

Dave Wenell  
24124 135<sup>th</sup> Ave. N.  
Rogers, MN. 55374  
June 22nd, 2020

Alyssa Fritz  
Committee Administrator - DFL Caucus  
574 State Office Building  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul Minnesota 55155

Dear Alyssa,

My name is Dave Wenell. I am father to amazing 6 year old boy named Jaxon. He has a medical diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder – Level 1, Language Disorder, and Anxiety Disorder Unspecified. He attends Rogers Elementary School in the ISD 728 school district since October of last year. He is also on an IEP and has been for the past 3 years.

I am writing this letter to you to express my grave concerns and personal experiences I've witnessed firsthand on how the current school policy of distance learning and potential continuation of that policy in the fall has directly impacted my family and most importantly, my son. Before I go into more detail, I want to be clear with my stance as a parent that my son must attend school in the fall "as normal" pre-COVID without any full or partial distance learning policy in place. My son must attend school in person without mask requirements and no distance learning.

There is really no way to sugar coat my family's personal experience with distance learning other than to say it has been a complete and utter abject failure. Due to my son's medical diagnosis, he has struggled significantly with social interaction on a good day under normal circumstances. He was literally just starting to learn how to socially interact with other peers when COVID happened. What happened afterwards with schools closed and distance learning instituted resulted in significant deterioration of any positive progress made prior to COVID as the weeks and months dragged on. Those impacts included: no where to go, no one to play with, no playgrounds to go to, all of his medical therapy appointments cancelled because he was deemed "not essential", swim classes cancelled, and most importantly, all his IEP related state mandated services cancelled such as occupational therapy and speech therapy. The school system completely left my son behind and left him in a far worse place than before COVID. It is impossible for any child, much-less a child with the challenges my son has, to learn how to socially interact with others without actually socially interacting with others. It is not possible to teach social interaction with a "distance learning"

policy in effect. Furthermore, there are many skills that require side-by-side help that cannot be simulated in a “distance learning” environment.

As harsh as this sounds, anything less than a return to school in the fall “as normal”, in person without masks will be the equivalent of saying my son doesn’t deserve an education and deserves to be left behind. My son deserves an education. He deserves the help he needs to succeed in life. He deserves to be around peers his age to learn social interaction and to frankly just “be a kid”. He deserves the same life experiences that we were afforded.

In summary, as educators you know as well as I do these years are as critical as they get to set a solid foundation to build upon for a child’s future education and the rest of their lives. Social interaction cannot be learned in a “distance learning” environment. Special needs kids such as my son require services that cannot be simulated in a “distance learning” environment and must be provided in person. Please I beg of you to abandon the “social distancing” path and resume school in the fall as normal with a pre-COVID policy in place. Please make the right decision for my son Jaxon and don’t leave him behind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Wenell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "D".

Dave Wenell

To All,

Recently the State of MN and Department of Education published three different scenarios for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year.

First and foremost, the three scenarios being considered are NOT ACCEPTABLE to me . Given the actual statistics, it is clear that Covid19 does not impact the younger generation as it does the older generation. The numbers do not warrant the very limited three considerations on the table. Why is a "traditional" school year not being considered at all?

For scenario #1, will there be partitions between the desks? Will children be able to physically interact with other students both in the classroom and on the playground? Will recess be a typical part of the day? Will the students have to eat home lunch in the classroom or will they be able to have lunch in the cafeteria with their peers? Will students be required to wear masks at school?

These are all questions that we (and I'm sure many others) are wanting answers to. We feel very strongly that we should not be instilling panic and fear into our young children and their school lives should continue as normal. I simply cannot imagine sending our 5 year old to kindergarten for the first time and having crazy restrictions placed upon her. Our 3rd grader will not be willing/eager to go to school as he has been for the past three years.

Distance learning was incredibly difficult for our family. The ambition wasn't there, the desire to learn wasn't there, there was nothing new taught, the redundancy of "book a day" was exhausting and it became a very stressful situation for our family. It truthfully felt like a complete waste of time. We cannot even imagine distance learning with a kindergartner.

If our children will not be allowed to be children at school full time in September in a traditional way, we are considering all other options (home schooling, private schooling, moving out of the state, etc.).

Again, the statistics (not assumptions) about this virus do not warrant anything other than a traditional school year for students.

Becky Thigpen

## **The Kids Need to Get Back to School!**

Kids need school. Normal school.

They need a classroom setting for interaction with their peers.

This encourages empathy towards others, and problem-solving skills. The hands-on experience of a classroom setting encourages curiosity and a passion for life-long learning. It also expands outside the classroom, via field trips, visitors and mentors, which expand a child's view beyond his classroom, his school, his town and beyond; to a world view.

Kids need physical education. They need exercise. Not just to control weight, but to improve attention, brain function, and overall health.

Kids need sports. They need it for exercise, yes; but also to learn to work together as team, to strive for one goal. This in turn teaches problem-solving skills. It develops leaders.

Kids need nutritious meals. For some children, the food they get at school is the only food they will get all day.

Normal school means No masks. Normal school means being realistic about 'social distancing.' Children have a very low, nearly zero, chance of getting COVID 19. As the virus has spread throughout the population, it has become less and less deadly, and will continue to do so. Like the seasonal flu, it will most likely always be with us. It is therefore unreasonable to expect and require the children to refrain from touching one another or to wear masks. Kids need to see faces to be able to read a person's state of mind; again, this teaches and encourages empathy. Masks also interfere with a person's ability to get enough oxygen, that of an active child. A mask will not allow for the normal function of their brains.

Parents need school. Normal school.

As the state begins to open up, many (most) parents are returning to work. Childcare becomes a top-of-mind concern for parents of school-age children. School provides a safe environment for children while parents are working keep a roof overhead and food their bellies; Who is to care for the kids—and teach them—during the day if they don't return to school?? How are parents to suddenly pay for this care? During the stay-home order, many day-cares closed, never to re-open; finding care would be yet another obstacle.

Kids Need School. Normal School.

Parents need school. Normal School

Given these, and many other concerns that I have not addressed, I implore you to please:  
Send the kids back to school. Normal School.

*~Jan Johnson, White Bear Lake*

Alyssa Fritz

Committee Administrator at Minnesota DFL Caucus

[ALYSSA.FRITZ@HOUSE.MN](mailto:ALYSSA.FRITZ@HOUSE.MN)

Re: 6/24/2020 hearing regarding the 2020-2021 school year

Ms. Fritz,

Our children NEED to return to school this fall, in person.

Keeping children isolated is NOT in the best interest of our future generations. We have decades of research that shows the significance of early learning, or lack thereof, on the trajectory of a child's education and life. We have decades of research that shows how important HUMAN contact is for the development of our brains. We have decades of statistics that paint the heartbreaking reality of what happens to abused children when they are isolated from mandated reporters. What we DON'T have convincing data on, is that shutting down schools changes the outcome of the COVID-19; yet, here we are.

We are blessed to have some amazing educators in our school district. However, despite the best efforts between educators and parents, the education our students received this spring was unacceptable. Many of the students that were fortunate to live in a safe home, have access to technology, food, and support at home, still struggled with depression, anxiety, social isolation, and not to mention significant learning loss, this spring.

What we are doing to our children is NOT okay. It is NOT okay to risk the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of our children. It is NOT okay to isolate the abused and neglected children and chalk them up to another casualty of COVID-19. It is NOT okay for us to ignore the lifelong consequences these decisions will have on our youth.

My expectation is that our leaders can table their political motives on this issue. This should not be about being Republican or Democrat, Liberal or Conservative, this vote is about doing what is best for the educational and overall wellbeing of our youth.

Thank you,

Joleen Quisberg

Representing Nisswa Elementary School, Nisswa Minnesota

Joleen\_thisis@hotmail.com

6/24/2020

Alyssa Fritz

Committee Administrator at Minnesota DFL Caucus

[Alyssa.Fritz@House.MN](mailto:Alyssa.Fritz@House.MN)

Dear Alyssa,

I am writing to you concerning the re-entrance of in-school attendance this upcoming school year 2020-2021.

I have 16 year old identical twin daughters with very different learning abilities. It is my belief that during the last three months of school, my daughters did not learn anything new, but this was not the fault of school administration. I believe they did the best they could with what they had, but e-learning was not effective for my daughters coupled with the added stress of a new learning format, confusion, and longer instruction times. On three separate occasions my daughter had contacted their school principal to express her concern with the heavy workload and overall frustration.

A school teacher is required to have a college degree with ongoing education. My education is in computer science, not as an educator. I do not agree that parents without a teaching degree should be allowed to (or dictated to) be the sole source of education for their children, especially in high school. I work full time for the State of MN and am unable to give them the one-on-one instruction time needed to help them thoroughly understand and demonstrate their lessons.

Continuing the elearning would not be beneficial for my daughters and it is my experience that the the kids will be the ones who suffer the most.

I'm asking you to support our children returning to their classrooms this fall.

Thank you,

Tonia Makarrall

Representing Pillager High School, Pillager, MN

[Tonia.Makarrall@state.mn.us](mailto:Tonia.Makarrall@state.mn.us)

**A Parent Statement For Opening MN Schools As Normal:**

My name is Kristine Modrow. I am a parent of a 4 healthy kids who want to go back to school in the fall, District 883.

This statement is to advocate for reopening of schools in Minnesota in person, as normal, without masks, distancing, or other protocols mandated upon the students.

Currently, **the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat COVID-19 is very weak** and data from influenza outbreaks suggest that school closures could have relatively small effects on a virus with COVID-19's high transmissibility and apparent low clinical effect on school children. At the same time, these data also show that school closures can have profound economic and social consequences.

The results of the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey by the Minnesota Department of Health:

“The new data also shows more Minnesota students than ever report having long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems. This number is up from 18 percent of students surveyed in 2016 to 23 percent in 2019. Eleventh-grade female students who report having long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems has more than doubled from 2013 to 2019. In the 2019 survey, of the 11th-grade female students who reported missing a full or partial day of school in the last 30 days, 24 percent reported that they missed school because they felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed or angry.”

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/.../.../studentsurvey101719.html...>

**WE need to reopen school to avoid the profound economic and social consequences any alternative would bring.**

Warm Regards,  
Kristine

**Kristine Modrow**

Phone: 612-819-4964

Email: [kmodrow@biolyph.com](mailto:kmodrow@biolyph.com)

June 23, 2020  
Woodbury, MN

**A Parent Statement for Opening MN Schools As Normal:**

My name is Glenn Fager. I am a parent of two students at St. Croix Prep Academy in Stillwater, MN – grades 9 and K.

I write to implore you to think critically before placing standards upon students for the upcoming school year that do NOT align with scientific evidence and create a negative learning experience for all students.

We do **NOT** support distance learning, social distancing or mask wearing for students in all grades. Consider:

Covid-19 Impact:

As you can see from the graph below based on CDC data, for the age group 0-19 years, of the children who got Covid-19, only **1.6% required hospitalization, 0% required ICU admission and there are zero deaths.**

Compare these results to seasonal flu which has not required schools to distance learn, social distance or require masks and you can conclude that reopening schools without ANY restrictions is the correct path forward.

# How COVID-19 Affects Different U.S. Age Groups

Hospitalization, ICU admission and fatality rates for reported U.S. COVID-19 cases by age group\*



\* Based on 2,449 COVID-19 patients with a known age.  
(February 12-March 16, 2020).

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Mask Effectiveness:

The “gold standard” of masks, N95, blocks 95% of particles measuring 0.3 microns and larger. Size of a Covid-19 particle is 0.125 microns. Surgical style masks are even less effective at blocking a small particle like Covid-19, making mask wearing an ineffectual barrier to spread.

Contributing to mask ineffectiveness is a child’s propensity to not constantly wear the mask correctly (pulling it down below the nose, touching it and other parts of face). How effective will a teacher be in policing a classroom full of mask wearers and still be able to teach effectively?

Herd Immunity:

Reconsider the graph above. Consider a child aged 0-19’s strong immune system. A much healthier approach to overcoming Covid-19 is to reopen schools without any restrictions and allow a child’s healthy immune system be the effective barrier that a mask is not.

Given the rarity of Covid-19’s impact on school-aged children (rarer than the flu), the ineffectiveness of masks to act as barriers, and the highly effective human immune system to act as a barrier, I ask that the decision panel reopen MN schools this fall without ANY restrictions.

Best regards,

Glenn Fager  
10095 Brookhaven Dr  
Woodbury, MN 55129  
612/990-8779

# School Year 2020-2021

June 22, 2020

To Whom This May Concern:

Hello. I am writing to you as a parent of an elementary aged child currently enrolled in the South Washington County Public School system. This letter is to express my concerns and desires for the 2020-2021 school year and beyond.

