

Dear Members of the State of Oregon Senate,

As a mother of two sons who attend Portland Public Schools, 6th and 10th grade, I am writing to urge you to support Governor Brown's focus and actions to reopen public schools.

Our children have not been inside a classroom since last March. My son was a freshman last March and is now entering the last semester of his sophomore year on-line. The 2000 students of his high school, Franklin High School, are being denied the opportunities to grow both personally and academically. He used to sprint out of our house every morning to the bus stop with such anticipation about his day when he attended school in person. At dinner, he would recount the encounters at the bus stop, lunch time, class debates, challenges during basketball practice. Our dinners are painfully quiet these days. The frustration and isolation are written all over each of my sons' faces. We are sacrificing their youth and their health. My younger son will not let me tell you the specifics about how painful and trying online learning and the isolation have been for him. And, the factor that keeps me up at night is that he is not alone with these hurtful experiences and we could have avoided this harm for my children and for so many others.

The studies from North Carolina, South Carolina and other states show that schools have been open, EVEN before vaccines, safely and without in school spread. Schools have lower spread than the community spread and this is in states which have much greater COVID rates than Oregon. Every public health expert advises us to keep schools open and to reopen because the evidence is overwhelming that the harm of no in person school far outweighs the risk of the transmission of COVID. Oregon cannot ignore this data and this threat to our children.

As our leaders, we expect you to navigate through the media fear-mongering, the tribalism, the false narratives set out by the teachers' unions, and put our children front and center of these decisions. Address the barriers to reopening schools and make it happen. I have family teaching and learning all up and down the East Coast during the past year. My family members who are teaching back in the classroom are thankful to be there and developing real relationships with their students. While at first they were scared, they have worked with the schools to put the safety plans in place and have a comfort level and also the conviction that they are doing what is best for our children.

Teaching is an essential service. Similarly, my husband is a public defender in Clackamas County and he has been representing his clients in court, for hearings and jury trials. He is sitting right next to his clients who are detained in jails and prisons where there is uncontroverted evidence of COVID spread. Yet, my husband and all of his counterparts are showing up every day and serving their clients and our state because it is critical and because every day matters. I would argue that teachers serve the same role in our community and our children need to be back in class.

Oregon is hurting a whole generation. There will be no way to effectively address the socio - developmental loss and academic loss. We need to stop the harm immediately.

Sincerely, Kelly Tilden