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August 5, 2020

An open letter to the Warren Consolidated Schools Community,

The Warren Education Association represents over 860 educators in the Warren Consolidated Schools (WCS) district. We feel compelled to issue this statement because the health and safety of these educators and the students they serve will be at an unacceptably high level of risk if the 2020-21 school year were to start with in-person instruction. It is our duty as bargaining representatives to protect the interest of our members and their students. Our demand that Warren Consolidated Schools suspend any plans to return to in-person instruction to start the school year fulfills this duty as it is the right thing to do.

Our reason for demanding such action is twofold: (1) Warren Consolidated Schools, like other public school districts, have not had the time or resources necessary to put in place the health and safety protocols required to safely reopen schools to students and (2) COVID-19 cases in our community are not improving at the rate necessary for containment of this pandemic.

Over the past month the WEA has thoroughly reviewed the health and safety protocols detailed in Michigan's Safe Schools Roadmap. These safety protocols were created by a broad coalition of public health and education experts with the goal of providing a roadmap to safely returning to in-person instruction. Since the Michigan Safe Schools Roadmap was issued on June 30, 2020, we've been working with WCS administration toward a plan for creating and implementing these necessary health and safety protocols. These include proper hygiene practices, the use of face coverings, distancing students in classrooms, reconfiguring school buildings, screening students and staff and responding to confirmed cases of COVID-19. This is a monumental task made all the more challenging by the lack of sufficient resources to put these safety protocols in place. We make this statement not to criticize WCS, but to acknowledge that it is impossible to get the job done before classes are set to resume on September 8<sup>th</sup>.

Over this same period of time we have closely monitored the number of confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases in Macomb County and throughout the state. Simply put, the pandemic that we have all hoped would be contained by now continues to persist and poses a significant risk to us all. Until data on COVID-19 cases confirms a sustained improvement toward containing the virus in our community, it is not safe for educators and students to return to classrooms.

We understand that alternatives to face-to-face classroom instruction create challenges in meeting the educational needs of students. We similarly understand that remote learning options disrupt the lives of working parents and cause economic hardship for our communities. However, we strongly believe that the health and safety of educators and students must take top priority. Our members look forward to reopening their classrooms to students. We pledge to continue to work in collaboration with WCS, building by building, toward putting the necessary safety protocols in place. While we feel confident we will achieve this goal soon, it is abundantly clear that it will not happen in time to start the 2020-21 school year. We stand behind the 860 educators in the WEA by demanding that WCS prioritize the health and safety of staff and students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert L. Callender".

Robert L. Callender - President  
WARREN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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