

Good Afternoon,

I am the parent of two teenagers in Portland, OR. My children have been in the Portland Public School system since kindergarten.

Our family is desperate for school re-opening. Once child, previously a straight A student through all of middle school and freshman year, is now getting a D in pre-calculus. I believe that CDL is an extremely poor substitute for in-person learning and that this has gone on for too long in Portland and around the state. Many kids and teens are falling behind academically, and feeling isolated, hopeless, and unmotivated. School closures made sense last March at the beginning of the pandemic, as the nation tried to wrap its head around what was happening. We have learned so much since then. We need to apply what we have learned to help our children and our teachers. School closures are detrimental to everyone: kids, teachers, parents, families, businesses. The politicization of school re-opening in Oregon has made the situation even more bleak. For this reason, I have told my teens to be prepared to be in CDL for the entire 2022/21 school year. I need them to not have false hope. Yet, I can visibly see them wilt under the weight and disappointment of this prospect.

As a parent of teens, I am deeply concerned, not just for their academic achievement and long term consequences, but I am also very worried about their social and emotional health. I have another child whose passion is music - he has played French horn since 6th grade. He has now been practicing alone in his room for 10 months. High school band this coming semester will be virtual. I can see the joy and "spark" for music dimming in him, as he soldiered on through days, weeks, months of sharing music with no one but himself. I am worried that the spark will be extinguished completely if CDL continues on for much longer. If the result of this ongoing closure is that he gives music up completely, it will be a tragedy. A preventable one, if only we could see that the consequences of extended school closures have so many life-long implications.

All Oregonians want a safe return to school. I believe this. We also see many Oregonian children suffering under CDL. We must come together to find a healthy compromise to get our schools back open safely. I feel that is it possible based on what other schools are doing in other states. That, combined with the overall excellent Oregon state COVID metrics, compared to other states, as well as our currently decreasing case count - all of these things need to be taken into consideration for school re-opening.

We feel disheartened to see the children of relatives in other states, happily returning to schools with masks on. We wonder what is different and special about Oregon, when our state metrics are better than those other states? We see Washington Square mall open and wonder why people can congregate at an indoor mall for shopping, yet Portland's children are shut out from their schools indefinitely? None of this makes any sense in the 10th month of the pandemic and truly, we are running out of reasons to tell our kids why this is happening to them.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

Sincerely,

Jane Perlas