**The only method of schooling I support for 2020/2021 and beyond is the reopening of in-person education.** I do not support any method of online or hybrid learning models. I do not support the enforcement of social distancing or masks for students or staff. I do not support a “new normal”. I do not support a new style of classroom including drastically reduced class sizes.

**Here is what my family wants for the 2020-2021 school year and beyond:**

- **In person and on-site learning in a school building or similar environment**
- **OPTIONAL masks for students and staff members**
- **NO Social Distancing for children besides the normal respect shown for personal space**
- **Keep recess time and add additional time for free play**
- **Keep cafeteria environment open for lunch**
- **No toxic chemicals for sanitization**
- **Extra attention paid to handwashing**
- **OPTIONAL online/distance learning for those families who CHOOSE it**
- **Updated and stricter sick policy for students and staff – taking daily temperature is ok**

This letter is necessary because as a parent I must seek schooling that is both effective and fulfilling for my child. My daughter's school life after COVID19 was neither of those. This letter is to express my desires and concerns, and they are shared by many parents that fall into a group called the silent majority.

\*I am in a Facebook group called "Reopen Minnesota Schools". We currently have 3.1 thousand members. Even though you may not hear from each one of us, we stand together to reopen schools WITHOUT A NEW NORMAL.

\* Open up schools without a new normal. COVID19 is not affecting nearly as many people as once predicted.

\*If mandated, social distancing would create an unnecessary sense of fear for children that would last for years to come. Children are NOT a threat to each other. They are the group least at risk to catch COVID19.

\*I do not agree with taking away recess. Kids need to an energy release with other kids so they can return to the classroom better prepared to learn. Children of all ages need even more free play time now due to the emotional state they are in after being in quarantine.

\*I do not agree with taking away lunch period in the cafeteria. Kids need a break from learning and from their learning environment while they eat. Eating in the classroom would not be a break for students or staff.

\*The emotional toll that distance learning took and would continue to take on everyone affected, from children to parents to teachers to children of teachers is much more detrimental than the amount of COVID19 deaths. Please give proper consideration to this issue.

\*Over 95% of people who catch COVID19 fully recover. Over 42% of deaths are from 0.6% of the population.

\*The closing of schools has not significantly reduced the spread of the disease because they are not responsible for the spread of the disease. It is mainly spread from adult to adult or from adult to child.

\*Even if a small increase in COVID19 cases arises from opening schools back up, hospitals and ICUs are ready. They have the capacity and space now because the projected number of people to be affected by COVID19 is nowhere near what is currently accurate. The pandemic is not as much of a threat anymore.

\*The hybrid or fully online model of schooling would not allow for a normal workweek for parents who are employed. What would parents such as myself do if their place of employment is outside of the home but their young school aged child needs to be home for learning, even if only half of the week?

\*Online learning would increase the number of unsupervised children. This brings about another set of issues such as mental health instability, safety risks, malnutrition, etc.

\*The online instruction compiled after COVID19 was not effective. It is confusing, doesn't allow for a daily routine and many other issues. It took my daughter only 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete everything assigned. She learned very little from online instruction and having videos from teachers on YouTube was a total distraction because other video ads would pop up along the sides. If it wasn't for the worksheets I gave her that I later graded and provided feedback on, she would not have learned very much. YouTube videos from a teacher is not the style of learning that school aged children require to be successful. My daughter's teacher for 2019/2020 was one of the top teachers in the district and even he could not make it effective (not his fault). School aged children do not effectively learn from online instruction.

\*Please note that the hybrid model or in-person school with extreme social distancing models are still a form of online/ distance learning. Neither are effective.

\*Please do not punish innocent school children for political gain. They are not at fault for the current situation and they are our future leaders.

\*The school building and staff is more than just learning. It is a safe place for abused children, impoverished children, mentally unstable children. It provides the proper environment for children with various disabilities. Let them have their safe place back.

\*Let the parent make the choice to either send their child to school or to keep them home by using distance learning. You should not make that choice for us. Give us choices!

\*My family is being proactive and meeting with a private school next week to weigh our options outside of the public school district. We will not let our daughter fail because of potential poor choices made by those in charge of determining the 2020-2021 plan. We will not enroll her in online education if an in-person option is available.

\*If enforced or encouraged, masks will be a constant distraction from learning. Even if see-through, masks will make learning tougher when students are already behind. Mask use would bring about additional health problems.

\*I do not think constant disinfecting is beneficial. Germs are a necessary part of life, and by sanitizing or disinfecting everything in a school, it would wipe out the good germs needed to build a stronger immune system. Also, sanitizing products contain ingredients that are potentially even more harmful to a person's health than COVID19.

\*As a side note: parents should be allowed into the school and into the classroom because it is our right to see what our child's environment is and to be an active presence in their school life.

\*I would be willing to be part of any focus group or similar if it helps you make a better informed and fair decision.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and I appreciate your consideration of my requests. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out.

On behalf of so many,

Allison Coyle

allisonmcoyle@gmail.com

9702 Dunes Lane

Cottage Grove MN 55016

Attn MN Department of Education & Governor Walz

I am a parent in the Eden Prairie School district. I'm writing all of you to let you know that I want my kids BACK in school full time without any e-learning in September. I don't want my school district wasting money on plexi-glass, masks, social distancing, smaller class rooms etc. You can have a temperature screen when they arrive at school, if they have a temperature they go home. If they don't they are healthy at they stay at school!

There are currently NO statistics that support you keeping them out of school.

- The CDC states as of 6/10/20 – a total of 138 deaths in the age group 0-24
  - [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid\\_weekly/index.htm#AgeAndSex](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid_weekly/index.htm#AgeAndSex) (1/2 way down the page, table 4 in Comorbidity table)

NEGATIVE effects?

- What is this doing to our kids mental state?
- What is this doing for their physical state? Obesity?
- Suicide Rates?
- Education rates?

ALL of the these things are negatives, what is the positive of keeping them out of school?

The WHO just released data showing the 'Coronavirus spread by asymptomatic people appears to be rare'. In my opinion your only possible valid argument was initially that the kids 'could' spread it to the teachers. EVEN if that was the case, let the teachers decide. WE are adults! If someone is at risk, student, teacher etc., they should have the right to choose to stay home if necessary. Students can home school!

I will remove my kids from our district all together if you do not allow them to go back to school full time. Furthermore, you should allow each district to make the decision based on the needs in their district specifically. If you live in Rural MN they may NEVER see a case of Covid 19. I live in Eden Prairie; we might see a case or two. Regardless, the numbers are ridiculously low to even have these conversations. You are overstepping your boundaries, all our kids back in school.

**Please answer one question:**

**WHAT data are you basing your recommendations off of? The CDC lists the percentage of children dying from Covid 19 as ZERO percent! 0.000%**

Can we PLEASE start using some commonsense?

Dump your models, in MN the facts are clear! Based on the last 3 months data, you had a 0.55% chance of GETTING Covid and 0.023% chance of dying from it (across the board!). If you are under 20 – ZERO chance of dying from Covid!

It might be a better use of your time to help facilitate the problems our Long Term Healthcare programs are having. THEY are the ones dying- not our kids!

Thank you for your time, I am anxious to hear your replies! If you do not open public schools fully in September, I will enroll my kids in private. You need to start answering basic questions using FACTS!

Nycole Pederson  
Eden Prairie School District

Dear Committee Administrator Fritz,

Our children need to return to a normal classroom setting in September or we face a significant demise in their education and mental health. I have two children, eleven and fifteen years old. My wife is a stay-at-home mother and I have continued to attend work through the duration of the Governors stay-at-home order. Although she can keep them on track during the day and ensure schoolwork is completed, their overall work effort and focus is compromised at home, without the presence of a teacher. Most significantly, their motivation is greatly reduced since grading has moved to a pass/fail curriculum and peer competition has been removed. Human beings succeed through challenge, failure, and reward. Our children are not being challenged properly through distance learning. I worry even more for the children who do not have guidance during the day, such as those with both parents at work and those with single parents. I ask of you, please return our children to school in September without restrictions. I thank you for your time.

Regards,

Mike Reiland

4602 Fable Hill Pkwy N

Hugo, MN 55038

763-360-2298

June 22, 2020  
Sauk Centre, MN

## **A Parent Statement For Opening MN Schools As Normal:**

My name is Christine Behnen. I am a parent of a 15 year old teen who intends to start school in the fall at Alexandria Area High School, District 206. Additionally we live in Stearns County. This statement is to share our experiences and advocate for reopening of schools in Minnesota in person, as normal, without masks, distancing, or other protocols mandated upon the students. If school resumes online or with these illogical mandates, we will be unenrolling. This is not our choice. Our choice is schooling as normal. **No New Normal! We will not participate in schooling by distance, masked, nor social-distanced!**

### **Distance Learning is not an option.**

Our experience last spring with unexpected distance learning was a disaster. My son was an A student up until schools were shut down. When his school was forced to continue through remote learning, he was unable to make the new medium and culture work for him. As he proceeded to fall farther and farther behind on assignments, his anxiety rose as his self-esteem plummeted. Finally, with my support, we withdrew him from essentially every class that he was signed up for, because it was torturous for him to fail so completely and uncharacteristically. I realized that he performs well in school because he completes his work as though he is going physically to a job, and working together with teachers and students. The focus provided by physically "going to work," and the relational rewards of working with and for others make my son an academic star. **The forced isolation of distance learning and the rupture of relationships that it entails make of my son a failure and leaves him with serious doubts about his future and even his own value. We must not put our students in the position to take the blame for a bad system. We will not repeat this harmful experience of distance learning.**

**The evidence: Children are safe. School shutdowns do nothing against the disease.**

**Evidence is clear that children have negligible risk from COVID - 19. They are not responsible for spread of the disease. Closing of schools has not significantly reduced the spread of this disease. There is no reason to restrict children nor the normal opening of schools.** I have extensive research to support these points and will include them at the end. When you, as the professionals and decision-makers in children's lives see new good information, it is your responsibility to revise and act according to the best information that you now have. Now you have it. Here are a few of the most compelling points:

- Children are not COVID-19 super spreaders: time to go back to school. Children are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. Case studies show infected

children failing to transmit despite heavy and prolonged exposure to others. Data from primary care and household studies suggests SARS-CoV-2 is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. In the conclusion: "**Governments worldwide should allow all children back to school** regardless of comorbidities... severe COVID-19 is as rare as many other serious infection syndromes in children that do not cause schools to be closed. Individualised risk assessment and decision-making by clinicians should occur for those considered at exceptional risk (such as in immediately after bone marrow transplant) or where there are other older family members at significant risk. <sup>1</sup>

- We now know that the pandemic influenza data are not applicable to Covid-19 . The Spanish Flu benefited from school closures, but this does not hold true in this case. Even if children do not seem to contribute massively to the spread, they can go through the disease; usually with very mild symptoms. So why do we have to protect them from infection? Sure, if we send the children back to school, as Sweden has done so far without any major problems, we must also ensure that the hygiene measures for the older population and for the children continue to be observed. On the publication date of this blog (6.4.20), a systematic review was published in the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Health (Viner et al.) On this topic . The article summarized 16 papers. The conclusions essentially coincide with ours: The scientific assessment shows that **the closure of schools has no relevant influence on the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic.**<sup>2</sup>
- Data from the SARS outbreak in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore suggest that school transmission played no substantial role in the outbreak, and that school closures and other activities such as school temperature monitoring did not contribute to control of infection transmission.

Although children appear to contract infection at the same rate as adults, they largely have mild or asymptomatic forms of the disease and appear to be less likely to spread the virus through coughing or sneezing; however, a precise understanding is as yet lacking.

Currently, **the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat COVID-19 is very weak** and data from influenza outbreaks suggest that school closures could have relatively small effects on a virus with COVID-19's high transmissibility and apparent low clinical effect on school children. At the same time, these data also show that school closures can have profound economic and social consequences.

