

Dear Legislature,

I truly wanted to start this letter out on a positive note. In fact, my first draft started out that way. However, I find that when it comes to my health, my family's well-being, and our community's safety that it is more important to be plain spoken and truthful.

I do agree with you that we need to get our children back in school; however I want to add **when it is safest for our communities to do so**. Yes, being back in schools, **when it is safer to be so**, will greatly benefit our students. I am a mother and I see just how much anxiety, stress, and depression my own children are going through during this time. I also see that same level of anxiety, stress, and depression mirrored in many other parts of the community. It is not limited to our students.

And school's opening will not solve these issues for our children! Students will still be in the midst of a pandemic. Their lives will still be disrupted. They will still be surrounded by anxious, stressed, and depressed individuals - many of whom might be the very people they might normally look to for support while at school.

It would be fair to say that this school year does not look like anyone expected it would. It would even be fair to say that many planned lessons are not able to be taught this year. But that doesn't mean that educators are not working harder than ever. And it doesn't mean that educators don't yearn to get back into the classroom with their students. You see, I work in schools. I, personally, find it so much easier to connect with students in person. However, I am also a mother, wife, and friend and I would hate to have these connections severed (maybe permanently) due to a Covid 19 infection that could have been prevented.

I do not subscribe to the magical thinking that Covid 19 stops at school doors. The majority (if not entirety) of results cited are skewed; they are from times when schools were closed, are in areas that are not specifically testing for cases at schools, or are collected early in the opening process before cases have had a chance to increase. Add to that the lack of testing relating to kids, and that kids are more likely to have asymptomatic to mild cases, and you have a resounding lack of data.

An article on CNBC states: "A study by researchers at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich determined that Switzerland's decision to shut schools last March was responsible for cutting mobility by 21.6%. The study, published Sunday and not yet been peer-reviewed, found school closures ranked third in reducing mobility nationwide — and therefore Covid transmission. A ban on gatherings of more than five people was shown to be the most effective policy tool, cutting mobility by around a quarter, while the closure of restaurants, bars and nonessential shops caused people to reduce total trips by 22.3%." (1/13/2021 [https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/13/coronavirus-children-and-schools-a-guide-on-what-we-know-so-far.html?fbclid=IwAR2vG2\\_wjLhwY9GMXpPP1Ms8UISdXeoroJT2214z6w7mqFAdLf5ZD2aXR5o](https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/13/coronavirus-children-and-schools-a-guide-on-what-we-know-so-far.html?fbclid=IwAR2vG2_wjLhwY9GMXpPP1Ms8UISdXeoroJT2214z6w7mqFAdLf5ZD2aXR5o))

Another article, this time from The Guardian, says: "A key factor in the spread of Covid-19 in schools is symptomless cases. Most scientists believe that between 30% and 40% of adults do not display any Covid symptoms on the day of testing, even if they have been infected. For children, however, this figure is higher. "It is probably more like 50% for those in secondary school while for boys and girls in primary school, around 70% may not be displaying symptoms even though they have picked up the virus," says Professor Martin Hibberd of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine." (1/2/2021

[https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/02/symptomless-cases-schools-key-driver-spread-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR0sVbJ7ZYfeNRu2BSvUESpeaaPBr2J-2Euugc5X-zDeOZDMIm6b4F\\_jRG8](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/02/symptomless-cases-schools-key-driver-spread-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR0sVbJ7ZYfeNRu2BSvUESpeaaPBr2J-2Euugc5X-zDeOZDMIm6b4F_jRG8))

A WebMD article states “While children are less susceptible to illness with the new coronavirus, they are nearly 60% more likely than adults over 60 to infect other family members when they are sick, a new study shows.” (1/21/2021

[https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210121/kids-highly-likely-to-transmit-covid-to-others?fbclid=IwAR3uRb\\_olHnQU4\\_teG3qIBZ\\_34f90aeKdjWMUadLRtSV1EhaCVtxFdAF1wU#1](https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210121/kids-highly-likely-to-transmit-covid-to-others?fbclid=IwAR3uRb_olHnQU4_teG3qIBZ_34f90aeKdjWMUadLRtSV1EhaCVtxFdAF1wU#1))

I’m done quoting from articles, but I suggest reading the above as well as the rest that I’ll leave here. Basically, the science regarding children and Covid 19 is the same as adults - mask up, wash well and frequently, keep your bubble small, socially isolate to the best of your ability, and limit your time in closed-air situations with people outside of your immediate bubble.

