

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am the working mother of two children. My oldest is a Kindergartner in the Beaverton School District. I am writing you to urgently ask you to do everything in your power to support the opening of our schools and return to in-person education. I am grateful to live in Oregon, with some of the lowest rates of Covid in the country. When schools shut down last March, I viewed it as a necessary sacrifice to close schools in order to help prevent the kind of horror we were all seeing in northern Italy and NYC. Then we saw case rates go down, and a return to in-person dining, bowling, drinking in bars, exercising in gyms, shopping, and many other activities, all while school children remained sequestered at home, as if no one was advocating for them. I was shocked by our state's priorities, but understood that the science was still unclear about the role of children spreading the virus and teachers in particular were very worried. (It was also clear that business leaders were very vocal about the need to reopen and that teacher's unions had zero faith in the district's ability to protect them with proper PPE and safety precautions.)

Meanwhile, my normally outgoing, happy, confident child was exhibiting behavior regressions, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. Eventually, we began allowing outdoor playdates, and the suicidal thoughts and depression lessened. Summer came, and we sent him, masked and armed with hand sanitizer, to tennis camp, soccer camp, Trackers outdoor camp. Anything that would give him a chance at social interaction and an opportunity to build his sense of self beyond his role as a big brother and family member. He returned to his old self. He became more confident, he smiled more. We had our child back.

It never occurred to me that school would not resume in-person by mid-November. The science seemed very clear that children in the lower grades were less likely to spread the coronavirus, and pediatricians were raising alarm bells about the disastrous effects of missing in-person school. My nephew in London had been back to school since July, as they tried to make up what was missed the previous spring. When it became obvious that school would not open I went into panic mode, and by some miracle found a nanny, who we share with one other family. If it were not for her, and my ability to afford the \$1600/month that I pay her, I would have had to quit the marketing career that I love to be a kindergarten assistant, a role that I have zero qualifications for. It's a privilege to have this support, and with this support and a great teacher, we are somehow getting through.

Then, our nanny took her paid Christmas Holiday to see family in Ventura, CA and caught Covid. For three weeks in January, my husband and I attempted to balance two robust careers that we have the privilege of doing from home, while keeping a toddler alive, and a kindergartner on track with iPad School. The best teacher in the world does not make this situation equal to the in-person experience. The prolonged nature of CDL shows a complete disrespect for working families. Schools are essential. Teachers are essential workers and they deserve the protections necessary to keep them safe at work, in a classroom with the children who need them. Nurses show up for work. Grocery workers carry on. Bus drivers continue to drive buses. Children all over the world have returned to school and by now, Oregon has the advantage of learning from what others have done.

I urge you to follow the science, and to do whatever necessary to make sure that schools and teachers have the funding and support that they need to get children back in classrooms. If it means that school districts need added protection from liability claims, so be it. A year of school missed cannot be made up. We cannot wait until Autumn. I realize that none of us has been through a pandemic before, but we are failing our children. We need rapid testing for schools, and PPE, and clear protocols for a return. I

don't want to send my kid into an unsafe environment but it seems clear that masks, and smaller groups, and open windows and hand washing can all help to keep him safe. Children the world over are going back to school. Even here in Portland, privileged children at private schools carry on, learning and accelerating and furthering the inequality that so many of us wish to end.

We can't wait.

Thank you for considering the needs of children and working families.

Best wishes,

Rian