA plan put in place, or were given permission to teach from home. There are two things wrong with that sentence: it was the end of last week before only a few heard about what they had for accommodations, and remote teachers having to get permission to teach from home. The anxiety level of educators is through the roof, as they are working on getting ready for this year with a plan that still doesn't address what they are doing, and getting childcare or eldercare in place with less than one week before school starts. We are very aware that this is a unique situation and that a lot of work has been happening all summer. This had the ability to have been done much earlier: if the Board had continued to meet during the summer, and if open communication was happening. The excuse of this being an unprecedented time is not acceptable- that is when we need to come together and be collaborative the most. This plan was put out for you to vote on without looking at the areas that violate the CBA, and there are some. No Memorandum of Agreement has been put in place to make sure that the changes in working conditions are properly addressed. We are working on this now, but we asked to address it in July and it has been put off until now.

Undoubtedly, you have been a part of many conversations with educators, administrators, parents, students and community members. You can see everyone's point of view and can sympathize with all opinions. It is so hard to have these conversations because they become one-sided, and listening to understand tends not to happen. We have been in the same conversations. Unfortunately, many of the conversations on social media were fed into by a few Board members and a few



Aldermen. These were very unprofessional displays, and were not supportive of the educational mission of the Manchester School District. It is appalling that so many non-educators consider themselves experts in the field, and feel it is acceptable to be critical to the point of hateful when discussing the issue of returning to school and what they think we should be doing with our personal lives. We are saddened to see that there has been little support for all of us in education by this Board and the Aldermen. We do thank those of you who have spoken publicly in support of educators, as it is much appreciated and is very uplifting.

We are the first people who want to be back in our classrooms with our students. We miss them and definitely understand that their social/emotional needs are very important. However, we cannot work on social and emotional growth if they are sick or dead. Safety is the first part of social/emotional health, and we are not providing basic safety with students in schools. You may have seen some research about "herd immunity". The basic premise is that the more people are around each other, the more they will end up immune to the disease. This is a virus. It can mutate to become something different. This is why the flu still exists. Research is showing that immunity for COVID-19 can last for about 3 months. People who were infected in March and April can get it again at this point, and have, but with a lowered immunity from the first time will have more devastating effects this time. It has been proven that children don't end up with herd immunity. We have members, as we are sure you also have experienced this, who have lost family members to this virus. One member has lost two family members with a third in hospice, all due to COVID-19. This member works with cognitively impaired students, and so will have to be in class with them. What social/emotional skills are we teaching our students when they see the devastating effects of this disease on their friends and teachers? How do we justify to a student that they came to school with the virus and it killed their teacher or their best friend? How do we teach them on the emotional level when they are afraid to be in a room with that many people for up to 7 hours? How do we assist their social skills if they cannot work with each other, share supplies, toys or equipment?

Are we being alarmists? Is this too overdramatic? Sadly, no. This is the reality that we want you to be able to see, so that when you are making decisions, you have the information you need. It would take more than three pages to really give you everything, but we know you see the picture. We have offered many times throughout spring and summer to take a big role in the development of a plan that would consider every position and everyone's needs. With less than one week before we start our training, we are not confident that the completion of a plan that addresses all needs will happen.

Sincerely,  
Sue Hannan