



TEACHER ELEVATING STUDENT VOICES PROJECT OVERVIEW

August 2020



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Elevating Teacher Voices project launched as a way to engage teachers across Oregon in a conversation about the COVID-19 pandemic and the current metrics for reopening schools. The project invited teachers to submit a statement that captures what they would like Oregon leadership to know.

HOW INPUT WAS COLLECTED

The Elevating Teacher Voices project elicited responses through a Facebook Group called Oregon Safe Return to Campus. All responses were posted as comments or sent via private messaging. Nearly 30 responses were collected. Not all are reported.

WHAT WAS LEARNED FROM OREGON TEACHERS

- Oregon leaders should recognize that Oregon teachers and other support staff feel as though their voices have not been heard.
- They feel that their health and their lives are considered to be expendable.
- They have noted that while Oregon leaders consider that they have a moral responsibility to provide education, support the well-being of students, and ensure that child care is available to support working parents, Oregon leaders appear to not feel that they have any moral responsibility whatsoever to the emotional trauma being experienced by Oregon teachers, along with the obvious risks to their health and lives and the health and lives of their family members from the COVID-19 virus.

DATA LIMITATIONS

Due to self-selection bias, the responses may not be a reliable representation of teachers across the state

POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE?

The question Oregon leaders might want to consider: How it will be possible to establish a positive school climate, based on trust and mutual respect, moving forward?

I have served my district selflessly for nearly twenty years. I have put my students above my own family time and time again. I have taught sick when I could not get a sub more times than I can count and work roughly 60 hours a week. Now we are in the middle of a pandemic with so much left to learn about this virus, where millions have been sickened and will face lifelong health challenges and so many have died. My district clearly does not care about all of the risks to my health and the health of my family and students. I absolutely do not feel safe going back to in-person teaching. My district's reckless disregard for my life—when I have given my life to this district—is crushing. I am terrified, disillusioned, and broken. I need a paycheck. But I have two small children who need their mother.

I am feeling very marginalized by the “powers that be” in education. I gave them a large portion of my life, and now they want me to give up my life.

I have taught in my district for 17 years and have been denied unpaid leave of absence to be able to educate my 2nd grade son who has two medical conditions that place him at high risk category. During the request process my professionalize was questioned and it was the most demoralizing experience of my career. I don't think I will return to the classroom again as I no longer wish to take part in what feels like an abusive relationship with public education.

I don't want to leave my job. I don't want to stop teaching. I don't want to never meet my students in person. But I also do NOT want to die. Maybe that is selfish. But it is honest.

School is supposed to be a place where children can grow in a safe, loving and nurturing environment. I did not give up my first career and go deeply into debt so I could be part of a system that wants to sacrifice my students' safety and well-being for the economy.

I know that children learn best in person, but in-person learning this year would be even more traumatizing than any of us are willing to admit. No hugs when a child is hurt, no playing with friends, military-like control—not to mention endless rolling quarantines, classmates and teachers getting sick or even dying, and the profound guilt a child would experience for the rest of their life if a family member dies.

I, as a 30 year veteran teacher, feel heartbreak and anger at the thought of watching children and staff in my classroom, school, and district become sick and spread this highly contagious virus.

I am not being anti-social. I am being responsible. I am not being rude. I am protecting myself and my family. I am not heartless. I actually care more than most because of my ability to continue to be a Mom, daughter, wife, sister, friend, etc. literally is dependent on my next decision. I am not being dramatic. I don't get that privilege. I am not fearful. I am experienced at survival. I have been practicing survival my whole life. I don't need to "just take a break." You see, I can never take a break without dire consequences. I am not asking the world to stop. I am asking you to listen without bias and a willingness to learn. I am not selfish. I have sacrificed myself to help others. I am high risk, a chronic bearer of diligence and obedience to live, while carrying the weight of never-ending guilt for this burden I didn't ask to share.

My daughter was diagnosed with leukemia in 2018, after months of being sick. In her two and a half years of treatment, she missed a lot of school, play dates, no clubs, no sports, no extra-curricular activities. She is behind a little in reading and math. But she will catch up because she is alive and healthy. That is so much more important than meeting some benchmarks a year later than the rest of her peers.

I am 27. I am high risk. I love my job more than I ever thought was possible. But I am not ready to die so that my students can do their schoolwork online in the same room.

Before students can succeed academically, they must feel safe both physically and mentally. In the last 2 days before we left school, students were worried and stressed in class saying we are all going to die. Another student mentioned that his grandpa is going to die. He couldn't focus on his learning. Also my students were asking each other if they will go to each other's funeral. I am an elementary school teacher. Considered at risk.

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It is atrocious that I'm being forced to choose between keeping my job and working in incredibly unsafe conditions—jeopardizing the health of my family and myself—or quitting and forging this income. Sheer Insanity. Unfair. How is it we've sunk so low?

I am 67 and love teaching music. As a music teacher, I get to see all of the students every year. My relationships with them by 8th grade are profound. I had hoped to teach at least 3 more years. But computing the percentages of students who can be expected to get CV-19 and the students who can be expected to die from it, that is a risk I am not willing to face. I have resigned my teaching position.

For the past 15 years, I have committed my life to teaching and serving students with highest needs, many of whom are medically fragile. Now I have to accept that their lives, my life, and the lives of my family members are deemed expendable by the education system, which ironically chooses to ignore the research and data provided by our country's most highly respected experts.

I do not want to be the cause or the scapegoat when children die because we go back to school too early based on faulty statistics. Teachers are already facing incredible scrutiny. We will certainly be blamed when children get sick or worse. It won't matter how hard we fought to keep them safe, we will shoulder the blame externally and internally. I can't live with that.

Teaching is my passion and my calling. Now, in my 13th year of teaching, I find myself considering the unfathomable—leaving education. I am at high risk. The deteriorating school building I work in, with antiquated ventilation and windowless rooms, can't possibly be an environment where coronavirus won't spread. Many students are being raised by grandparents or other high-risk individuals. With the K-3 exception I feel I am being forced to risk not only my life and long term health outcomes, but also be complicit in risking the lives and health of my students and their families. My heart is breaking at having to make such a choice.

We all want to go back to school and teach our students. But it is just not safe for our students, our families, or our community.