

To whom it may concern,

I have been very troubled by the push to reopen schools, given countless stories of the effect on Covid-19 on children and educators. The excuses given have ranged from “parents needing childcare”, to an “increase in suicide rates.” In what world have our educators been sole responsible for solving the mental health issues of our children? If this were the case, wouldn’t there be increased funding for mental health providers and support educators in our schools, rather than cuts? Why are those pushing to go back to school blind to the idea that children’s mental health is suffering right now NOT because schools are closed but rather because we are living through a pandemic? Why are we not figuring out how to help support families SURVIVE through this without putting more Oregonians at risk?

We have had low numbers in Oregon because we’ve been fairly safe. In a time when cases across the country are still on the rise, steadily heading toward half a million American lives lost, when vaccines aren’t readily available, when vaccines for children aren’t even part of the conversation yet, and when new strains of the virus are making their way through the states, this is NOT the right time to drop our guard.

Those hit the hardest by the pandemic seem to be the ones to consider even more, and yet they are being overlooked. No one is a monolith, and I can only go by the many voices of Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander and other community members of Color with whom I’ve been in contact for the last 9 months, and this push to go back is not what they’re asking for.

What happens when we force families of a Color back to school, and their communities are hit harder? It’s called racial cleansing and it’s the OPPOSITE of what Oregon needs to do to make up for generations of exclusion and racism. How can we say “we need more educators of Color” or that “we have to work to bridge the widening achievement gap”, and then immediately show that we don’t care about the health of these very lives?

Comprehensive Distance Learning has been a challenge. It’s taken some getting used to, but I know many, MANY children, including my son, who are in a flow. Many are even thriving. If we disrupt that now, they’ll spend more time readjusting than learning at this point in the school year. How many schools across our country, across our world, have opened their schools only to have to close them right away due to Covid exposure? That causes more educational disruption I refuse to do that to my child.

I refuse to put my child and our educators in harm’s way. We are not prepared to support our children through grieving the loss of classmates, educators or family members. Do you not realize the weight of grief and despair that will affect our children’s mental health then?

I am one voice of thousands who refuse to send my child back until it’s safe. I am a PTA Vice President, a proud PPS parent, who has been an advocate for our public schools for years, but I will NOT keep my child enrolled if it means risking lives, and I am not alone. Is this going to be the fall of our public school system? Or do you have a plan for keeping the system alive despite mass unenrollment?

Please consider the weight of your decisions.

Terribly worried,

Maya von Geldern

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