It is unclear how long countries can maintain tight suppression measures before behavioural fatigue in the population occurs.<sup>31</sup> Given predictions that social distancing measures might need to be in place for many months or even years, there is an urgent

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<sup>1</sup> <https://adc.bmj.com/content/105/7/618>

<sup>2</sup> <https://infekt.ch/2020/04/schulen-schliessen-hilfreich-oder-nicht/>

need to identify how countries can safely return students to education and parents to work. Education is one of the strongest predictors of the health and the wealth of a country's future workers, and the impact of long-term school closure on educational outcomes, future earnings, the health of young people, and future national productivity has not been quantified.<sup>3</sup>

In the state of Minnesota where 81% of deaths (attributed to COVID-19) have occurred in nursing homes, isn't it time that we get real about where risk does and does not exist? With a disease with a clear and commonly known predilection for the elderly or health compromised, as well a clear and indisputable inability to significantly harm the school-aged, isn't it time that we let children resume their normal lives? If it is truly the adults who are at risk, **let any future policies focus upon the protection of adults from other adults.**

#### **What I would like to see happen upon reopening of schools:**

- In person, onsite learning
- Optional masks only for students and staff
- No social distancing for children. No social restrictions for children (except to respect others' personal choices to stay at a distance)
- Distancing and masks by choice for adults in schools
- Extra outdoor time for purposes of health, both free play and classtime
- No toxic sanitation chemicals. Only non-toxic methods.
- Streamline the ease of routine hand-washing, and subsequent moisturizing in the winter.
- Optional distance learning for students and staff who prefer it.
- Firm but supportive sick policy. Those who are sick stay home, without repercussions.
- Limit and reduce out of school work and homework in order to promote healthy sleep, downtime, etc.
- Creation of a positive health support plan for adults in schools. For example: encourage outdoor learning. Create a culture of respect for adults who are choosing to distance and wear masks. Encourage availability of healthy snacks. Limit out of school hours workloads in order to allow sufficient rest at home. Encourage physical activity.

#### **Addendum of Further Relevant Studies and Articles:**

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(20\)30095-X/fulltext#seccestitle90](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(20)30095-X/fulltext#seccestitle90)

- [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjlul1STpRi4cdbe5ehk8NQxRpOKFB\\_w](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjlul1STpRi4cdbe5ehk8NQxRpOKFB_w). June 9.

Schoolchildren under the age of 15 are more likely to be hit by lightning than die from coronavirus, new figures suggest, amid mounting pressure on the Government to get more to get pupils back into classrooms as quickly as possible.

Scientists from the universities of Cambridge and Oxford have called for "rational debate" based on the "tiny" risk to children, suggesting that if no vaccine is found in future it may be better for younger people to continue with their lives while the more vulnerable are shielded.

- [https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/05/california-pediatricians-quest-on-school-reopening-guidelines-1291462?fbclid=IwAR3PvPJztklXNBfNE5VbFImL445tvIEblYwbZ5NJofb\\_uJ7bpDZ9M7wuy0](https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/05/california-pediatricians-quest-on-school-reopening-guidelines-1291462?fbclid=IwAR3PvPJztklXNBfNE5VbFImL445tvIEblYwbZ5NJofb_uJ7bpDZ9M7wuy0). June 5

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State guidelines released Friday encourage facial coverings and wellness checks for students, as well as a slew of social distancing measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus. But the Southern California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics spoke out recently against a similar plan for Los Angeles County schools, calling it "not realistic or even developmentally appropriate" and warned that masks for younger children could hinder their language skills and other development. Kuo said recommendations to minimize movement in hallways, for example, is overboard.

"Why would we hold schools to a higher standard than what we do for hospitals and clinics?" Kuo said. "Some of the recommendations make you scratch your head. I suspect that the person writing these is not a pediatrician. ... I'm really surprised how everyone is just deferring to public health and giving them that power."

While face coverings have grown in acceptance as a way to reduce the spread of Covid-19, they are challenging for younger children, Kuo and other child health experts said. And they are a particular barrier for special education students who rely on instructional aides; autistic students who are prone to hypersensitivity; and students with respiratory issues and anxiety.

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other reasons, what do we do? Exclude them all for 14 days based on those symptoms alone?"

- <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/no-child-known-to-have-passed-on-coronavirus-to-adults-global-study-finds/ar-BB13qi2t?ocid=sf&fbclid=IwAR2ebWNFI3aNdQkEJso5dCv0gnZmwiPtVBOB0qLa9EKJQI8SOgY13A2ghdg>

The review into paediatric coronavirus studies found it is likely children "do not play a significant role" in transmitting the coronavirus and are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. It also found there has not been a single case of a child under 10 transmitting COVID-19, even through contact tracing carried out by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Collated by paediatric blog Don't Forget The Bubbles, in partnership with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), researchers looked at 78 studies from around the world, with most from China where the disease originated. The findings come as the Swiss government said grandparents are now allowed to hug their grandchildren because they concluded that "young children don't transmit the virus".

- [https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2341N7?fbclid=IwAR1I1K8EZ7h-j1e2Pr8v1--OQx-4KhTJvQWG6R\\_LFKZbBzAsaThMQ1JFpvg](https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2341N7?fbclid=IwAR1I1K8EZ7h-j1e2Pr8v1--OQx-4KhTJvQWG6R_LFKZbBzAsaThMQ1JFpvg). May 28 Sending children back to schools and day care centres in Denmark, the first country in Europe to do so, did not lead to an increase in coronavirus infections, according to official data, confirming similar findings from Finland on Thursday.
- [https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR0O4m\\_JVL\\_y1QgtcMDFgvEplS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg](https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR0O4m_JVL_y1QgtcMDFgvEplS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg). Australian Government's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Nick Coatsworth.

When school closures were initially proposed to control an epidemic, planners had influenza in mind. Flu spreading within schools and children are the main source for transmission in the community. But COVID-19 is not the flu. Far fewer children are affected by COVID-19, and the number of transmissions from children to children and children to adults is far less. As an infectious diseases specialist, I have examined all of the available evidence from within Australia and around the world and, as it stands, it does not support avoiding classroom learning as a means to control COVID-19.

The main risk of going back to school is that it increases the movement and interaction of adults in the community and puts staff back in contact with each other. Importantly, this can be managed. Staff and parents must maintain their distance from each other in the school environment, avoid the school if unwell with a cold, and keep children at home when they are not feeling well.

- <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/covid-19-how-new-information-should-drive-policy> Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Roundtable - COVID-19: How New Information Should Drive Policy

Dr. David Katz' testimony:

We should adopt "total harm minimization," aimed at mitigating the direct harms of COVID19, and the indirect harms of societal upheaval and economic collapse, as our national policy objective. This is best pursued by means of risk-based (i.e. vertical) interdiction policies that shelter/protect those most vulnerable to severe infection and grave outcomes, while phasing back to relative normalcy those in lower risk groups.

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CONCLUSIONS: People <65 years old have very small risks of COVID-19 death even in the hotbeds of the pandemic and deaths for people <65 years without underlying predisposing conditions are remarkably uncommon. Strategies focusing specifically on protecting high-risk elderly individuals should be considered in managing the pandemic.

- [https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32405162/?fbclid=IwAR1LHQnVmn1CEkmYWLftJcDC0yxVTIzF12tKr\\_s5VG8GHAuyB2Ht\\_vP8-iA](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32405162/?fbclid=IwAR1LHQnVmn1CEkmYWLftJcDC0yxVTIzF12tKr_s5VG8GHAuyB2Ht_vP8-iA). Case study of asymptomatic person infected. None of the 455 contacts were infected, despite 4-5 days median contact time. This supports the premise that asymptomatic carriers are unlikely to infect others.

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- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/08/asymptomatic-coronavirus-patients-arent-spreading-new-infections-who-says.html?fbclid=IwAR3DUyNjIqZkqbKpEh79iTiixtd92UQ9sdryaZHor4dLVgCaRCRmNRVEWk>. Regarding asymptomatic spread.

Government responses should focus on detecting and isolating infected people with symptoms, the World Health Organization said.

Coronavirus patients without symptoms aren't driving the spread of the virus, World Health Organization officials said Monday, casting doubt on concerns by some researchers that the disease could be difficult to contain due to asymptomatic infections.

"From the data we have, it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits onward to a secondary individual," Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, head of WHO's emerging diseases and zoonosis unit, said at a news briefing from the United Nations agency's Geneva headquarters. "It's very rare."

"We have a number of reports from countries who are doing very detailed contact tracing," she said. "They're following asymptomatic cases. They're following contacts. And they're not finding secondary transmission onward. It's very rare."

- <https://www.foxnews.com/health/cdc-now-says-coronavirus-does-not-spread-easily-via-contaminated-surfaces?fbclid=IwAR0Pa53HR2JITHsyVkYXR-TEPxbzx4pNtBaREDqjHluosxnXEM4z3pnBTo>. Finally the CDC officially said contagion through surfaces unlikely.
- [https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH\\_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx\\_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U](https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U). This article from the Universities of MN by two professors and experts on respiratory infection concluded "We do not recommend requiring the general public who do not have symptoms of COVID-19-like illness to routinely wear cloth or surgical masks." It then explains why.

June 22, 2020

Elk River, MN

A Parent Statement For Opening MN Schools As Normal:

My name is Tammy Hogan. I am a parent of a 15 year old boy who wants to start 10th grade at Elk River High School in the fall (ISD728) in person and play football! We live in Sherburne County. This statement is to share our experiences and advocate for reopening of schools in Minnesota in person, as normal, without masks, distancing, or other protocols mandated upon the students. Our choice is schooling as normal. No New Normal! We will not participate in schooling by distance, masked, nor social-distanced!

Distance Learning is not an option.

Our experience last spring with unexpected distance learning was less than optimal for both learning and mental health of the kids. My son was doing school work for maybe 2 hours per day.

The evidence: Children are safe. School shutdowns do nothing against the disease.

Evidence is clear that children have negligible risk from COVID - 19. They are not responsible for spread of the disease. Closing of schools has not significantly reduced the spread of this disease. There is no reason to restrict children nor the normal opening of schools. I have extensive research to support these points and will include them at the end. When you, as the professionals and decision-makers in children's lives see new good information, it is your responsibility to revise and act according to the best information that you now have. Now you have it. Here are a few of the most compelling points:

- Children are not COVID-19 super spreaders: time to go back to school. Children are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. Case studies show infected children failing to transmit despite heavy and prolonged exposure to others. Data from primary care and household studies suggests SARS-CoV-2 is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. In the conclusion: "Governments worldwide should allow all children back to school regardless of comorbidities... severe COVID-19 is as rare as many other serious infection syndromes in children that do not cause schools to be closed. Individualised risk assessment and decision-making by clinicians should occur for those considered at exceptional risk (such as in immediately after bone marrow transplant) or where there are other older family members at significant risk.
- We now know that the pandemic influenza data are not applicable to Covid-19 . The Spanish Flu benefited from school closures, but this does not hold true in this case. Even if children do not seem to contribute massively to the spread, they can go through the disease; usually with very mild symptoms. So why do we have to protect them from infection? Sure, if we send the children back to school, as Sweden has done so far without any major problems, we must also ensure that the hygiene measures for the older population and for the children continue to be observed.

On the publication date of this blog (6.4.20), a systematic review was published in the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Health (Viner et al.) On this topic . The article summarized 16 papers. The conclusions essentially coincide with ours: The scientific assessment shows that the closure of schools has no relevant influence on the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic.

- Data from the SARS outbreak in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore suggest that school transmission played no substantial role in the outbreak, and that school closures and other activities such as school temperature monitoring did not contribute to control of infection transmission.

Although children appear to contract infection at the same rate as adults, they largely have mild or asymptomatic forms of the disease and appear to be less likely to spread the virus through coughing or sneezing; however, a precise understanding is as yet lacking.

Currently, the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat COVID-19 is very weak and data from influenza outbreaks suggest that school closures could have relatively small effects on a virus with COVID-19's high transmissibility and apparent low clinical effect on school children. At the same time, these data also show that school closures can have profound economic and social consequences.

It is unclear how long countries can maintain tight suppression measures before behavioural fatigue in the population occurs.<sup>31</sup> Given predictions that social distancing measures might need to be in place for many months or even years, there is an urgent need to identify how countries can safely return students to education and parents to work. Education is one of the strongest predictors of the health and the wealth of a country's future workers, and the impact of long-term school closure on educational outcomes, future earnings, the health of young people, and future national productivity has not been quantified.

In the state of Minnesota where 81% of deaths (attributed to COVID-19) have occurred in nursing homes, isn't it time that we get real about where risk does and does not exist? With a disease with a clear and commonly known predilection for the elderly or health compromised, as well a clear and indisputable inability to significantly harm the school-aged, isn't it time that we let children resume their normal lives? If it is truly the adults who are at risk, let any future policies focus upon the protection of adults from other adults.