- Largest COVID-19 contact tracing study to date finds children key to spread, evidence of superspreaders [https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/09/30/largest-covid-19-contact-tracing-study-date-finds-children-key-spread-evidence?fbclid=IwAR32RQcd77elgKpluUzCZm-RK3E-FWwAg\\_61r6KudPK\\_BvHAUvMe481syjU](https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/09/30/largest-covid-19-contact-tracing-study-date-finds-children-key-spread-evidence?fbclid=IwAR32RQcd77elgKpluUzCZm-RK3E-FWwAg_61r6KudPK_BvHAUvMe481syjU)
- CHOP Researchers Find Elevated Biomarker Related to Blood Vessel Damage in All Children with SARS-CoV-2 Regardless of Disease Severity <https://www.chop.edu/news/chop-researchers-find-elevated-biomarker-related-blood-vessel-damage-all-children-sars-cov-2?fbclid=IwAR2xyELrCPvOkyO-eRFdwYhY9Z3QobuA1IVbWsjZLZ63B05jwJoNzOOsyLo>
- COVID-19 positivity rates in Austin schools worry health officials [https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-positivity-rates-austin-schools-worry-health/story?id=75248906&fbclid=IwAR2DbNGkSDDWFrRmkMBznGbr0xTekgT\\_PuzdZBoe-f10xZzqKfeORzOHY5M](https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-positivity-rates-austin-schools-worry-health/story?id=75248906&fbclid=IwAR2DbNGkSDDWFrRmkMBznGbr0xTekgT_PuzdZBoe-f10xZzqKfeORzOHY5M)
- Are the symptoms of COVID-19 different in children? Do the new variants impact children differently? What can parents do to keep children safe from COVID-19? <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/posts/3945582115487142> (especially listen to the clips from 2:37 and 4:30)
- Airborne-particle experts explain how to stay safe from new highly contagious coronavirus strain <https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2021/01/airborne-particle-experts-explain-how-to-stay-safe-from-new-highly-contagious-coronavirus-strain.html?fbclid=IwAR32PrPh6Fs-E4FP3vKTVnythH6NM4avy0pc5VtVj6wRt1jho59vJ1qWURWs>

Schools are hubs within our communities. Even with the best of intentions, our bubbles will be lost. Once I go back to in-person schooling I am automatically exposed to at least 26 other families (I counted), and that’s just my exposure from our tiny life skills classroom. I will be required to be within close contact to the other staff in the room and the students as we help lift students into wheelchairs, help with toileting, feeding, and just generally need to be in closer contact throughout our time due to their needs. This contact puts me in their bubbles which can include dual households (split parents), PSWs that support the students' needs in their homes, and other family members who live outside the home.

Currently, if I were to return to school my district could legally ask that I interact with the majority of students within a building. There is NO LIMIT on how many individuals that adults within a school can interact with - no cohort size. My risk was never part of the equation taken

into account when trying to figure out how to open schools up safely. However, I am not disposable or expendable.

Furthermore, I strongly object to the idea that learning only happens in the classroom. I have seen incredible growth and learning happen this past school year. It can't be measured in the standardized tests, but it has been happening. I've watched our kids build endurance - especially with growth mindset, gain independence, and grow in ways that would never have been available in normal circumstances. I am confident that, when it is safer, we will all come together and find a myriad of ways that our students have grown and flourished during this time.

I also want to add that it is a very loud minority that is pushing for reopening of schools. The common "If you can go to Costco then you can go to school" is a common theme I hear from them. However, the last time I checked, most shoppers don't go to Costco for 4-6 hours a day multiple days a week. Chicago has already found this out as "about 19% of students eligible to return for in-person classes." (1/22/2021 [https://www.wbez.org/stories/less-than-20-of-eligible-chicago-public-schools-students-returned-for-in-person-classes/2f429c39-eced-4fbb-b727-14506960f0a0?fbclid=IwAR0\\_8dewZ1Xp4W\\_1o9MpdmVLdbeVsSheDZr7mpjVSNiy5kgVmAJVf3rAZDE](https://www.wbez.org/stories/less-than-20-of-eligible-chicago-public-schools-students-returned-for-in-person-classes/2f429c39-eced-4fbb-b727-14506960f0a0?fbclid=IwAR0_8dewZ1Xp4W_1o9MpdmVLdbeVsSheDZr7mpjVSNiy5kgVmAJVf3rAZDE))

I strongly urge you to promote a plan that keeps classrooms limited and mostly as distant-learning until all school staff, all "essential" employees who have to be in-person, and high risk individuals have been vaccinated (and had the time necessary for the full effect to take place). Schools should also remain limited when community spread is high. Closing schools to in-person when community spread is high is shutting down a hub. The effects will help our community stay healthier and our hospitals cope.

I also ask that when you do reopen schools that you include a mandate that everyone (unvaccinated) in a school building gets a randomized Covid test at least once a month as well as whenever anyone has symptoms at school, and whenever anyone is coming back from being sick. Let's do the work to get good data available for our decision makers. This will also help school employees feel safer and less disposable.

Finally, I leave you with one last consideration. I will **NOT** be going back into an unsafe situation. Our family will lose income and health insurance, but we will do what is necessary to not lose a life. We would rather be on state assistance than burying a loved one. If I find myself looking for a new job, I will be sure to ask the question, "What did your district/business do to keep its employees safe during the pandemic?" Oregon already has an insufficient number of educators available. Your actions could be what make even more leave (or not consider moving here). Or you could take a strong stand in support of students, educators, their families, and their well-being.

Sincerely,  
An Oregon Educator, Special Education Assistant, Mother, Wife, Community Member  
Suzanna Fitch