

To the Senate Committee on Education

My written testimony is to address concerns over school reopening.

I am a former Oregon educator (teacher, school counselor) and currently a sub (or will be again when in person learning starts) in a couple of districts.

My last day of work was March 13th, the last day of school before things shut down. I saw the notice in my email just before going for the sub job I had signed up for the day before...schools would be closing early for an extended spring break. Most students had found out too before leaving for school and the mood was subdued; I had them talk and draw pictures about what they planned to do over the next few weeks.

It is close to a year later and I have missed seeing and working with children, and I am eager to return to work. But I do not want to go back, and I do not want the students back, and I do not want educators back until it is entirely safe for all; including student families and our communities.

I was a working parent of three young children while I was working as a teacher and counselor. I know how it must feel to parents who are struggling to juggle work and overseeing distance learning. I can imagine what it must be like for parents who have had to make decisions about quitting jobs or taking a leave because child care is expensive and not readily available right now. And I can imagine how concerned they must be about their children's education and how stressful it must feel to see their children struggling with work at home

But lost classroom time, lost work time, and the challenges of overseeing schooling while working is a small price to pay for the health, safety, and lives of our students, educators, families, and communities. I realize that many parents feel they do not have options left them except to reopen school. But children bounce back, our economy will bounce back, and our lives will approach 'normalcy' only when we first deal with getting Covid infection rates and transmission rates way down in our communities. That should be the very first priority of the state and the legislature. What the Senate Committee on Education can do is ensure that Oregon students get the best and most equitable education possible while schools remain closed by helping fund those things that will accomplish this goal. And the Education Committee can help set some standards about school reopening and what is absolutely needed for a return to in person learning for the health and safety of everyone.

Teachers must have the opportunity to be fully vaccinated. And it takes up to two weeks for the full effectiveness of the vaccines to kick in. That is a time period of several weeks between when educators get their first shots, then second, then reach that two week timeline. Students 16 and over must be fully vaccinated as well in order to return.

Buildings must have updated ventilation systems and all educators must have access to full PPE; masks must be available to students as well.

Testing, contact tracing, and isolating protocols for every school must be in place, including school health care workers at each site.

Educators must be able to fully quarantine at home if they are in any contact with a positive case without pay repercussions.

And metrics for community transmission must be set as mandatory, not just guidance. As the OEA president has pointed out, having unclear, inconsistent guidance is not fair to educators and students and families.

There are conflicting reports about transmission in students. I encourage you all to read all the science and data. And the new variant, now in Oregon, appears to be 50% more transmissible. Childhood cases have surpassed 2 million in the US, according the Children's Hospital Association and the AAP. Yes, Oregon Covid numbers are coming down. One reason is less testing being done. But another is that Oregon has been delaying in person education in so much of the state. Opening schools before the safety measures above are met will reverse the progress we have made. And we must not forget that the most vulnerable and affected people in the state, students from minority, immigrant, and low income families must be considered; keeping children home protects their families and communities.

Let's keep our children, our educators, our families, our communities safe. If we have to wait until after spring break, so educators, students 16 and over, and more community members can all be fully vaccinated, and infection rates keep coming down, it will well be worth another 2 months of distance learning to protect and save health and lives.

Thank you.

Lisa Carol Stiller, Beaverton, Oregon

(14685 SW Osprey,Dr.,#1114, Beaverton, OR 97007)