What I would like to see happen upon reopening of schools:

- In person, onsite learning
- Optional masks only for students and staff
- No social distancing for children. No social restrictions for children (except to respect others' personal choices to stay at a distance)
- Distancing and masks by choice for adults in schools
- Extra outdoor time for purposes of health, both free play and classtime
- No toxic sanitation chemicals. Only non-toxic methods.
- Streamline the ease of routine hand-washing, and subsequent moisturizing in the winter.
- Optional distance learning for students and staff who prefer it.

- Firm but supportive sick policy. Those who are sick stay home, without repercussions.
- Limit and reduce out of school work and homework in order to promote healthy sleep, downtime, etc.
- Creation of a positive health support plan for adults in schools. For example: encourage outdoor learning. Create a culture of respect for adults who are choosing to distance and wear masks. Encourage availability of healthy snacks. Limit out of school hours workloads in order to allow sufficient rest at home. Encourage physical activity.

Addendum of Further Relevant Studies and Articles:

- [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjlul1STpRi4cdbe5ehk8NQxRpOKFB\\_w](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjlul1STpRi4cdbe5ehk8NQxRpOKFB_w). June 9.

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- [https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR004m\\_JVL\\_y1QgtcMDFgvEpIS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg](https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR004m_JVL_y1QgtcMDFgvEpIS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg).

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- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/08/asymptomatic-coronavirus-patients-arent-spreading-new-infections-who-says.html?fbclid=IwAR3DUyNjIqZkgbKpEh79iTiixtd92UQ9sdryaZHorg4dLVgCaRCRmNRVEWk>. Regarding asymptomatic spread.

Government responses should focus on detecting and isolating infected people with symptoms, the World Health Organization said.

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“We have a number of reports from countries who are doing very detailed contact tracing,” she said. “They’re following asymptomatic cases. They’re following contacts. And they’re not finding secondary transmission onward. It’s very rare.”

- <https://www.foxnews.com/health/cdc-now-says-coronavirus-does-not-spread-easily-via-contaminated-surfaces?fbclid=IwAR0Pa53HR2JITHsyVkYXR-TEPxbzx4pNtBaREDqjHluosxnXEM4z3pnBTo>. Finally the CDC officially said contagion through surfaces unlikely.

- [https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH\\_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx\\_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U](https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U). This article from the Universities of MN by two professors and experts on respiratory infection concluded "We do not recommend requiring the general public who do not have symptoms of COVID-19-like illness to routinely wear cloth or surgical masks." It then explains why.

Sincerely,  
Tammy Hogan  
Elk River parent

Thank you for the opportunity to provide some feedback about distance learning. As a parent of 2 high school students, I have first hand experience with distance learning. Both of our children attend a school that pivoted quickly to distance learning and the level of instruction was adequate to continue learning. However, it was very inferior to in-person learning. Both children noted that the expectations were much lower for their work. And as a result, our children (and many others) are behind in their learning.

If the threat of COVID19 was rising or if children were shown to be major carriers of the disease, I could understand the need to continue distance learning. However, we have learned that both of these things are not the case. In addition, a large majority of the fatal cases of COVID19 have been in congregate living facilities. This points to different strategies to protect those persons, who do not have direct contact with schools.

Our children need to get back to the work of learning and they need in-person instruction. Aside from the very important and fundamental work of learning, our children also need to get back to the social environment that school provides. Distance learning has also impacted the mental health of our children in a significant way. And without medical and epidemiological evidence to support continued isolation, we need to allow for more contact. The risk of mental health issues, including but not limited to depression, anxiety and suicide are very real and pressing concerns that are children are at greater risk for due to the continued isolation.

As a person who is at higher risk for contracting COVID19 and having complications from it, I realize that putting students and teachers together in school increases the risk of more infections. However, the risk involved is no greater than the risks we have been taking for hundreds of years in schools and the risk I take in going shopping, eating at restaurants, and attending church. There are many infectious diseases that could be spread by human-to-human contact. COVID19 has been hyped up as a greater risk, but the fatality rate does not bear out all of the hype. The bottom line is that anytime people have contact, there is risk. We have the infrastructure in place to handle more cases of COVID19, as well as other infectious diseases. There is no reason why students and teachers can't return to school.

Distance learning not only provides inferior instruction and isolates students, it also prevents students who need additional services from getting them. Without a compelling reason to continue, these students are being unfairly denied what they need to be successful learners.

I strongly urge you to advocate for students by urging Governor Walz and the MN department of health to return students to school campuses this fall.

Dear distance learning committee,

I am a parent of a seven and three year old and I wanted to share some of our experience of how distance learning went and how it negatively affected our child's mental health.

Our seven-year-old daughter loved school and thrived in the classroom with structure. Once distance learning started, she lost interest, became frustrated easily, and you could just see she was not happy. She would get through the bare minimum of schoolwork and would then have to entertain herself the rest of the day since my wife and I both have been working full time since this all began. Distance learning is not an option for our family because of our work schedules; we cannot commit the time to help a soon to be second grader through her schoolwork. This past spring our daughter would try to do the work herself and get frustrated forcing us to stop working to help her through the assignments. We were not as productive at work and I don't think our daughter learned much of anything during those two to three months.

Our son who is 3 has been in a daycare center the entire time, they have adjusted cleaning and drop-off to reduce the spread of the virus. There have been no issues or outbreaks during this time and there are over 100 kids and staff in that building. This summer our daughter is also going to the daycare as part of their school age program and she has regained her spark to learn and is thriving again. So much of elementary education is social-emotional and by doing, distance learning you completely remove that critical part and the kids don't learn as well.

I fully understand the concerns of the virus and reducing the spread, I am the Laboratory Safety Officer at the Minnesota Department of Health Public Health Laboratory and it is my job to keep our staff safe. We have not closed; in fact, we are working longer hours testing samples for COVID-19. We work in a space that is difficult to maintain six feet distance and we have precautions in place to help reduce the spread, and I can say we have done so successfully. I understand a school is a different place than a laboratory; I know we can implement effective control measures that can reduce the spread; so many businesses already have done it. We also have to remember that the data shows kids are less likely to have severe illness.

We do have to think about the teachers as well. Like any other business, schools need to develop procedures and protocols for cleaning, proper distancing, and limiting interactions between groups. Daycares have been doing this since day one with no issues. Maybe we give teachers and students the option if they don't feel safe coming back there is a distance learning option for them.

I know we can figure out a way to allow in person learning and be successful at it. We owe it to our children to give them the best education or we will harm them for life. When it comes to their education and mental health, we cannot wait for a vaccine, an effective treatment, or things to get better, because we don't know when that will come. We need to figure out a way to get these kids back into the school where they can thrive again.

Thank you,

Dan Hammersley

To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for your willingness to hear from those of us who are looking out for our children's best interests. While I understand that Covid is a real threat to those who are immuno compromised, everyone else needs to be allowed to build up an immunity to it. Life is full of risks, and teaching our children to hide in fear isn't how we should be handling this. School needs to resume in the fall without any changes. Full time, full rotations to other classrooms, sports, programs, no distancing, no masks, no gloves, normal cleaning. Distance Learning was an experience that everyone did the best they could with, but it just can't replace the valuable experience that normal school provides.

I have an in home daycare, and did not close during the lockdown, as guidance from both our Governor and MDH were that it was up to each provider to do what they wanted and that they would sure appreciate if we stayed open. If this "disease" was so fatal, then why weren't we ordered shut like the schools? Instead, all kindergarten through 3rd graders were probably rerouted to daycares where they spent hours a day with babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Little ones are notorious germ spreaders because everything goes in the mouth, covering sneezes and coughs doesn't happen, and hugs and kisses are given to all. With parents still out and about in the community bringing germs home to their kids who then bring them to daycare, how come this didn't turn into an outbreak at daycares? The only logical explanation is that kids and healthy adults aren't really affected by this novel coronavirus anymore than they are by all the old strains.

Thank you,  
Laura Edwards

We are writing this letter today to state that we want our kids back in the fall to normal school. No social distancing or masks. This nonsense needs to stop. This State has already affected our children in a very negative way with domestic violence, abuse, depression, anxiety, lack of socialization with peers, no prom, no graduation, no sports and extracurricular activities, No ACT's still!! It is all skyrocketing. Our family does not even know anybody that has even had co-vid. We are rural Minnesota not Minneapolis. These kids have not been affected by getting the disease. They have been affected by the lack of leadership in this State.

Distant learning did not work for our family. My child's GPA dropped. A teacher cannot teach via skype or zoom. It was a joke. Labs do not work; Spanish does not work and much more. Most kids need hands on learning. My child said to me "what's the purpose of getting up and getting on the computer. We cannot do anything anyways". My husband and I were essential employees, which anybody with a job is an essential employee, but we are at work and cannot oversee the teacher's job. People become teachers to teach kids. That is why the taxpayers are paying them. I heard of a lot of parents that were at home with their children and could not help them with things. We parents have learned math a whole different way!!

This nonsense of having no school or not back to normal needs to stop. Kids need to go to school and be normal. My child will not wear a mask but will wash her hands and stay home if not feeling well. This State owes it to these kids to fix what they did wrong!!

Thank you for your time,

Steve and Carrie Fasching

Dear Legislators of Minnesota,

I am writing this letter with two different titles in mind. I am first and most importantly a mom to a going to be 5<sup>th</sup> grader and 3<sup>rd</sup> grader. Secondly, I am writing this as an educator. I teach 2<sup>nd</sup> graders at Glencoe Silver Lake School District. I believe with everything that I know about children through both many years of experience and my education, we need to go back to school with very little restrictions in the fall.

First, I would like to discuss my experience as a parent. Distance learning was not horrible but it was not ideal either. I am blessed to have two children that both do quite well in school. Saying that, distance learning started out rough for everyone at our house, the first week was honestly horrible. Once we figured everything out it got a bit better. My son liked to work quickly and get everything that he needed to get done for the day in the morning so he could have the rest of the day to do what he wanted (playing way more video games than normal). He knew that I had high expectations so he did well. My daughter had a bit of a different experience. At our conference in February my husband and I were told that our 2<sup>nd</sup> grader “is an ideal 2<sup>nd</sup> grader and truly a joy to have in class”. I say that because that is not what I saw at school. She missed her teacher, her friends, and just going to school in general. She is a teacher pleaser and she wants to do well at school – at school, for her teacher, at school-not for her mom at home. After a few weeks the novelty wore off for my son as well. He lost motivation and interest. The teachers at their school did an amazing job preparing daily videos and sending work home but it is not school. They missed their teachers, their friends, they missed recess, they missed everything about school.

Second, as an educator I also believe that it is essential for us to go back to school in the fall. I had a very supportive group of families this past year. I had probably one of my best classes I have had in a while. Let me tell you, distance learning was not easy. I had parents that were both still working, I had single parent families with multiple children and very limited access to the internet, I had families that do not speak English (thank goodness for the translation feature on Remind and SeeSaw), I had a few families that I had to reach out to daily just to get them to check in. Even though I had a fabulous class I know that I had kids that have not done much of anything since Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>. I know that I had kids that fought with their parents daily about school, I had kids that didn't get to school work until 6:00pm because their parents were working. I can honestly say that 21 out of my 21 students missed school, they missed their friends, they missed learning with a teacher right there with them every step of the way instead of ZOOM meetings and YouTube videos. I did the very best that I could during distance learning but, distance learning is not the best way that students learn. It is definitely not the best way that teachers teach.

There will no doubt be a “summer slide” like we have never seen before, I think everyone knows that. I am more concerned about the social and mental health slides that these kids are having. Kids need to have social interactions with their peers, they need structure and routines, which a school setting provides. Some of these kids need the warm meals that school provides. And this is what kept me up at night, some of my students and kids throughout our state need the love they get from school. They need that greeting from their teacher each day, they need to know that they matter and yes they need to feel that love, because unfortunately school is the one place that they feel safe and loved.

I also worry about the physical toll that being out of school and activities for so long is taking on our children. Kids are used to playing in the morning at school, in Phy. Ed class and at recess. Some of these

kids have had very limited time outside to play which is not good for them physically, mentally or socially. There was a big push for 60 minutes of physical activity...well I am sure that 60 minutes is not happening with many children currently.

Third, we went to distance learning in mid-March last year. Teachers had September to mid-March to get to know their students and families. We had 7 months to build relationships. We had 7 months to get to know each student. We had 7 months to know what each student was capable of. We had 7 months to figure out just what each student needed from us. We had 7 months! I can not imagine starting in September with a whole new group of 2<sup>nd</sup> graders that I do not know and teaching them from a distance. Building those relationships are an essential part of teaching for me.

