

Dear Oregon Legislature:

I am writing you as a parent of 3 children in Portland Public Schools in support of reopening our schools. I understand from the new revised metrics that our elementary schools should be able to open by Feb 15.

I understand that this is a complicated issue, and I try not to fault anyone during a pandemic, but I believe it was a mistake to close our schools this past Fall. As a physician, I am aware that our numbers in Oregon are better and have been better than the vast majority of the country, yet we have decided to keep schools closed the longest. Rates are now dropping in Oregon. I believe school is a right and there is no sound scientific argument to keep schools closed at this point.

I understand that there have been equity concerns, and we should be trying to improve equity in general, but I also am a general advocate for all students. I am not even sure we understand what situation would actually be more equitable - schools open or closed - there seem to be a number of conflicting opinions about this.

In my opinion, there is a level of fear mongering and inability to tolerate any risk in the current argument to keep schools closed indefinitely. I think you could make an argument to never open schools based on influenza risk (exposure of teachers, concerns for equity), but of course we as a society have accepted that level of risk, even if it may affect intergenerational homes more (I have not heard this argument, but this is an extension of the current argument of increased risk to homes with grandparents.) We do not even require that teachers get vaccinated for influenza, so we must be comfortable with at least some level of risk. Our covid numbers have been decreasing since December, but covid will probably never be eradicated. I plead with you to please help us reopen the schools, as every child in this state deserves access to a public school education in person.

Thank you for reading my email.

Emily Lynn, MD