



Washington State Senate

1000 4th Avenue Building
300 West 42nd
Olympia, WA 98501

Senator Steve O'Brien
20th Legislative District

Phone: (360) 342-7334
Email: senator@obrien.wa.gov

September 2, 2020

Honorable Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, Washington 98512

Dear Superintendent Reykdal,

As Washington's children begin the 2020-21 school year, I encourage your office to monitor the public and private schools that are choosing to manage against COVID-19 infection and offer partial, or full in-person instruction.

We know – and pediatricians and social scientists agree – in-person learning is beneficial to the educational and social-emotional well-being of children. The Center for Disease Control says [it is important for schools to reopen](#) and the American Academy of Pediatrics has [provided a lot of helpful recommendations](#) for this process.

As the ranking leader on the Senate health care committee, I have been tracking districts' partial-reopening plans that would prioritize the education of children with special needs, as well as younger elementary students who are not served nearly as well by remote instruction. One is the [Bellevue School District](#), which is becoming a model for others.

By monitoring, then rigorously evaluating the health- and instruction-related practices taken by all private and public schools that offer partial and full in-person instruction, your office will be able to identify best practices. These will help the many districts choosing to engage exclusively in distance learning to replicate their safe return to the traditional classroom instruction.

A rigorous evaluation includes closely monitoring infection rates. If districts opening to in-person instruction do not experience COVID-19 outbreaks, it would be a strong indication that other schools can open safely as well, provided they follow the best practices your office identifies.

In addition, I request that in late September or early October your office provide the Legislature with an evaluation of these schools, on their successes or failures in limiting infection within their student and staff populations. And, I ask that you provide a list of recommendations, based on the findings in that report, for safely expanding in-person instruction if the data support it.

Finally, I ask that the evaluation of children's services provided at school facilities also be included in this report to the Legislature.