Please don't get me wrong, I do not want anyone to be in danger, but I do feel that by keeping kids out of school we are doing way more harm than any virus ever could. I think we need to go back to school. Teachers need to be in part of the planning part to create realistic guidelines so schools can actually open back up. People that work at school are some of the most caring and compassionate people that want nothing but the best for our students and their well-being. Please let us back, please let us do what we do, please-for the kids!

Respectfully,

Julie Grams

June 21, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

Please hear the voices of the people who are taking the time to write and provide their experiences.

I have four children in the school system, two whom are on IEP's, and I am a teacher myself. Distance learning is not what is best for any of my four children. School is so much more than academics. It's about learning appropriate socialization, interaction with others, face to face engagement, structure and routine. It's about learning to work with others in groups, follow rules and expectations and take part in specials (ex: phy ed, music, art, STEM, etc.)

We know that children are not the vulnerable crowd to this virus, yet it seems as though they are sacrificing the most. Going to back to the classroom is essential for them, for their mental health, for their well-being and for their overall development. Going back to school with mandates to wear masks the entire time, not touch any one or sit at the same desk surrounded by plastic curtains IS NOT WHAT IS BEST FOR KIDS. All that will do is scare them in a place that is supposed to be safe for them.

I understand that not everyone will feel comfortable going back into the school setting. So, have schools send out surveys to find out who is and who isn't. For those who are, allow them to come back. For those who are not comfortable, allow them to engage in distance learning. This might naturally create smaller class sizes that can be in the classroom.

I just beg you to please think about what is best for children....all children. Distance learning is not the answer.

Respectfully,

Shawna, mom of four

June 22, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

My children were negatively affected by "distance learning." Doing school work in one's dining room with siblings of four different ages and abilities is nearly impossible given the situation we all had shoved down our throats. My children suffered without human contact from teachers, staff and peers. It is not good for one's mental state to have a child isolated from their normal daily schedule, being cooped up at home. Children thrive on schedule.

Humans thrive with contact with other humans. Students succeed when they have personal eye contact and praise from teachers.

Learning from a screen only is not learning at all.

One of my children is special ed. He is on an IEP. The contract I have on his behalf from the school, and in turn, the government, through his IEP was breeched. My son suffered without the stipulations within his IEP being met. He was unable to complete task he had completed while IN school. My son has a para while IN school. He had no para assistance throughout the entire debacle of "distance learning."

My 4th grade daughter, who had mostly A's and one B during the regular school year also suffered greatly — she was only able to complete 10% of her assignments. This government overreach in shutting down the lives of our young children is a travesty and close to crimes against humanity in my view.

My children did not receive a proper education via "distance learning," and their mental health deteriorated during this time. They became depressed and angry. They are now hopeful that their lives will return to normal in September. If they are made

to wear masks, they will be homeschooled. If school isn't like it was before covid in the fall, they will be homeschooled. I will not allow my children to be negatively impacted by unnecessary methods that are floating about regarding how school will look in the fall. No masks. No partitions. No social distancing.

Thank you,  
Melissa Axelson

June 23, 2020

Minnetonka, MN

To Whom It May Concern;

My Name is Dr. Adrienne Castrovinci Schnurr, and I am a parent to 2 young daughters. They just finished up 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades at a Spanish immersion charter school in Minnetonka. I want to express my feelings and experience with distance learning this past spring.

Prior to the shutdown, our daughters were great and very engaged students. English is our home language, and we wanted to enrich their development with adding a second language at an early age. First of all, immersion is rather impossible when they are at home with us. They did have about 30 minutes a day of a zoom interaction with their teachers in Spanish, but that pales in comparison to the 6 hours each day that they were receiving at school. They have conversations with their teachers, peers and administrative staff all in Spanish, and they have not been able to do that since mid-March. At home, we are not able to help them with this, and every day that they missed they were losing their language skills.

Also, after about one week, their interest in the activities and meetings waned. They both had a difficult time getting engaged to do the activities, and they both started having more out bursts and behaviors because of the stress that it caused. Our oldest daughter even quietly refused to turn in her work, because she didn't understand one part, and was unable to directly connect with her teacher to ask the questions. She had to send an email, and she was very frustrated that she couldn't just go to her and ask a simple question. Both of them had to be forced to join the meetings, and overall it was a very negative experience for us all. At the end of the term, they both expressed that they would rather be homeschooled, then to have to do distance learning again.

In addition to all of this, my husband and I both work outside of the home, and had to severely cut our own hours and pay to accommodate to them being home every day. It was a very serious struggle for everyone in the house.

Let me just say that we love their school and the flexibility that in person school affords our family, but will pull them if many of the measures that the state are suggesting are imposed. We will not support wearing masks and complete social distancing in school. They are little and need a hug from their teacher if they need to be comforted. Also, a model where there is part-time school is ridiculous if you have two working parents. There is honestly no way that this can be a successful idea for many Minnesota families. Lastly, if there is a complete distance learning model, we will choose to home school. This whole COVID situation has been SO incredibly hard on so many children, and taking away the school that we all love is one thing that completely breaks my heart as their mother. I also will not see them struggle like I did for the last 2 months of the school year.

Please take this into consideration when discussing the potential changes for the upcoming school year. I want our children to be successful and safe, and I believe that this can be achieved in a full time school situation. COVID has an extremely negligible effect on children, and they need a sense of normalcy in their lives. A virus with a 0.27% rate of death is hardly something to continue to disrupt their lives over.

Sincerely,

Adrienne C. Schnurr, D.C.

612-382-5587

# **June 23, 2020**

**To whom it may concern;**

**I would like to address many concerns I have over return to school this fall. If we don't allow our children to go to school we will have more pressing problems to deal with such as behavioral issues, mental health, & more.**

**One of my 3 children is a 10 year old boy with autism. The "distance" learning was not a fit for him. He is so structured that home is not where we do school. We found it very hard to get him to engage in the home environment. Not to mention we work too so trying to juggle this with 2 other kids was near**

impossible.

He was so confused as to why he was suddenly not in school. I don't know what other families are doing where the parents are not engaged in their children's education, but I can guess & it's not good. I'm sure my son has fallen more behind & so many by others have too! My middle son is a good student who seemed lost without structure of going to school.

Kids pose such a lower threat to spread this virus & as research has shown, surfaces too seem to be very low. Kids need to be back together & if I'll we stay home. The young & healthy are the ones who **NEED** to be together. Provide some herd

immunity. Our hospitalizations have been steadily lower. I cannot see my special needs child with sensory issues wearing a mask either.

Temp checks & asking questions are appropriate & using some extra cleaning. Basic hand washing is best. I am a nurse & strongly believe masks are far more detrimental than we are hearing. If my child can attend daycare he can most certainly attend school. We cannot shut life down or we will have no life left to live. This will have long lasting psychological impacts on our kids. Please open school!!!!!!

**Jill Devich**

Dear Committee Members,

Currently, kids are NOT social distancing. This is the reality. And they are NOT wearing masks. I am a parent of three girls in Wayzata Public Schools. I have a rising senior, a rising sophomore, and a rising 7<sup>th</sup> grader. Distance learning for my kids was varied, but my overall experience is that it is a failure and can't continue. This was especially hard for my middle schooler. In our home, both parents are working from home due to office shut downs, plus managing three kids.

Struggles include:

- Technology challenges around the state, but also in homes where all family members are tapping a home internet line for work and school. Additionally, the level of technical savviness varied greatly with teachers. And difficulties uploading homework and tests.
- Teachers differ radically on how they are operating. Some have been great and really engaged on a daily basis with kids and know who is struggling so they can quickly intervene. Others are doing the bare minimum and have no idea what and how their students are doing on a daily basis. I had to keep very close tabs for those classes.
- Parents are expected to step in and teach, especially elementary and middle school kids. This is challenging if you are working outside the home, working from home, or don't have the skills to teach.
- Nothing replaces face-to-face interactions with teachers and peers. Teachers are masters at facilitating classroom discussion that enriches the learning experience. Student's interact and hear other people's opinions and questions, which is a key piece of learning. This also teaches kids to appreciate multiple perspectives on various topics.
- Mental Health is a big one and so important. Kids who already struggle with mental health issues easily can spiral out of control. Schools provide so much needed support for so many kids on a daily basis. Unfortunately, it is hard to really deliver what is needed in most situations.
- Kids with special needs have suffered immensely. Parents may be trying to work and can't because they now have to fully dedicate their time to their child who has special needs. These kids are the ones who have completely slipped through the cracks.

The education gap that already existed has widened. The disparities between minorities and non-minorities is now exacerbated. By continuing distance learning, the repercussions will be felt for years to come.

COVID 19 has little effect on anyone under 20. For teachers and admin staff, there are ways to set up classrooms to protect them from students and visa versa. K – 12 Education is a basic that the state is to provide to the citizens of our state. The school districts must provide this service to its tax payers in a way that students can thrive and be successful. Distance learning does not do that for most students. If students are part of a vulnerable population, then those students should be offered on-line learning. Get our kids back in the classroom so they can excel and continue to be given the tools needed to be successful adults. There are no excuses for our schools to provide top-notch education to every student. The residents of this state deserve to be supported in educating our kids in the best way, which is in-person without restrictions.

Kindest Regards,

Kelly Bellini

[Kelly\\_bellini@yahoo.com](mailto:Kelly_bellini@yahoo.com)

952-237-0834

June 22, 2020

White Bear Lake, MN

A Parent Statement For Opening MN Schools As Normal:

My name is Jennifer Sarauer. I am a parent of a 15 year old teen who intends to start school in the fall at White Bear Lake Area High School, District 624. Additionally, I have an 11 year old who intends to start at Sunrise Middle School in White Bear Lake. We live in Ramsey County. This statement is to share our experiences and advocate for reopening of schools in Minnesota in person, as normal, without masks, distancing, or other protocols mandated upon the students. A goal for 100% of people to never contract the flu, the common cold, or COVID is not achievable. We need to look towards a more logical and balanced set of goals. If school resumes online or with these illogical mandates, we will be unenrolling. This is not our choice. Our choice is schooling as normal. No New Normal! We will not participate in schooling by distance, masked, nor social-distanced!

Distance Learning is not an option.

Our experience last spring with unexpected distance learning was a disaster. My daughter is an A student who requires additional challenges. Distance learning was largely review which left her bored and with lost ambition. Now my child is academically behind as she enters her sophomore year. The social isolation was the biggest impact. As an athlete she went from seeing her friends every day on the ice and looking forward to spring sports with many of them, to sitting alone in her room all day. I begged her to see her friends and told her she could invite anyone over. With her friends were on tight lockdown, sad, and alone she sat, her zest gone. My daughter has an opportunity to compete for college level athletics, where there are standards for academics and character. This distance learning and social isolation system failed her. I am thankful that she has time on her side, but we must not force students into a school system that fails our students. We will not repeat this harmful experience of distance learning.

The evidence: Children are safe. School shutdowns do nothing against the disease.

Evidence is clear that children have negligible risk from COVID - 19. They are not responsible for spread of the disease. Closing of schools has not significantly reduced the spread of this disease. Minnesota needs to shift focus to what is happening in long term care facilities. There is no reason to restrict children nor the normal opening of schools. I have extensive research to support these points and will include them at the end. When you, as the professionals and decision-makers in children's lives see new good information, it is your responsibility to revise and act according to the best information that you now have. Now you have it. Here are a few of the most compelling points:

- Children are not COVID-19 super spreaders: time to go back to school. Children are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. Case studies show infected

children failing to transmit despite heavy and prolonged exposure to others. Data from primary care and household studies suggests SARS-CoV-2 is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. In the conclusion: "Governments worldwide should allow all children back to school regardless of comorbidities... severe COVID-19 is as rare as many other serious infection syndromes in children that do not cause schools to be closed. Individualized risk assessment and decision-making by clinicians should occur for those considered at exceptional risk (such as in immediately after bone marrow transplant) or where there are other older family members at significant risk.

- We now know that the pandemic influenza data are not applicable to Covid-19 . The Spanish Flu benefited from school closures, but this does not hold true in this case. Even if children do not seem to contribute massively to the spread, they can go through the disease; usually with very mild symptoms. So why do we have to protect them from infection? Sure, if we send the children back to school, as Sweden has done so far without any major problems, we must also ensure that the hygiene measures for the older population and for the children continue to be observed.

On the publication date of this blog (6.4.20), a systematic review was published in the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Health (Viner et al.) On this topic . The article summarized 16 papers. The conclusions essentially coincide with ours: The scientific assessment shows that the closure of schools has no relevant influence on the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic.

- Data from the SARS outbreak in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore suggest that school transmission played no substantial role in the outbreak, and that school closures and other activities such as school temperature monitoring did not contribute to control of infection transmission.

