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MICHAEL J. MURPHY
ALDERMAN, 10TH DISTRICT

Return to in-person learning is needed for local youth

Statement of Alderman Michael J. Murphy March 22, 2021

Tomorrow the Milwaukee Board of School Directors will vote on whether Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) students should return to classrooms in April. When it comes to returning to in-person learning, I appreciate the caution and diligence demonstrated to this point, but I believe now is the time for our students to resume their learning in-person.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has offered guidance saying school district reopening should be considered in communities where there are fewer than 50 new cases per 100,000 people per week, and less than 8% of people tested for COVID-19 test positive. As was reported last week, Milwaukee is below both of those thresholds. On top of these promising trends, teachers have been eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations since March 1st, and many can achieve full vaccination by the time reopening occurs in April.

Over time, the science on this issue has also become increasingly clear. The CDC published new research that found limited coronavirus transmission in schools that require masks, an important factor that is included in the MPS reopening proposal. Additionally, the proposal addresses enhanced ventilation and surveillance testing, two more key components that help make schools and classrooms safer.

Perhaps most importantly, research has indicated that the prolonged absence from schools can leave in impact on learning development. Access to technology, computer literacy, reduced learning times and less hands-on support can all impact the development of the whole child. This also includes the missing social-emotional development that comes from being in a classroom with peers.

Other urban communities including New York City, Chicago and Boston have begun phasing in in-person schooling, and it is time Milwaukee does the same. I hope the Milwaukee Board of School Directors agrees and votes to allow children to return to the classroom in April.

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