

Good afternoon,

My name is Britney Colton. I am a mother of three school-aged children. I've also become an advocate for reopening our schools. Safely. But with urgency.

I'm an admin of a Facebook group called Clack to School. Together with our sister pages, we represent over 40k Oregon families, all seeking to safely reopen schools. We represent teachers, parents, and community members.

I'm not going to debate the science here. Frankly, it is so overwhelming the harm the continued shuttering of our schools is causing, and that they can be safely reopened now. Even without a vaccine.

You will undoubtedly get emails from teachers and the OEA. Whatever they say in those emails, they have also come out and publicly said school is not safe and should not reopen until kids are vaccinated. So not only are their demands sensational and unreasonable, it is hard to follow them because they are constantly shifting based on what best fit their desires in the moment.

We are not against teachers. We love our teachers. We want them safe. I myself have five immediate family members who are all public school educators. And they are appalled at what is happening now. And they know the union is not representing so many who feel powerless to speak up for fear of retribution.

Remember as you read their submissions that they have a union. They have lobbyists. They are getting a paycheck from the comfort of their home, many of them who are teaching remotely across the country, and still galavanting on vacations. In fact, they are even meeting up at the mountain to teach in their cars before hitting the slopes.

Remember they have little direct incentive to return to the classroom.

Remember kids do not have unions or lobbyists. Neither do their parents. Remember that while no child in Oregon has died of Covid, many have died by suicide. Remember that there is scant evidence that any teacher or staff person across the country has contracted Covid AT school.

Manufactured fear in aid of ulterior motives should not trump sound science. Their fear is largely a stalking horse. We have had teachers openly (and shockingly, proudly) admit to us they love working from home, with their dog on their lap, and don't want to go back. Great. They need to find another job because teaching is an IN PERSON job.

The governor set a goal of returning to in person by February 15. As of today, most schools across this state are nowhere close to achieving that. And to the extent they are motivated, they are being stonewalled by calculated demands designed to not return teachers to the classroom for the foreseeable future.

The public education system may not survive this. I, and so many other parents, are out. We are grateful we have the resources to go to private school and be in person. We recognize that privilege. And it is painful for those left behind.

You mandated that schools close nearly a year ago. Trust me, most schools will not reopen until you once again mandate they reopen. Absent such a mandate, the unions will continue to be obstreperous and block the way.

And the ones harmed are the children. Who have no say. And no power. And who have already yielded a year of their lives for the sake of others.

Remember them. Fight for them. Because it has now become clear that their schools and teachers are not.