Although children appear to contract infection at the same rate as adults, they largely have mild or asymptomatic forms of the disease and appear to be less likely to spread the virus through coughing or sneezing; however, a precise understanding is as yet lacking.

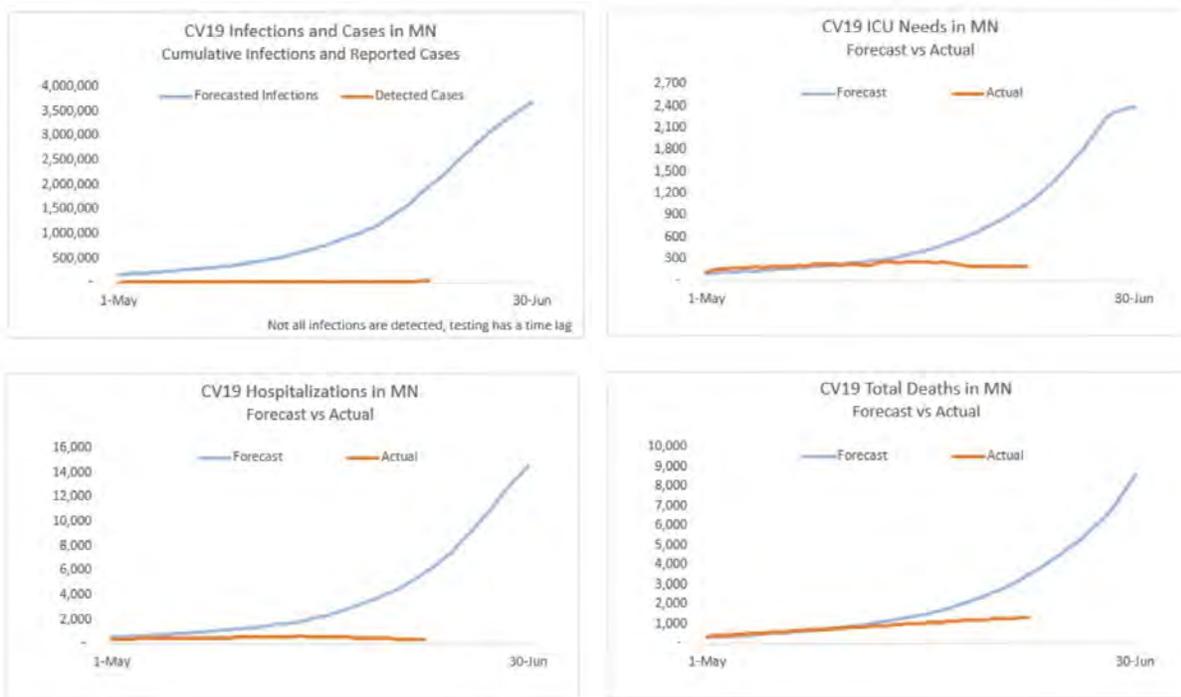
Currently, the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat COVID-19 is very weak and data from influenza outbreaks suggest that school closures could have relatively small effects on a virus with COVID-19's high transmissibility and apparent low clinical effect on school children. At the same time, these data also show that school closures can have profound economic and social consequences.

It is unclear how long countries can maintain tight suppression measures before behavioral fatigue in the population occurs. Given predictions that social distancing measures might need to be in place for many months or even years, there is an urgent need to identify how countries can safely return students to education and parents to work. Education is one of the strongest predictors of the health and the wealth of a country's future workers, and the impact of long-term school closure on educational

outcomes, future earnings, the health of young people, and future national productivity has not been quantified. Dr. Fauci also notes the dangers of prolonged isolation, as cited on May, 22, 2020: “Stay-at-home orders intended to curb the spread of the coronavirus could end up causing “irreparable damage” if imposed for too long, White House health advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci said.”

In the state of Minnesota where 81% of deaths (attributed to COVID-19) have occurred in nursing homes, isn't it time that we get real about where risk does and does not exist? With a disease with a clear and commonly known predilection for the elderly or health compromised, as well a clear and indisputable inability to significantly harm the school-aged, isn't it time that we let children resume their normal lives? If it is truly the adults who are at risk, let any future policies focus upon the protection of adults from other adults.

It is time to readjust based on actual data. The graphs below show just how off the models have been. Further, if these were broken out by school age vs. adults, we would see that school age stats are miniscule.



What I would like to see happen upon reopening of schools:

- In person, onsite learning, full-time
- Optional masks only for students and staff
- No social distancing for children. No social restrictions for children (except to respect others' personal choices to stay at a distance)

- Distancing and masks by choice for adults in schools
- No toxic sanitation chemicals. Only non-toxic methods.
- Streamline the ease of routine hand-washing, and subsequent moisturizing in the winter.
- Optional distance learning for students and staff who prefer it.
- Firm but supportive sick policy. Those who are sick stay home, without repercussions.
- Limit and reduce out of school work and homework in order to promote healthy sleep, downtime, etc.
- Creation of a positive health support plan for adults in schools. For example: encourage outdoor learning. Create a culture of respect for adults who are choosing to distance and wear masks. Encourage availability of healthy snacks. Limit out of school hours workloads in order to allow sufficient rest at home. Encourage physical activity.

#### Addendum of Further Relevant Studies and Articles:

- [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjJl1STpRi4cdbl5ehk8NQxRpOKFB\\_w](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjJl1STpRi4cdbl5ehk8NQxRpOKFB_w). June 9.

Schoolchildren under the age of 15 are more likely to be hit by lightning than die from coronavirus, new figures suggest, amid mounting pressure on the Government to get more to get pupils back into classrooms as quickly as possible.

Scientists from the universities of Cambridge and Oxford have called for "rational debate" based on the "tiny" risk to children, suggesting that if no vaccine is found in future it may be better for younger people to continue with their lives while the more vulnerable are shielded.

- [https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/05/california-pediatricians-question-school-reopening-guidelines-1291462?fbclid=IwAR3PvPJztklXNBfNE5VbFImL445tvIEbIYwbZ5NJofb\\_uJ7bpDZ9M7wuy0](https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/05/california-pediatricians-question-school-reopening-guidelines-1291462?fbclid=IwAR3PvPJztklXNBfNE5VbFImL445tvIEbIYwbZ5NJofb_uJ7bpDZ9M7wuy0). June 5

Pediatricians are urging school districts to reopen this fall without delay and suggesting that requiring students to wear masks and submit to daily temperature checks may not be worth the logistical nightmare it could become.

State guidelines released Friday encourage facial coverings and wellness checks for students, as well as a slew of social distancing measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus. But the Southern California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics spoke out recently against a similar plan for Los Angeles County schools, calling it “not realistic or even developmentally appropriate” and warned that masks for younger children could hinder their language skills and other development. Kuo said recommendations to minimize movement in hallways, for example, is overboard.

“Why would we hold schools to a higher standard than what we do for hospitals and clinics?” Kuo said. “Some of the recommendations make you scratch your head. I suspect that the person writing these is not a pediatrician. ... I’m really surprised how everyone is just deferring to public health and giving them that power.”

While face coverings have grown in acceptance as a way to reduce the spread of Covid-19, they are challenging for younger children, Kuo and other child health experts said. And they are a particular barrier for special education students who rely on instructional aides; autistic students who are prone to hypersensitivity; and students with respiratory issues and anxiety.

“Frankly, that temperature is only as good as that moment of time, and we also know that kids are often asymptomatic,” she said. “Is that really the most effective use of our public health resources? And if they do have a fever, which tons of little kids get often for other reasons, what do we do? Exclude them all for 14 days based on those symptoms alone?”

- <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/no-child-known-to-have-passed-on-coronavirus-to-adults-global-study-finds/ar-BB13qj2t?ocid=sf&fbclid=IwAR2ebWNFI3aNdQkEJso5dCv0qnZmwiPtVBOB0qLa9EKJQI8SOqY13A2ghdq>

The review into paediatric coronavirus studies found it is likely children "do not play a significant role" in transmitting the coronavirus and are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. It also found there has not been a single case of a child under 10 transmitting COVID-19, even through contact tracing carried out by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Collated by paediatric blog Don't Forget The Bubbles, in partnership with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), researchers looked at 78 studies from around the world, with most from China where the disease originated. The findings come as the Swiss government said grandparents are now allowed to hug their grandchildren because they concluded that "young children don't transmit the virus".

- [https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2341N7?fbclid=IwAR1I1K8EZ7h-j1e2Pr8v1--OQx-4KhTJvQWG6R\\_LFKZbBzAsaThMQ1JFpvg](https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2341N7?fbclid=IwAR1I1K8EZ7h-j1e2Pr8v1--OQx-4KhTJvQWG6R_LFKZbBzAsaThMQ1JFpvg). May 28

Sending children back to schools and day care centres in Denmark, the first country in Europe to do so, did not lead to an increase in coronavirus infections, according to official data, confirming similar findings from Finland on Thursday.

- [https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR0O4m\\_JVL\\_y1QgtcMDFqvEpIS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg](https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR0O4m_JVL_y1QgtcMDFqvEpIS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg).

Australian Government's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Nick Coatsworth.

When school closures were initially proposed to control an epidemic, planners had influenza in mind. Flu spreading within schools and children are the main source for transmission in the community. But COVID-19 is not the flu. Far fewer children are affected by COVID-19, and the number of transmissions from children to children and children to adults is far less. As an infectious diseases specialist, I have examined all of the available evidence from within Australia and around the world and, as it stands, it does not support avoiding classroom learning as a means to control COVID-19.

The main risk of going back to school is that it increases the movement and interaction of adults in the community and puts staff back in contact with each other. Importantly, this can be managed. Staff and parents must maintain their distance from each other in the school environment, avoid the school if unwell with a cold, and keep children at home when they are not feeling well.

- <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/covid-19-how-new-information-should-drive-policy> Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Roundtable - COVID-19: How New Information Should Drive Policy

Dr. David Katz' testimony:

We should adopt "total harm minimization," aimed at mitigating the direct harms of COVID19, and the indirect harms of societal upheaval and economic collapse, as our national policy objective. This is best pursued by means of risk-based (i.e. vertical) interdiction policies that shelter/protect those most vulnerable to severe infection and grave outcomes, while phasing back to relative normalcy those in lower risk groups.

- [https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054361v1?fbclid=IwAR2jOKI8QUPE5OXWGSF\\_d\\_ERD2uoM19fNPe59VM01OWjriHTsqyb0x\\_e-Ljl](https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054361v1?fbclid=IwAR2jOKI8QUPE5OXWGSF_d_ERD2uoM19fNPe59VM01OWjriHTsqyb0x_e-Ljl) COVID-19 Mortality Risk

The absolute risk of COVID-19 death ranged from 1.7 per million for people <65 years old in Germany to 79 per million in New York City. The absolute risk of COVID-19 death for people ≥80 years old ranged from approximately 1 in 6,000 in Germany to 1 in 420 in Spain. The COVID-19 death risk in people <65 years old during the period of fatalities from the epidemic was equivalent to the death risk from driving between 9 miles per day (Germany) and 415 miles per day (New York City).

CONCLUSIONS: People <65 years old have very small risks of COVID-19 death even in the hotbeds of the pandemic and deaths for people <65 years without underlying predisposing conditions are remarkably uncommon. Strategies focusing specifically on protecting high-risk elderly individuals should be considered in managing the pandemic.

- [https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32405162/?fbclid=IwAR1LHQnVmn1CEkmYWLfJcDC0yxVTIzF12tKr\\_s5VG8GHAuyB2Ht\\_vP8-iA](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32405162/?fbclid=IwAR1LHQnVmn1CEkmYWLfJcDC0yxVTIzF12tKr_s5VG8GHAuyB2Ht_vP8-iA). Case study of asymptomatic person infected. None of the 455 contacts were infected, despite 4-5 days median contact time. This supports the premise that asymptomatic carriers are unlikely to infect others.

455 contacts who were exposed to the asymptomatic COVID-19 virus carrier became the subjects of our research. They were divided into three groups: 35 patients, 196 family members and 224 hospital staffs. The median contact time for patients was four days and that for family members was five days. All CT images showed no sign of COVID-19 infection. No severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infections was detected in 455 contacts by nucleic acid test. Conclusion: In summary, all the 455 contacts were excluded from SARS-CoV-2 infection and we conclude that the infectivity of some asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 carriers might be weak.

- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/08/asymptomatic-coronavirus-patients-arent-spreading-new-infections-who-says.html?fbclid=IwAR3DUyNjIqZkqbKpEh79iTiixtd92UQ9sdryaZHorg4dLVgCaRCRmNRVEWk>. Regarding asymptomatic spread.

