

Hello all,

I am a parent of two teenagers and after this almost year of isolation and near total lockdown for our kids, I am begging you to do all that is possible to make public school districts open classrooms for kids of all ages who want to go now. Not in the fall, but now. We cannot ignore their developmental and educational needs any longer, we are at a crisis point. We can do this safely and it's imperative that it be done now before we lose more kids to mental health issues.

We need you as legislators to understand that while some are fearful of going into classrooms, the silent majority are not. We feel powerless and because of that don't feel we have a voice. But it's time for us to have one and I speak up for every one of those parents or children who feel helpless and angry and without hope. No one is asking our opinion on the matter; the surveys that you have heard recently are selective and not at all representative of the majority. While we watch our families in friends in other states or even private schools here in Oregon attend with little to no issue with transmission within schools or sports activities. We see the evidence before our eyes and yet you still insist Oregon is special or unique and can't get it done. We are not special and we absolutely can get it done. We need to get it done. Our children are suffering.

We know this can work and are willing to put in the work but we need your help:

1. If teachers and unions now insist that they must be vaccinated before going back into person, then mandate that it happen once this occurs. For those that do not want to take the vaccine or cannot for medical reasons can be given the option to work remotely or give up their right to hold the schools accountable for any potential concern. You cannot force everyone to get vaccinated but give them the option and then move forward.
2. Clarify and modify the metrics with the limited liability rules so districts can open and be covered even if they don't meet now "advisory" metrics for their county. This must be a clear communication so there is no fear of potential lawsuits.
3. Governor, please we beg you to remove the mandate that keeps contact sports from occurring as planned on February 22nd. Forty other states have done contact sports successfully. Not without bumps, but still they have been done. Our kids, especially our teenagers, need their activities. It is worth the very small calculated risk. You will lose people to other states if this does not happen; you already have.

Governor Brown, you mandated that schools close last March. Schools are now led by fear in their opening decisions. This manufactured fear, despite the science and the many studies/experts who have shown schools can be opened safely (even without the vaccine) has allowed this to go on too long. Schools will not open if you continue to be soft on your decisions. You must take control and mandate that they open by February 15th, not just tell them it's up to them. You are our leader, please use that leadership to put our kids first and mandate public schools to open classrooms by that date.

High school students should be your priority. After almost 11 months, they know how to wear masks and understand how to social distance (and can be directed more easily than a 6 year old). They are preparing now for adulthood and careers/next steps in education. While teachers are doing their best, this is not the education that will prepare them successfully for their next steps. My son has an elective next quarter for Woods class. Tell me, what is the point of a class meant to foster hands-on learning if he has to do that from home with scraps of wood and whatever tools we have on hand? Are they expected to use scissors and kitchen knives? This is almost laughable, he'll be graded on participation essentially. This is not the education we are looking for for our children and it is not sustainable. My senior in high school has had the already challenging process of applying for colleges and scholarships made much worse because now she competes with kids from other states who have had the opportunity for normal in-class learning. Do you understand how hard this is for them? What it's done to their normal development? You can stop this from getting worse but we need you to take firm control and mandate that she and her classmates can get back into the classroom to finish their school year. And maybe have some kind of good memory of what high school was supposed to be like for them. The class of 2021 has arguably been the most affected by this pandemic and our leaders' decisions around schools and lockdowns. You can help to stop the bleeding, to some degree, by getting them back into their schools to finish the year.

I will end with this. We know that teachers and their unions have power. Parents and children do not. We don't have anyone lobbying for the kids, just our voices and our votes that have been too complacent and trusting. We are using them now because we have no other choice. Hear us. We are the constituents you are elected to represent. Our voices and asks are what you should be pushing for and not that of powerful unions and special interests. If you choose fear of a virus that we have learned to live with over the cries of help from your people, then you will see the consequences on ballots and through action of leaving this state. This is an actual fear you should be worried about. Your future voters are watching and learning.

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

Thank you,
Tera Hilton