

Dear Dr. Pollio and respected School Board Members,

After careful consideration and research, and in council with those with first-hand experience with COVID protocols, I cannot in good conscience support reopening of schools under the current [JCPS guidelines and planning](#). It is flawed, rushed, not aware of the wider community and ultimately a burden that JCPS should not have to bear. These proposed reopening guidelines put us squarely on track to a public health disaster of our own making.

Below I have provided a summary of my concern, followed by supporting details. I counsel each and every member of the community to closely consider JCPS' plan and the wider community situation and contact those in power with your concerns. **During a pandemic, there is no in-person public school plan that only affects those in school.**

If schools were to re-open in person now, we - meaning JCPS *and* the wider community - either cannot do or have not done what the CDC considers "safe" to re-open. Based upon the best information we have right now, reopening without widespread adherence to those guidelines will lead to an expansion of the pandemic throughout all of Louisville. It will lead to more deaths.

Considering education alone - it is unsustainable and unreasonable for the public to ask JCPS, its staff and its teachers to undertake a massive transition in a blisteringly short amount of time *and then act as widespread disaster relief*, while also managing two separate modes of learning. To massively disrupt the current course for at most two months of in-person instruction may not be worth it.

In summary, I would like the District and the School Board to consider the following:

- 1) I believe that NTI remains the sole safe option because there are gaps in this plan and the community at large that endanger our community's safety. Re-opening for in-person classes should only occur when those gaps have been mitigated and other community precautions have been put into place.
- 2) Do not ignore the CDC guidelines in favor of public pressure. Provide more detail and transparency about the realities of the plan and the limitations of JCPS' ability, and consider a longer, wider view.
- 3) Put the burden of reopening back on the community inside which JCPS lives and the governments under which it falls. Define standards we all must meet to reopen. COVID is a community problem.
- 4) Finally, use JCPS' awesome powers not to dramatically restructure for a brief moment, but to target those students most in-need, while planning for the long term.

In the meantime, I cannot send my children to school in-person, which according to experts may contribute to spreading and prolonging this deadly virus that has already done such grave damage to our families, friends, and co-workers.

I am open to the idea that I have misjudged JCPS' plan, the CDC's guidelines or the cost/benefit analysis that led to the plans made and timetables set. Open dialogue is critical at this moment.

Sincerely,

Ben Wilson

Lincoln Performing Arts Elementary & Noe Middle School Parent  
LPAS SBDM Parent Representative & Cross-Country Coach

Below is a detailed summary of my concerns, with references where appropriate. If I am mistaken or otherwise misrepresenting anything, please let me know:

### **JCPS and the Wider Community Have Not Met or Cannot Meet Safety Precautions**

Earlier this week, [the CDC announcement today indicated that reopening school can be safe “if precautions are taken on campus and in the community”](#).

JCPS’s in-person plan cannot satisfy these precautions, and the plan provides no provision or consideration for precautions taken or not taken in the community.

These community precautions include mask mandates, adequate social distancing, and imposing limits on indoor dining and indoor sports. JCPS and the wider Louisville community either cannot materially meet these requirements, or have not limited the activities. In specific:

- The JCPS plan has not provided adequate detail around, or worse cannot (by its own admission), provide adequate social distancing.
- The JCPS School Board recently voted 5-2 to allow indoor winter sports including wrestling, cheer, swimming and others.
- Indoor dining is allowed in Jefferson County.

### **The JCPS Plan Does Not Meet Basic CDC Safe Reopening Guidelines**

Regarding the JCPS plan, there are two clear instances where it will not be able to abide by the CDC’s most recent and long-standing social distancing guidelines:

- **Social distancing on buses:** the plan states (albeit obliquely) that they will not be able to provide social distancing on buses. “Students will be separated to the extent possible on the bus, but the school bus will be loaded without capacity limits.” This is extremely concerning, and will have an outsized impact on those who cannot provide transportation for their students to and from school.
- **Social distancing in classrooms:** While each JCPS school and classroom varies in size, in my experience at Lincoln Performing Arts Elementary, most classrooms will not allow social distancing, even at 50% capacity.

There are many other areas that lack detail, but these two above *directly contradict* the CDC’s current guidelines for “safe” reopening. To put it bluntly, the nation’s top medical experts believe the disease will spread at an accelerated rate if these precautions are not taken.

There are other local and national school systems that have mitigated these issues. For example, social distancing can be successfully implemented with detailed “pod” plans, similar to [Chicago Public Schools](#). To return to in-person school at this moment, we would need to mitigate as many of these as possible. This may not be possible given the size and complexity of JCPS.

### **The Public Has Unrealistic Expectations**

Vaccinating teachers has become to be seen by many of the loudest public as a “magic bullet”. It is not. It is one layer of prevention, and with JCPS having no requirement for vaccination for staff - it is limited. This reality, [combined with the School Board's willingness to regard public sentiment above science](#) - is contributing to a disturbingly persuasive narrative in the public sphere. “We must reopen schools because teachers have been

vaccinated". This is a flawed, unsafe, reckless argument. JCPS should counter this with detailed and clear communication to the contrary.

### **JCPS is Not Designed for this Burden**

Finally, I believe that JCPS has been put into the unfortunate position of being disaster relief for an entire community. The gargantuan effort required to effect this plan *for two months* would introduce further stress, confusion and likely an interruption of instruction for NTI and in-person students.

This burden is not one that JCPS is well-equipped or designed for. The CDC guidelines also clearly state that the community itself has a burden to bear. JCPS is being forced into a position by the inaction of governments at every level above them. This is unfair.

Instead, I would love to see JCPS' energies better spent by continuing NTI and offering targeted support to families and students who are most critically in need. This effort could and should extend to summer support and planning for quality reopening when the community has met thresholds of safety.