Government responses should focus on detecting and isolating infected people with symptoms, the World Health Organization said.

Coronavirus patients without symptoms aren't driving the spread of the virus, World Health Organization officials said Monday, casting doubt on concerns by some researchers that the disease could be difficult to contain due to asymptomatic infections.

"From the data we have, it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits onward to a secondary individual," Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, head of WHO's emerging diseases and zoonosis unit, said at a news briefing from the United Nations agency's Geneva headquarters. "It's very rare."

"We have a number of reports from countries who are doing very detailed contact tracing," she said. "They're following asymptomatic cases. They're following contacts. And they're not finding secondary transmission onward. It's very rare."

- <https://www.foxnews.com/health/cdc-now-says-coronavirus-does-not-spread-easily-via-contaminated-surfaces?fbclid=IwAR0Pa53HR2JITHsyVkyXR-TEPxbvzx4pNtBaREDqjHluosxnXEM4z3pnBT0>. Finally the CDC officially said contagion through surfaces unlikely.

- [https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH\\_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx\\_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U](https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U). This article from the Universities of MN by two professors and experts on respiratory infection concluded "We do not recommend requiring the general public who do not have symptoms of COVID-19-like illness to routinely wear cloth or surgical masks." It then explains why.

Lora Whitehouse  
14435 42<sup>nd</sup> Ave N  
Plymouth, MN 55446

June 22, 2020

Governor Walz  
Minnesota Department of Education  
Minnesota Department of Health  
C/O Alyssa Fritz  
Alyssa.Fritz@house.mn

Dear Governor, MDE and MDH,

I am writing as a parent of four children in Minnesota. I work full-time for a corporation based in Minnesota with over 80,000 employees. My husband works full-time for the State of Minnesota. As I mentioned, we have four children currently in the public schools in the Robbinsdale School District. Our children going into 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Armstrong High School, 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Armstrong High School, 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Plymouth Middle School, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at Zachary Lane Elementary.

As you can see, we are heavy users of the Minnesota public school system, and in the past, we have been staunch supporters of public education in Minnesota. I used to believe that it didn't matter where you lived in Minnesota, you were going to get an amazing education. Sadly, I no longer believe that.

The Robbinsdale School District and the State of Minnesota MDE failed us this past spring when distance learning was implemented. My oldest, at the time a 10<sup>th</sup> grader at Armstrong High School, went from being a straight A student, taking an AP class for US History, involved in advanced orchestra, a participate in Cross Country, Nordic Skiing and Track and Field, to a depressed child who didn't care about the classes and couldn't process his entire world being taken from him, and replaced with a failing substitute for in-person learning. None of our children learned anything new, and the experience was quite awful.

Robbinsdale took the approach that if all students did not have the ability to access classes and technology, then the teaching would be appropriate to that denominator. **This meant that there was no new learning for over three months.** My second grader had no instruction. The most he experienced was a video of his teacher reading a book over the Seesaw app, on a Chromebook we had to purchase because the school district didn't have them for any students 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and under.

This was all while my husband and I were busier than ever at our jobs (which we are extremely grateful to have), and we were not able to teach our children. We didn't have the time during the day due to our busy work schedules, and the evenings needed to be for some family down-time.

**The reason I am writing this letter is to inform you that if public schools do not open full-time for our students, we will pull our children from the public schools. In addition, if face masks are required, we will pull our children from the public schools.**

We have been exploring options, and our family will enroll our children in a private school that does not take and federal or state funding, so they are able to operate their school without the untenable

restrictions currently being proposed by the government. It will be expensive, and require sacrifices on our part, but we feel so strongly about this and our children's education, that we have decided this is what we will do.

Please feel free to contact me if you want to discuss this further.

Kind regards,

*Lora Lewicki Whitehouse*

Lora Lewicki Whitehouse  
763-516-6313

Jun 22, 2020

### **A Parent Statement For Opening MN Schools As Normal:**

My name is Brenda Gorsett. I am the mother of a 16 year old who missed out on the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of her sophomore year and, along with her teammates, defending the Lake Conference and Section in softball. While Eden Prairie is very well known for many sports, softball is not one of them. In 2019, these girls went to the State High School Softball Tournament for the first time since 2007, and were looking forward to defending their successful year with 3 seniors, 1 junior, and 3 sophomores returning from that 2019 team.

I bring all of this up, because first and foremost, while we adults can afford to sit back and “miss” a year of this, or a season of that, or a month of the other, when you take away something from kids, they never get that moment back. Early on, I supported the “stay at home” initiative because there was so much that we didn’t know. We now know a lot. I’m a pharmacist, I’ve worked in immunology since 2003, I understand how to follow data, trends, and balance risks and benefits. For every medication that is prescribed to a patient, there is a risk/benefit analysis that involves the health care provider, the patient, and in many cases the family.

### **We need to have a better risk/benefit analysis for our kids and returning to school in light of this current pandemic.**

You are going to be overwhelmed with a number of statistics from various parents on the lack of risk to our kids. I’m just simply going to say that data from other countries are consistent with what we are seeing in Minnesota and our neighboring states:

- <10% of kids from ages 0-18 test positive for COVID-19
- 2-4% of kids from ages 0-18 who test positive are hospitalized

In Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, and North Dakota, as of today there have been NO DEATHS from SARS-COV2 in kids <18 years old.

In Minnesota alone:

- 980/1880 deaths in ages 0-24 from H1N1 in 2009-2010
- 538/6288 deaths in ages 0-24 from influenza in 2017-2018
- 735/4146 deaths in ages 0-24 from influenza in 2019-2020

**On August 7, 2009 the CDC issued a new recommendation that schools should NOT close down during H1N1 influenza outbreaks**, noting this advice as guidance and that decisions should be made based on **local conditions**. “The new advice is being issued because “once you close a school, as we saw last spring, that creates a very significant ripple effect” on parents and businesses, Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, said during the briefing... However, the officials said, some schools will be justified in closing if

they have a high rate of infection or large numbers of students with the underlying conditions that make the virus more dangerous.”

H1N1 was a novel influenza A virus that predominantly affected YOUNG PEOPLE. Yet schools did not overwhelmingly close. We now know that SARS-COV2 does not affect our children to the same extent as adults, particularly the elderly or those with pre-existing conditions. We also know that 81% of the deaths in Minnesota are in our elderly nursing home population – those least able to fight off this virus.

### **WHY ARE WE ASSIGNING THE BURDEN OF DECREASING DEATHS FROM SARS-COV2 TO OUR CHILDREN?**

The May 19, 2020 CDC “Considerations for Schools” are also guidance NOT RULES and state: “As some communities in the United States open K-12 schools, CDC offers the following considerations for ways in which schools can help protect students, teachers, administrators, and staff and slow the spread of COVID-19. **Schools can determine, in collaboration with state and local health officials to the extent possible, whether and how to implement these considerations while adjusting to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the local community.** Implementation should be guided by what is feasible, practical, acceptable, and tailored to the needs of each community.”

There should be broader help for those at higher risk, both adults and students. When teachers and students are sick, they should be sent home with better understanding of how this will impact their school work. But not every single student should be penalized for the few. This is part of risk/benefit analysis. Additional parts of risk/benefit analysis include the learning environment, safety, mental health, and relationship building.

This virus is not going to go away. The best thing that we can do is have sufficient numbers of low-risk people contract the virus, obtain individual and eventually herd immunity, and educate on safe and healthy ways to protect those who are at risk. Masks for all do not make any sense in this environment. Keeping kids physically apart and separated by physical barriers do not make sense in this environment. I understand the arguments “against” relying on immunity – those are, quite frankly, smokescreen arguments. If those smokescreens are indeed accurate, then we have zero need for the flu shot as that vaccination relies on the same theory of immunity.

### **What I would like to see happen upon reopening of schools:**

- In person, onsite learning
- Optional masks and distancing only for students and staff by their own choice
- No social distancing for children. No social restrictions for children (except to respect others’ personal choices to stay at a distance)
- Extra outdoor time for purposes of health, both free play and classtime
- No toxic sanitation chemicals. Only non-toxic methods.

- Streamline the ease of routine hand-washing, and subsequent moisturizing in the winter.
- Optional distance learning for students and staff who prefer it.
- Firm but supportive sick policy. Those who are sick stay home, without repercussions.
- Limit and reduce out of school work and homework in order to promote healthy sleep, downtime, etc.
- Creation of a positive health support plan for adults in schools. For example: encourage outdoor learning. Create a culture of respect for adults who are choosing to distance and wear masks. Encourage availability of healthy snacks. Limit out of school hours workloads in order to allow sufficient rest at home. Encourage physical activity.

Kind Regards,  
Brenda Gorsett, Pharm.D.  
Eden Prairie, MN

June 22, 2020

Dear Legislatures,

My name is Alexandra Reiland and I was a Freshman in High School this past school year. I go to White Bear Lake Area High School North Campus. I wanted to write you and tell you about my experience with distance learning. From my perspective this was a horrible way to teach students. I could not get motivated to do my work, there was no consequence if I did not do my work on time or at all, and I felt that I did not learn a thing. I missed out on feedback that would have help strengthened my Spanish, writing, test taking abilities, and my capability to take an AP course. Distance Learning was very frustrating for students and teachers. Teachers did their best with this situation, but this cannot be a long-term solution. So, with that, I also write to you to fully open schools back up in the fall for students to get the proper education they deserve.

-Sincerely

Alexandra Reiland

June 22, 2020

Dear Legislatures,

My name is Bridget Kamas, I am a stay at home mom to my 2 children Alexandra and Tommy and I am not smarter than a 5<sup>th</sup> Grader. My husband and I have lucky enough to have all the means in the world to raise our children. I was able to stay home, be vested in my children from volunteering at school, helping with kids who are less fortunate from dropping those kids home after practice to buying them dinner, to even having those kids spend long weekend because parents were not around. I only mention this for the following reason.

There are children who are less fortunate than mine. Children who go to school as a safe haven from abusive parents. Children who rely on the two meals a day from school. You may say, "they can still go to school and get the meals." Most of these parents do not have reliable transportation or can't be bothered to drive to school. I have seen this firsthand and it is not only sad but frightening. Then we have children who have mental health issues who rely on their school for access to counselors for those needs. Not to mention the ADHD kids, the IEP kids etc. Those are my concerns for ALL children.

As it relates to my children, the Distance Learning program was a JOKE!!! I have 1 child in a private catholic school (5<sup>th</sup> grade) Frassatti Catholic Academy and a child in public school (9<sup>th</sup> grade) White Bear Lake, MN.

Technology: Chromebooks were issued for both children. Both of these Chromebooks broke and were not fixable or able to be replaced in time. Our only saving grace was that we had an additional laptop and personal Chromebook already. If we did not have the means, we would not have had anything and there was nothing the school could do for us.

On-line zoom meetings: This was a joke, teachers would send out the date and time of meetings. The kids would all log on talk to each other, no teacher. No teacher, half the time, would not show up. After about 4 weeks of that they finally figured it out. How is my 5<sup>th</sup> grader supposed to problem solve that issue. The on-line course work was hard to understand due to lack of teacher interaction. Although these kids have Chromebooks in their normal day to day, with teachers. This is not the same. Teachers would say "we are available for you" but it was hard to communicate it.

Not enough: Both of my children excel in school. We moved my daughter from private school to public school to get the AP classes. She worked her heart out all year of her freshman year for her AP credit, then loses it to the pass/fail grading for the last semester of the year. From that point on I could not motivate my child to do anything. She said, "why should I work so hard for nothing?" She would barely do enough work to barely pass. I had no words, what could I tell her to motivate her?

My son would get his assignment and finish all his work within an hour. When speaking to his teacher she said she was over her head. She had kids screaming that they could do the work, to kids that were done and needed more. I asked for a reading list, additional websites etc., never got it. His private school choose to keep grades "as normal". Ironically, straight A's and got a C in art. Why? Because I didn't have access to getting different art supplies from the store they asked for. So, what are you going to do for those kids who must go out and buy art supplies?? I have money and ability to get them and could not find what was requested.

I DO NOT HAVE THE PATIENCE FOR DISTANCE LERNING!!

Everyday, was a fight an argument that ended in crying and anger on both sides. All my kids wanted to do is go back to school. Both children will be enrolled in public school moving forward, you have to move forward with regular school hours. Have people sign a waiver, I have signed one for everything from dentist, orthodontist, doctor visits, school team practices etc. Create a waiver, have people sign it, if you do not want your child in school they do not have to come, distance learning is available for them. This waiver could be that same solution.

