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August 6, 2020

Dear GTACS School Board and Reopening Committee,

**Grand Traverse  
Children's Clinic**

Dr. David Olson  
Dr. Andrew Tursman  
Dr. Lisa Chimner  
Dr. Jelanie Bush  
Dr. Katie Elms  
Dr. Tuan Bui

We, as your local physicians and health care providers, are writing in support of reopening in person education for the children of GTACS. Our community is currently in Phase 5 of the MI Safe Start Order, with low positivity rates, a strong health care capacity, and increasing availability of testing with containment protocols in place. As you are aware, Phase 5 allows for the live instruction of K-12 students with appropriate safety protocols. We would like to work with your board to help this happen in the safest way for everyone, keeping in mind the health risks and benefits for both children and staff.

**Kids Creek Children's Clinic**

Dr. Jim Robertson  
Dr. Stephanie Galdes  
Dr. Kim Hegewald  
Dr. Rachel Newman  
Dr. Kristina Lishawa  
Dr. Mark Israel

Beyond their role in education, we know schools are important as a safe place for children providing social development, stimulation, structure, routine, physical activity, and nutrition. As practitioners who work directly with the GTACS student population, we have a unique insight into the effects of in person school closure on GTACS students and their families. The months of remote learning this spring deepened existing inequities in families without reliable internet service and social supports to continue learning. We saw young children put in charge of their own daily routines and schedules, increased child abuse, parents struggling for resources to feed their families, and increased anxiety and depression in GTACS students and their caregivers. We also saw children with special needs struggle and regress without their school-based therapy and supports. We know you will consider these children, families, and our future as a community in your important decision.

**Traverse Area Pediatric and  
Adolescent Clinic**

Dr. LuAnn Labian  
Dr. Sarah Mulder  
Dr. Karla Smith  
Dr. Megan Stilwill  
Dr. Kristie Koehler

We understand there is no perfect decision and that reopening cannot be completely without risk. However, we have felt the urgent need for school reopening every day in our clinics. Science and medicine regarding the coronavirus are constantly changing, and we are continuing to share knowledge as data evolves. We also acknowledge that if positive rates in our community increase, our testing capacities change, or medical resources are stressed, that remote schooling may become the safest option for everyone. In person learning cannot be successfully or safely accomplished without implementing the proper precautions, supplying PPE for teachers and school staff, and following outlined guidelines on infection control. Teachers and school staff need to be provided the same support and protections that we have been successfully providing our nurses and doctors on the frontlines.

**Additional Physicians**

Dr. John Gorman  
Dr. Curt Schubert  
Dr. Sherry Small  
Dr. Walter Meeker  
Dr. Margaret Meeker  
Dr. Scott Selle  
Dr. Tim Rutkoski

We are attaching a resource sheet to aid you in reaching the decision to reopen schools and to facilitate in person instruction in a safe environment. These are evidence-based resources to support the reopening, while explaining the health risks and steps that can be taken to substantially reduce transmission risk.

In summary, returning to school in person is important for the healthy development and well-being of the children in our community. Science and local infection rates should drive the decision making on safely reopening schools. As a community we need to continue to reassess and adjust together as we face this upcoming school year. Thank you for your time and attention. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or comments.

We are happy to keep this conversation ongoing throughout the 2020- 2021 school year.

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# Helpful resources

August 6, 2020

## **CDC school opening guidance**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>

<https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/6935-CDC-opening-guidelines/e1a8802d0d76b3e-b43a8/optimized/full.pdf#page=1>

## **National Academies Report on School Reopening, July 15, 2020**

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2020/07/schools-should-prioritize-reopening-in-fall-2020-especially-for-grades-k-5-while-weighing-risks-and-benefits>

## **American Academy of Pediatrics**

<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/covid-19-planning-considerations-return-to-in-person-education-in-schools/>

<https://services.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2020/pediatricians-educators-and-superintendents-urge-a-safe-return-to-school-this-fall/>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Return-to-School-During-COVID-19.aspx>

## **Johns Hopkins University School Reopening Plan Tracker**

<https://bioethics.jhu.edu/research-and-outreach/projects/eschool-initiative/school-policy-tracker/>

## **Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab**

### **Summary of Evidence for School Reopenings**

<https://policylab.chop.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/publications/PolicyLab-Policy-Review-School-Reopenings-July-2020.pdf>

<https://thenotebook.org/articles/2020/07/20/chop-outlines-safe-conditions-for-reopening-schools/>

## *New England Journal of Medicine,*

### **July 29, 2020 Report on Reopening Primary Schools During a Pandemic**

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMms2024920?query=TOC>