

I am worried about what would happen if you let people pressure you back into reopening physical schools too early.

I would say that we have an aging teacher population, meaning the majority of teachers are high risk, but you probably heard that. I would say teachers are retiring when we need more teachers in order to teach these students, which would cause people with less experience or even less qualifications, but you probably heard that. I would say that the behaviors we expect of children would take a mental toll on them, but you probably heard that. I would say the classrooms are actually unsafe and many schools across the country that already reopened have been shut down due to the spread of covid, but you probably heard that.

The truth is, I think basically everything has been tried except for a certain experience I had in highschool, not too many years ago. I don't think others have this experience, so it's important for me to get the word out. I actually tried to learn under extremely similar conditions as the ones my sister's high school set. Even without dangerous germs added to the mix, it was a nightmare.

First, some information about who I was before the experience. I was a gifted child when it came to math and science. I absolutely loved school because I thought math and science were fun. I was hard working and a couple grades ahead in math. This was me. This was how I was. (I also lost second grade due to seizures and the following exhaustion, even being described as ragdoll like by doctors. Fun fact: the seizures made me right handed.)

Now, let's talk about my experience. It was algebra II. I was sat at a computer in a classroom to do an online class. At first, I was going through the class really quick and accurately because of my existing math skills. Then came logarithms. (I still don't like logarithms.) This is where I started getting stuck. At first, I tried to reread the text to see if I could spot what I did wrong. After a couple rereads, I figured it was time to ask for help.

Asking for help proved pointless. The teachers that were supposed to help me learn math weren't really qualified to do so. They were special ed teachers that were at a lower level in math than I was. Any time I asked for help, I would end up teaching THEM math. There was one teacher in that classroom that knew math, but I had limited ability to ask him questions. He wasn't even there the same period as when I was taking math.

With asking for help basically out of the question, I went back to rereading over and over again. After the tenth time reading it, I started to feel like that method of learning wouldn't help. What was left?

I quickly learned the check ins were about twenty minutes apart, so I would ask for the test to be reset then. Then I would do guess work for the test hoping to get it right since it was clear at that point that I wouldn't be able to learn that part of the content. I started playing games in a different tab, switching back when I hear the footsteps approaching to make it look like I was actually working. Nobody ever realised I was slacking off. I was slacking off because I felt hopeless and trapped by the system.

I failed that class, so what did the school do? **THEY PUT ME IN THE SAME CLASS AND SAME CLASSROOM ONLY CHANGING ONE VARIABLE.** They gave me a tutor, which was a change my mom fought for, meaning if it weren't for my mom, I would have been forced into the same exact variables!

I met with the tutor once a week, but by the time I got a tutor, the damage had already been done. I was already trained that asking for help was pointless. Even when I did ask my tutor for help, the tutor would explain things in a way my brain didn't understand. It would have been nice if I had a classmate at my math level that I could ask. I flew through the beginning of that class, only to get stuck on logarithms again. I failed the class again.

By that time, my mom started to get ticked off at my school. She knew I was starting to hate math and school. She started fighting to get me into a regular class with a qualified teacher. Here we go. My third attempt at logarithms.

I got into a regular class with a qualified teacher. I FLEW THROUGH THAT CLASS AND MY CLASSMATES HELPED ME ACTUALLY LEARN LOGARITHMS! Seriously, my classmates from that class remember me as “one of the smart ones.” It’s amazing how much difference being able to get help from your peers is. It didn’t repair my love for math, though.

This experience might sound different than what the children would go through, so let me point out the similarities. 1) being seated in a way that makes you feel separate from your classmates 2) limited ability to ask for help 3) the risk of getting a teacher that doesn’t know what they’re doing 4) risk of the teacher explaining things in unhelpful ways 5) the inability to properly ask peers to translate it into words you understand 6) being sat at a computer in a classroom and expected to learn 7) the loneliness that comes from being so close to somebody who can help you yet being unable to ask them for help

I’d like you to understand that the person who fought to free me from the loneliness and the feeling of being trapped by the system is now fighting to keep schools closed.

In the end, you should play a game of worst case scenarios. Would you rather go down in history for needless loss of education or for needless loss of life? Here’s another game of worst case scenarios: I lost second grade due to seizures and the exhaustion that followed. I also lost my dad due to a heart attack 20 days before my ninth birthday. Which do you think affected me more?

I want to become a teacher once I finish college. I’ve wanted to become a teacher ever since I was a young child. I knew teachers don’t make much money, but I still wanted to be one. I knew teachers often have to buy materials for their classroom from their own money, and I was okay with it. I learned teachers are expected to be a human shield during mass shootings if need be, and my dedication didn’t change. Now teachers are speaking up about not wanting to get sick or not wanting their students to get sick, and there’s backlash about that. Now, I’m not sure I want to be a teacher. We have a society that expects too much from our teachers and doesn’t fund education or the teachers enough to actually do what’s expected of them. If schools do open up too early, I likely will drop out of college and never become a teacher because society is saying that teacher lives don’t matter.

Please consider keeping schools closed no matter what the backlash says and reconsider sending the youngest students, who aren’t old enough to have the critical thinking required to keep themselves safe, back first. If I went back to the models I’ve seen during my formative years, I would probably have never wanted to go to college or become a teacher.

In the end, we need to realise in person classes are not much better if they’re being safe, and you can recover education, but you can’t recover lives.