

Dear PPS School Board Members,

After having received several urgent notifications about movement on the premature return to on-site/in-person learning for Portland, I felt compelled to send to my union reps an email, who in turn encouraged me to send this along to the School Board and Governor Brown, as it pertains to a teacher/parent perspective on the discussions of returning back to campus for in-person learning. Suffice it to say, as a teacher that has been with PPS since 2009, I'm anxious and frustrated by what seems to be a vocal group in Portland attempting to frame their beliefs and ideas as representative of the majority. I was made aware of a facebook group with approximately 900 members that seems to have garnered media attention, as well lobbied the PPS School Board for a return through a group that promotes the opposite position (Oregon 4 a Safe Return to Campus) - which has over 13,000 members. If we were to look at those two groups as representative 'samples' on this issue, it's clear that the vast majority of Oregonians, and indeed Portlanders, prefer to follow the safest of routes for our return, versus the group that seems to advocate 'crossing our fingers and hoping we're okay' with regards to a premature return.

I feel that all studies are showing we are in the very heart of the storm when it comes to Covid, and not yet ready for a safe return. For those of us that are in the high risk categories, it's basically asking us to put our lives into the hands of PPS, who might well be more listening to the complaints of a minority of families rather than to science. The very fact that it is a small and vocal group actually demonstrates the very opposite of the complaints that seem to be the lens they want the public to view the issue. The silence of most families and teachers on the issue has in fact indicated that people approve of the safety measures that have been taken so far. In short, people typically only speak up when they have a concern or disagree on an issue. That said, I am speaking up now to make it abundantly clear that I 100% do not agree with a premature return to campus.

With vaccinations starting, it seems only prudent that PPS should wait. While it's not ideal, we can make up for lost time in academics. What we can't make-up for is loss of life or permanent health issues as a result of a rush back to school during what Anthony Fauci has called 'the darkest hour' in the covid epidemic.

I cannot and will not support a rush back into the buildings during this time without vaccinations having happened and a reasonable decline in infections within Portland. Through the safety protocols that led to being virtual, as well the stricter guidelines in Oregon, we've managed to be one of the least infected areas. It only takes looking at a map, however, to see that we are doing better BECAUSE of those measures, not in spite of them. Anecdotally speaking, there has not been a week that has gone by where I haven't encountered a student that has declared they are sick after sniffing and coughing in our group time, and that is as a specialist teacher. In fact, I write this email on the heels of a student explaining that they had to change the location of their learning spot due to a sick sibling (who could be heard coughing in the background), just this morning.

Returning to school in person is definitely on the horizon, but a premature push is callous in its disregard for teachers and students. Should we have an outbreak, outside of the obvious health concerns that will mire us, we'll be all the more chaotic as we try to shuffle back and forth between distance learning. We have created systems, and throwing ourselves into a chaotic spiral of potential shutdowns and startups will not only create anxiety and additional stress, it could well cause less academic gains than if we ride out the storm and go back when we know it is reasonably safe to do so.

Please feel free to pass along my concerns as needed. As a PPS teacher and a parent of PPS students, I object strongly to a vocal minority gambling with my health and the health of my family.

Thanks,

Kim Baker
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