

Dear Senate Committee on Education,

I am a physician and father of two children in the Portland Public School system.

We are committed to this community and had always backed our teachers with our full support as they have historically gone above and beyond for the needs of our children.

Our state's history is at an inflection point. We need to decide which side of history we will fall on.

I am writing to strongly support the re-opening of schools in the state now.

We have sworn that we will follow the science. The evidence is clear. Opening of schools is low risk to our children, our teachers, and our community. Advocating for no risk is clearly misinformed. There is very little influenza in the state (none in Multnomah County). We cannot simply make a similar argument that influenza causes death and illness, so we need to maintain closures. The same can be said for sports and driving. The practice needs to be about accepting, but modifying risk. Distance learning is not an acceptable modification for a young learner.

The Governor has made the mistake of prioritizing teachers over the frail elderly population for vaccine administration in our state. The decision will cost the lives of Oregonians, but I understand why she did it. The teachers are simply unwilling to work without perceived adequate protection. I can tell you that the protection is already adequate. It has been across half the country that has allowed students to learn in person.

As a physician, I consider myself an essential worker. I haven't missed a day of work since the pandemic started and have treated Oregon's sickest patients, Covid included. Not one person in the largest health care system in Oregon has contracted the virus from a known patient exposure. Not one. People get it from the community and they get it from their social interactions at work. Basic precautions are sufficient. This is very clear in healthcare. I wish the community could understand it.

Lastly, can we please put the future generation of Oregonians first? I think we all have clarity that children are suffering and are the real victims of this pandemic. Those with sustained fear do not need to go to school. However, I plead my case that teachers are more essential than other community members that we support.

Please advocate for the immediate re-opening of Oregon Schools.

Regards,

Mike

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