

Old Capitol Building
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Olympia, WA 98504-7200



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

January 12, 2021

Dear Governor Inslee and Secretary Shah:

As you know, we have successfully reopened schools for in-person learning to some degree in most districts across the state, consistent with the health and safety requirements by the Department of Health and the Department of Labor & Industries.

To expedite school reopening across the state, I hope you will reconsider the timing of P-12 (preschool through grade 12) school personnel in the recently unveiled state vaccination plan. I believe the current schedule will have the unintended consequence of vaccinating tens of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of parents and guardians in our state who would still not be able to return to work because their school-age children will still need direct support at home. This must be a factor in your consideration.

Tens of thousands of vaccines provided to people who will remain isolated at home will not optimize the many objectives of vaccination, including individual health, public health, and economic recovery.

To be clear, we do not need widespread vaccination in order to safely reopen schools, but vaccinations will expedite school openings. Together, we urged for school reopening in mid-December based on the data and research compiled by the Department of Health. The data showed that, when schools follow the mandatory countermeasures – face coverings, hand hygiene, physical distancing, cleaning and disinfecting, and screening – transmission within the school community is low.

The current vaccine phases clearly focus on individuals who are most at-risk based solely on their physical health profile. This approach is understandable but substantially discounts the mental health needs of our 1.2 million P-12 students and the disruption of their academic progress.

If we prioritize the 142,000 school employees earlier, we can open our schools much faster, and the subsequent vaccine rollout will have a far greater impact on returning our families, communities, and businesses to stability.

At a minimum, please pull forward those school employees already working in buildings to directly support students in-person. Several districts across the state followed our June guidance to reopen

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schools and they have done so with success. These employees should be vaccinated first among all our school personnel to ensure the continuity of their in-person learning model.

Finally, if the incoming presidential administration releases all the vaccine at once, instead of holding back quantities for second doses, I hope Washington will substantially review its current vaccine plan. I also suspect you could prioritize P-12 employees for the inevitable quantities of vaccine that will be under-subscribed in each phase, given the clear hesitation among many Washingtonians to get the vaccine.

I am grateful for our partnerships with both of your offices throughout this pandemic. Your teams have been remarkable.

I'm looking forward to discussing the considerations offered here.

Sincerely,



Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction