

Dear Oregon Senate Education Committee Members,

I am the mother of 2 teenage daughters currently enrolled at Grant High School in Portland. One is a Junior and she is doing well, considering the circumstances, but she has a strong work ethic, a strong circle of friends and 2 years of high school under her belt. I do worry about her giving up on the idea of school and her plans of attending college though if the schools are not to reopen this year.

My other daughter is a Freshman and has never been able to set foot into her high school. She's never met a single teacher or staff member in person or had the opportunity to make new friendships which she was so looking forward to after spending 9 years at the same small elementary school. She also had been suffering from some anxiety, and we now know depression and self-harming, and attempted to take her life on October 17, 2020. Luckily, I found her in time and was able to get her to the emergency room where she spent 3 days hooked up to an IV with antidote for Tylenol overdose. We spent a total of 7 days in the hospital under 24 hour supervision while we waited for an opening in either an inpatient or outpatient treatment center, and then my daughter spent another 4 nights in an adolescent treatment center. Am I saying that this happened because schools are closed? I'm not sure, but I believe strongly that she had lost hope and the monotony of the endless days of isolation and being "unseen" at school made her decision easier. She had no reason to care about school even though she was a 4.0 student who was well-liked by teachers prior to the shutdown. It was easy for her to hide behind her computer and she was too anxious to turn on her camera, and we had no idea how badly she was suffering. See, the shutdown has affected everyone in some way and parents are struggling as well to just keep it together. We don't know what "normal" shutdown anxiety looks like and we had never dealt with mental health issues before this. I know that she is not the only student (or family) feeling this way or the only student who has attempted suicide or is self-harming themselves. Spend a day with nurses and doctors in the Adolescent Psychiatry wards and they will tell you the real story. All mental health issues are at an alarming rate!

I strongly urge you to fight harder to have our schools reopened to at least a Hybrid style before this school year ends. And reopen athletics and facilities that allow kids to be kids and have access to building relationships with people other than their immediate families. They need this and we know that it can be done safely based on science and the data of states and districts that are doing it. Ten months of school closure is too long! Adults have not waited so long to enjoy a beer or cocktails. Look at how creative bars and restaurants have had to become to ensure their livelihood. We can do better for our kids and not just by taking them out of public schools and building our own pods or putting them into private schools. CDL is not what I want my hard-earned tax dollars to go to. Please help give our kids some HOPE! So many are counting on you to do the right thing.

Thank you for your time and hard work.

Sincerely,
Jean Zuber Marshburn