

Hello,

We have a second grader in PPS and an incoming kindergartner for fall 2021. I am writing in support of reopening public schools in the Portland metro area. I am sure you have been provided with the data and research supporting the safe reopening of schools, so instead I would like to share our story with you.

My son has a diagnosis of ASD and is on an IEP. While he is very bright, he struggles with appropriate peer communication and social interactions. His IEP is largely focused on these areas and when he attends live school he benefits from small group sessions with other boys to help work on these skills. This can clearly not be recreated with online distance learning and my son is therefore missing out on these valuable skills and teaching that can only be obtained in person. The longer he is kept out of school this is only going to worsen. And of course he is not alone in this area. I have heard from countless families whose kids are struggling socially and emotionally in addition to academically. While distance learning was initially appropriate when the pandemic began as we needed to learn more about the virus, it is now irresponsible to continue to keep schools closed knowing what we now know.

My husband and I both work in healthcare and have been working throughout the pandemic. We know from our personal experience that PPE (specifically masks) and appropriate safety precautions (hand washing and social distancing when possible) that we are able to effectively stop the transmission of COVID 19. Therefore with these precautions in place, it is more than reasonable, it is in fact safe, for kids to return to in person learning using a hybrid model (to allow for space and smaller class sizes) immediately. At this point in time our positivity rates are some of the lowest in the nation (and dropping), yet we remain closed here in the Portland metro area. Are you able to explain how our neighbors across the river (Vancouver and Evergreen districts) have been able to reopen using a phased in hybrid model but we cannot? It is unacceptable that PPS has not even submitted a plan to help return kids to the classroom. We need to do what is right for our children and get them back to school as I fear for the long-term consequences for both our kids and community if we continue down this path of distance learning.

Thank you for your time,  
Tracy Schuller