



## Washington State Senate

314 Legislative Building  
PO Box 40420  
Olympia, WA 98504-0420

**Senator John Braun**  
Senate Republican Leader  
20th Legislative District

Phone: (360) 786-7638  
Toll-Free: 1-800-562-6000  
John.Braun@leg.wa.gov

February 23, 2021

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee,

I am appealing to you to take immediate action to ensure that public schools in our state will reopen to in-person instruction as soon as possible. At the time of this writing, less than 30 percent of our K-12 students are receiving any in-person instruction during the school week. We all agree that this is unacceptable, but we need to find a way to make speedy progress toward reopening schools to provide the level of educational services that our students deserve, and which our state is committed to deliver.

Republicans in the Senate have proven that we are eager for students to return to in-person instruction, but legislative efforts to make this happen have so far been unsuccessful. Nevertheless, your ability to provide technical assistance to school districts, make adjustments to Proclamation 20-09.3 and related guidance documents that set parameters for modes of instruction, and commit financial resources appropriated by the Legislature to help schools safely operate, is vital to reopening schools.

I also urge you to make necessary adjustments to state health guidance documents where science and public health data show that it is possible. This may include reevaluating safe physical distancing requirements, such as allowing for three feet of distancing among younger students;<sup>1</sup> restructuring schedules; expanding coronavirus testing options at all schools;<sup>2</sup> and offering more first-dose vaccinations to educational staff as a priority. As local school boards rely on the state's

---

<sup>1</sup> Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *Op-ed: Reduce distancing requirement to keep kids in school*, [hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/oped-reduce-distancing-requirement-to-keep-kids-in-school/](https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/oped-reduce-distancing-requirement-to-keep-kids-in-school/); Joseph G. Allen & Sara Bleich, *Opinion: Why three feet of social distancing should be enough in schools*, The Washington Post (Nov. 12, 2020), [washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/11/12/three-feet-social-distancing-schools-coronavirus/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/11/12/three-feet-social-distancing-schools-coronavirus/); Alexa Green, *Starting Monday, social distancing guidelines go from 6 to 3 feet in Indiana classrooms*, [fox59.com/news/coronavirus/starting-monday-social-distancing-guidelines-go-from-6-to-3-feet-in-indiana-classrooms/](https://fox59.com/news/coronavirus/starting-monday-social-distancing-guidelines-go-from-6-to-3-feet-in-indiana-classrooms/); The Public Schools of Brookline, *Evidence of Scientific Consensus In Support of Reduction of 6-Foot Distancing Parameters*, [brookline.k12.ma.us/lib/MA01907509/Centricity/Domain/25/Evidence%20of%20Scientific%20Consensus\\_Reduction%20of%20Distancing%20Parameters\\_2.18.21.pdf](https://brookline.k12.ma.us/lib/MA01907509/Centricity/Domain/25/Evidence%20of%20Scientific%20Consensus_Reduction%20of%20Distancing%20Parameters_2.18.21.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Department of Health, *DOH expands school testing initiative to encourage more in-person learning*, [doh.wa.gov/Newsroom/Articles/ID/2627/DOH-expands-school-testing-initiative-to-encourage-more-in-person-learning](https://doh.wa.gov/Newsroom/Articles/ID/2627/DOH-expands-school-testing-initiative-to-encourage-more-in-person-learning) (Feb. 16, 2021).

guidance, it is imperative for the state to take every opportunity to give guidance that enables schools to open. State government should be as flexible as possible in its guidance to schools.

Finally, I am compelled to remind you that our judiciary tells us that children in Washington enjoy a constitutional right to have the state make ample provision for their education. While I understand the severe challenge that COVID-19 has presented to ensuring that this right is respected, the state must do more to help students get back to in-person instruction.

I look forward to working with you on this urgent and important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Braun", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Senator John Braun  
Senate Republican Leader