



RE: Concerns of API Community with K-12 Schools Reopening

Chair Dembrow
Vice Chair Thomsen
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

January 28, 2021

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I am writing on behalf of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) to express the concerns of schools reopening from the parents we work with in our Community Development programming. APANO unites Asian and Pacific Islanders to build power, develop leaders, and advance equity through organizing, advocacy, cultural work, and community development. We envision a just world where Asians and Pacific Islanders and communities who share our aspirations and struggles have the power, resources, and voice to determine our own futures, and where we work in solidarity to drive political, social, economic, and cultural change.

COVID has deeply affected our community, through [Asian-owned small businesses closing at rapid levels](#), food insecurity, and the lack of resources and outreach in language. For our youth, distance learning has brought forth new challenges and has led to a lack of connection to peers, their teachers, and a decline in their mental health. However, the thought of going back to school is distressing and adds further complications to an already taxing reality. Many of whom live in multigenerational households with family members who do not have ready access to healthcare.

For some of our parents, going back to school brings fear of contracting COVID, and for others having to choose between a job and filing for unemployment to support their children's learning continues to be a daily struggle. It is also concerning to bring their children back to underfunded schools where teachers will now also act as mental health supports without appropriate preparation.

Historically underserved communities face the most barriers to accessing education, and yet, are typically the last ones considered with any decision. We must include the concerns of Pacific Islander and Asian communities with going back into the classroom and invest in supporting families through reopening decisions, in partnership with community-based organizations and other trusted partners.

Sincerely,
Lanea Olson