

ALL ABOUT ANN ARBOR**Hundreds of physicians, psychologists call for Ann Arbor Public Schools to reopen**

Group urges AAPS to reopen by Gov. Whitmer's March 1 goal date

Meredith Bruckner, Community News Producer, All About Ann Arbor

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Professionals have signed a letter petitioning Ann Arbor Public Schools to reopen. (Pixnio)



ANN ARBOR – More than 350 local physicians and psychologists have signed an [open letter and petition](#) to the Ann Arbor Board of Education and Ann Arbor Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, urging them to reopen schools for students who choose to learn in-person by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's recommended deadline of March 1.

Citing data and recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, Dr. Anthony Fauci and more, the group maintains that it is safe to return to schools for those who choose to do so.

"The scientific, health and psychological consensus is clear: It is possible for children and teachers to safely return to school with proper mitigation measures. Giving parents this choice is the best course of action for our children and community," Kimberly Monroe, a pediatric hospitalist and one of the lead organizers of the letter said in a statement.

"My own experience of seeing the devastation caused by school closure among Ann Arbor's children has been eye-opening and heartbreaking. The letter supports a choice for return to in-person learning to reduce these impacts."



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The health professionals criticize AAPS for its decision to remain fully virtual since last March. It is the only school district in Washtenaw County -- and one of the remaining districts in the state -- to have yet to set a firm start date to return to school buildings.

"My colleagues and I feel so strongly that science and the best interests of children should guide the Ann Arbor Public School's decision that we needed to speak out," Joanna Spencer-Segal, an internist with a subspecialty in endocrinology said in a statement.

"It's time for Ann Arbor to make the rational decision to allow students and families a choice of in-person schooling. There are thousands of successful models around the country that AAPS can follow -- what is needed now is leadership that is willing to stand up for science and our children."

AAPS Superintendent Swift announced on Jan. 8 that while [preparations are in place to offer a hybrid learning model](#), the reopening of schools depends on low local infection rates, vaccination progress and regular antigen testing.

While the petition supports "aggressive vaccination of all teachers," the group of medical professionals said: "We agree with Governor Whitmer that school reopening should not wait on vaccination progress."

Ahead of the Jan. 27 Ann Arbor Board of Education meeting, Swift wrote a letter to the school community announcing that all schooling will remain virtual due to a high number of cases in Washtenaw County, a slowed effort to vaccinate teachers due to low vaccine supply and the emergence of the new COVID-19 B.1.1.7 variant in Ann Arbor.

“The health and safety of our staff and students, parents and community remain paramount; this commitment will not change,” wrote Swift. “There will not be an announcement of an upcoming transition to open in-school hybrid learning at this current time.”

The letter from area medical professionals cites data that shows school closures are having a profound impact on the most vulnerable students.

According to the group, this includes negative impacts on learning and “physical or sexual abuse, substance use, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation.”

Students with special needs and their families are particularly underserved and are in urgent need of returning to schools, said the group.

“We understand that in the fall, there were many unknowns, and school districts were left to make an educated guess as to the safety of reopening schools,” reads the letter. “That is no longer the case. We are disappointed that the district continues to delay reopening, despite considerable data and government guidance indicating that it is safe to reopen.”



“The district has also not surveyed AAPS staff and families or gathered data on their willingness to return to face-to-face instruction at this time. AAPS students deserve better.”

This is the third letter that Ann Arbor healthcare providers has sent to AAPS and coincides with efforts by parents to reopen the schools due to negative impacts their children are facing during the closures.

Related reading:

- [Parents call for schools to reopen at rally in downtown Ann Arbor](#)
- [Gov. Whitmer encourages Michigan public schools to reopen for in-person learning by March 1](#)
- [Coaches ready for Michigan high school contact sports to resume](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



[Meredith Bruckner](#)

Meredith has worked for WDIV since August 2017 and was voted one of Washtenaw County's best journalists in 2019 by eCurrent's readers. She covers the community of Ann Arbor and has a Master's degree in International Broadcast Journalism from City University London, UK.

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