

The following email is to be written testimony for the Senate Committee on Education's January 27th meeting.

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and Other Committee Members,

My name is Cassie Swift. I am a resident of Marion County and a 4th and 5th grade teacher for Salem Keizer Public Schools. It is my strong belief that we should return to school as quickly as possible, with the appropriate safety measures in place. Research has shown that with proper COVID-19 guidelines in place, school can be a safe environment, both for teachers as well as for students. While the Oregon Education Association and its local chapters are actively fighting against the return to school, many of the teachers they claim to represent are fighting to return. Our students are struggling socially, emotionally, and academically. Even the ones who are "doing well" when we look at assignments alone (which are few and far between), are self-reporting sadness and loneliness all the time. This is evidenced by personal conversations with students, as well as our district's social emotional survey (Panorama). I have students who have not attended school since last March. I have students who are taken care of by older siblings, or even who *are* the older siblings taking care of younger ones, at just 10 years old. This detracts from their ability to focus on their own school work, when they are concerned with ensuring their sibling does theirs. Parents still need to work in order to provide for their families; this is no fault of theirs. While schools shouldn't solely be seen as "daycares," the reality is school really is a place to CARE for children. There is nothing wrong with that. Right now, our schools are failing at this simple task. Teachers are doing everything they can, but there is only so much we can do from behind a screen. Our students need to be back in our classrooms, where they can learn and grow in all aspects. The loneliness, sadness, and isolation that they are experiencing, in order to take care of their teachers, is not a burden a child should carry, especially since it is not one rooted in science. Because school is proven to be a safe place, when proper COVID-19 guidelines are followed, it is our duty to open schools in a safe way. Please do so immediately.

Thank you,
Cassie Swift