

Our students and teachers belong together in the classroom. Since March, Saint Paul Public Schools has been working to make this happen safely. Our plan to reopen our schools is in line with all of the measures and requirements outlined in the state's updated Safe Learning Plan, and contains procedures to modify our learning model if and when necessary.

SPPS is preparing to bring our youngest students back to school beginning Feb. 1.

We have learned from other school districts in the state that have provided some form of in-person learning for their students. We have learned safety measures to protect our valued teachers and staff. We have learned from the experiences of our Essential Kids Care and Discovery Club staff, who have been in our buildings with SPPS students since March. We have learned more about COVID-19 itself, and the risk of spread in schools, elementary in particular, compared to community spread. We have also learned the consequences and inequity of shutting students out of our schools for education and resources for 10 months.

The majority of public and non-public schools in Minnesota have been open for some form of in-person learning this school year, including many schools here in Saint Paul. Our SPPS schools are ready to do the same.

Since August, we have developed and implemented Readiness Targets at each of our schools. In October we announced our readiness to open, and those targets remain in place today. At that time, COVID-19 cases were spiking, and we made the right decision to remain in distance learning. Today's COVID-19 case rates are significantly lower than they were before winter break, and they continue to stabilize.

Distance learning has not been optimal for many of our students. SPPS cannot simply hope that students will improve in the current learning model. We must act; we must use the best information we have to open our schools. The disparities in our children's education are too large to ignore and too consequential to continue in a manner that serves some and not all. We believe an option to return is important for our community. The Virtual Learning School is available to all families who want to continue learning from home.

We understand there is fear and apprehension about returning to school during a pandemic. Those feelings are real and many of us as SPPS parents share those feelings. Real world experiences from other school districts in Minnesota and around the country show us that schools being open does not equate to higher rates of community spread.

Citation: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/risk-comms-updates/update39-covid-and-schools.pdf>

Ideally we could plan on a definite date that all staff could receive the COVID vaccine. The reality is that is not possible due to the many unknowns surrounding vaccine

distribution. We cannot wait for all teachers to be vaccinated before opening. Our students cannot wait. Governor Walz has recommitted to the mitigation factors that have proven successful across the state since March in allowing elementary schools to open as soon as January 18.

Our buildings are ready. We are thoughtfully implementing our return to school plans over the next several weeks. We are watching COVID-19 cases and working closely with state and local public health officials to ensure we can modify our plans as soon as it might be necessary.

Saint Paul residents rely on their school district to provide students with relevant instruction, social/emotional support and resources to help them become their best selves. We take that bond of trust very seriously. SPPS values our teachers and all of our staff members. By working together, we can get our students and teachers back where they belong in a safe way.