Masks: No masks required; people can choose to wear them. My husband is one of the top start-up Medical Device people in the State of MN, specializing in sterilization. 99% of people have no idea what a sterile field is, or not to touch your mask once it is on. I have watched children chew on them, tug at them with dirty hands, take off fall to ground and put back on. All those germs and bacteria are now on the mask, being breathed back into their lungs. You will see an influx of bacteria lung infection soon due to heat and lack of cleanliness which now make you more susceptible to COVID. People can choose to wear them but not require them. Again, waiver.

I can go into detail, for hours, the sadness, the mental health problems all this has caused, the stress and anxiety in my home, the lack of education and motivation. Overall, Distance Learning DOES NOT work, get my kids back to school, as normal.

Thank you in advance for your time,

Bridget Kamas

I am the parent of two daughters, ages 12 and 15, that attend ISD194, and I am extremely concerned that Minnesota public schools may not re-open in the traditional sense this fall. My husband and I are concerned that the state will decide to continue distance learning, which fails to provide our children with the necessary social and academic structures that public schools were created to provide. Although Governor Walz ran for office as a candidate who claimed to care about children and their education, his seeming indifference in addressing the repercussions of altering children's education and cancelling their activities is disconcerting.

Furthermore, the lack of clear communication regarding what form of public school will be available in Minnesota leaves many families unprepared for what may be a continuation of the policies that were in place at the end of this past school year, which is unacceptable to many. Parents need to prepare now to enroll their children in private schools or to move to states that have been clear that the education of children is a priority.

I am not dismissive of the potential risks, but I have examined the statistics and other facts regarding COVID-19, and do not understand how the schools could remain closed for such a minimal risk to school-aged children, particularly when most all Minnesota schools remained open during the 2009 pandemic, which was a much greater threat to children. Furthermore, it has become increasingly clear that if vulnerable individuals are taking appropriate precautions and isolating themselves, then asymptomatic carriers like children can resume their activities without an appreciable increase in risk to the vulnerable. Understandably, parents of vulnerable children may want to utilize online learning options, and substitute teachers may be needed if teachers who are at high risk are not able to teach in person, but it would be absurd to continue these closures rather than educate parents and educators on the true risks and then let people decide for themselves.

Thank you for your time and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Emily Williams

To whom it may concern,

I am a parent of two daughters, ages 12 and 15, that attend ISD 194. I am writing to voice my concern that the State of Minnesota will continue to put the education and well being of our children on the back burner in the name of protecting the elderly from COVID-19. While I am not discounting the impact of COVID-19 on the oldest and sickest in the population, I am tired of the State of Minnesota in general and Governor Walz and the Departments of Health and Education in particular discounting the lives of our children. Schools must open on time and as normal this fall.

In March, we were told by Governor Walz and the Department of Health that we had to “flatten the curve” to allow our medical professionals and hospitals time to prepare for the large number of people expected to become infected by COVID-19. While I was skeptical then that we were going to disrupt society to avoid catching a bad flu, I like most Minnesotans fell in line and reluctantly walked off the cliff. Unfortunately, what was originally presented as a deferral of the inevitable has turned into an apparently never-ending quest to stop anyone from ever catching COVID-19. We were sold a bill of goods and our children are paying the price.

Our school district implemented a distance learning model designed to allow students to continue learning in the winter when school would historically have been cancelled due to snow or extreme cold. Based on the results of the months-long experiment in distance learning this spring, I am happy to report distance learning will work wonderfully if it is implemented for a couple of days each winter. However, as any parent and honest educator will tell you, it is not a sustainable replacement for the education and social development of children for an entire semester or school year.

I believe the summer slide began in March for my daughters. They did not learn the same amount this year as students in prior years. Assuming school resumes as usual this fall, my fear is a significant part of the school year will be spent trying to catch up to where they should have been had school not been disrupted this year. Fortunately, my daughters tend to do well in school, and I believe they will eventually catch up to where they should be for their age and grade. Unfortunately, many more students will not be so lucky.

It goes without saying that many significant milestones are achieved in school – band and choir concerts, sports championships, musicals, plays, field trips, and graduations. Unfortunately, too many children missed too many milestones this year for reasons beyond their control. The adults running our state failed them, as did the adults in our state who elected them or did nothing to remove them.

Even in March, it was clear COVID-19 had minimal impact on those who were young and healthy as it primarily targeted the oldest and sickest amongst us. Our children were forced to put their lives on hold in the name of protecting their grandparents and great grandparents. In 2009, when the last pandemic was affecting children, the state did not tell the adults to “stay at home” to protect the children, and in fact not even most schools were closed during that pandemic. The double standard is striking.

As we are now approaching the beginning of the next school year, I urge you to reconsider the failed policy put in place to end the 2019-2020 school year and ensure our children will return to school in September like they do every year without restriction. Distance learning should remain an option for children falling in a high-risk category and parents with an irrational fear of sending their children to

school should have an opportunity to opt out. However, most of our children should not have to continue the summer slide that began in March. Further, they should be allowed to experience the achievements denied them this year. Time does not stop, so Governor Walz and the Departments of Health and Education should stop taking away their opportunities.

I am not a native Minnesotan and there are things (such as the weather) that occasionally make me wonder why I live here. The education of my children was not one of them until this year. In my opinion, a state that values education as highly as Minnesota claims should be doing everything it can to ensure our children return to school this fall. I sincerely hope Governor Walz and the Departments of Health and Education will do the right thing and announce a “better in school” policy immediately.

However, if the recent past is any indication, I do not have much faith. Accordingly, I am urging the legislature to do its duty and send a strong, bipartisan message to Governor Walz that education in Minnesota is still important. Tell him he must open schools this fall as normal. Anything less will be a signal to parents that Minnesota is no longer a good place to raise children.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Alan Williams

To whom this may concern,

As a mother of 5 school age children, distance learning was challenging to say the least. We are hoping for a complete return to normal for our kids this fall.

Thank you!

Anne and Dennis Swanson

Last modified: 10:15 AM

June 22, 2020

Mahtomedi, MN

A Parent Statement For Opening MN Schools As Normal:

My name is Kerri Mitchell. I am a parent of two 15 year old teens and a 13 year old teen who intend to start school in the fall at Mahtomedi, District 832. Additionally we live in Washington County. This statement is to share our experiences and advocate for reopening of schools in Minnesota in person, as normal, without masks, distancing, or other protocols mandated upon the students. If school resumes online or with these illogical mandates, we will be unenrolling. This is not our choice. Our choice is schooling as normal. No New Normal! We will not participate in schooling by distance, masked, nor social-distanced!

Distance Learning should NOT be an option.

Our experience last spring with unexpected distance learning was a disaster. My twins are both A students who received the Presidential Award for making honor roll every quarter throughout their three years of middle school. When school was forced to continue through remote learning, they were greatly underchallenged. They lost interest in school and said it was a waste of time and a joke. They said they didn't learn anything during distance learning and that they really missed being in class and socializing with their classmates and teachers. My daughter who is 13 had a different experience. She needs more face to face with teachers and extra learning that did not happen. She also didn't learn because she normally is able to ask a lot of questions and gets extra help. It was a challenge for me to keep her engaged when she's not in a formal setting. She also didn't have the same expectations as she would have in class and without those she only tries enough to get by. She wasn't interested in school and it was all a waste of time for her as well. Distance learning was a huge waste of time and I'm angry my kids don't have the education they should have starting this fall. To think this should continue is maddening.

I am shocked we are even talking about distance learning at this point. I am angry that the "Science" being shoved down our throats is from months ago before we knew more. Shame on this government for not spending the time and energy to help the long-term care folks and for wasting my kids education, tax payers dollars and their mental health by not looking at the new data in front of them. I am sickened to think my kids may not go back this fall. It's a tragedy. My oldest daughter is a Covid nurse at a Children's Minneapolis Hospital and even she says all the kids need to go back to school in the normal setting. She has seen an influx of attempted suicides in the age ranges of 11-15. These kids don't have support at home and are depressed from lack of sports and social interactions now with school in the fall not certain it has brought on desperation for these young kids. I worry about the mental health of the kids and the parents at home that have to support distance learning. I also demand a better education for my three children entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The evidence: Children are safe. School shutdowns do nothing against the disease.

Evidence is clear that children have negligible risk from COVID - 19. They are not responsible for spread of the disease. Closing of schools has not significantly reduced the spread of this disease. There is no

reason to restrict children nor the normal opening of schools. I have extensive research to support these points and will include them at the end. When you, as the professionals and decision-makers in children's lives see new good information, it is your responsibility to revise and act according to the best information that you now have. Now you have it. Here are a few of the most compelling points:

- Children are not COVID-19 super spreaders: time to go back to school. Children are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. Case studies show infected children failing to transmit despite heavy and prolonged exposure to others. Data from primary care and household studies suggests SARS-CoV-2 is mainly spread between adults and from adult family members to children. In the conclusion: "Governments worldwide should allow all children back to school regardless of comorbidities... severe COVID-19 is as rare as many other serious infection syndromes in children that do not cause schools to be closed. Individualised risk assessment and decision-making by clinicians should occur for those considered at exceptional risk (such as in immediately after bone marrow transplant) or where there are other older family members at significant risk.
- We now know that the pandemic influenza data are not applicable to Covid-19 . The Spanish Flu benefited from school closures, but this does not hold true in this case. Even if children do not seem to contribute massively to the spread, they can go through the disease; usually with very mild symptoms. So why do we have to protect them from infection? Sure, if we send the children back to school, as Sweden has done so far without any major problems, we must also ensure that the hygiene measures for the older population and for the children continue to be observed.

On the publication date of this blog (6.4.20), a systematic review was published in the Lancet Child and Adolescent Health Health (Viner et al.) On this topic . The article summarized 16 papers. The conclusions essentially coincide with ours: The scientific assessment shows that the closure of schools has no relevant influence on the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic.

- Data from the SARS outbreak in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore suggest that school transmission played no substantial role in the outbreak, and that school closures and other activities such as school temperature monitoring did not contribute to control of infection transmission.

Although children appear to contract infection at the same rate as adults, they largely have mild or asymptomatic forms of the disease and appear to be less likely to spread the virus through coughing or sneezing; however, a precise understanding is as yet lacking.

Currently, the evidence to support national closure of schools to combat COVID-19 is very weak and data from influenza outbreaks suggest that school closures could have relatively small effects on a virus with COVID-19's high transmissibility and apparent low clinical effect on school children. At the same time, these data also show that school closures can have profound economic and social consequences.

It is unclear how long countries can maintain tight suppression measures before behavioural fatigue in the population occurs.<sup>31</sup> Given predictions that social distancing measures might need to be in place for many months or even years, there is an urgent need to identify how countries can safely return students to education and parents to work. Education is one of the strongest predictors of the health and the wealth of a country's future workers, and the impact of long-term school closure on educational

outcomes, future earnings, the health of young people, and future national productivity has not been quantified.

In the state of Minnesota where 81% of deaths (attributed to COVID-19) have occurred in nursing homes, isn't it time that we get real about where risk does and does not exist? With a disease with a clear and commonly known predilection for the elderly or health compromised, as well a clear and indisputable inability to significantly harm the school-aged, isn't it time that we let children resume their normal lives? If it is truly the adults who are at risk, let any future policies focus upon the protection of adults from other adults.

What I would like to see happen upon reopening of schools:

- In person, onsite learning
- Optional masks only for students and staff
- No social distancing for children. No social restrictions for children (except to respect others' personal choices to stay at a distance)
- Distancing and masks by choice for adults in schools
- Extra outdoor time for purposes of health, both free play and classtime
- No toxic sanitation chemicals. Only non-toxic methods.
- Streamline the ease of routine hand-washing, and subsequent moisturizing in the winter.
- Optional distance learning for students and staff who prefer it.
- Firm but supportive sick policy. Those who are sick stay home, without repercussions.
- Limit and reduce out of school work and homework in order to promote healthy sleep, downtime, etc.
- Creation of a positive health support plan for adults in schools. For example: encourage outdoor learning. Create a culture of respect for adults who are choosing to distance and wear masks. Encourage availability of healthy snacks. Limit out of school hours workloads in order to allow sufficient rest at home. Encourage physical activity.

Addendum of Further Relevant Studies and Articles:

- [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjlul1STpRi4cdbe5ehk8NQxRpOKFB\\_w](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/06/09/school-age-children-likely-hit-lightning-die-coronavirus-oxbridge/?fbclid=IwAR0JB7twNyPUxOWHGczxYtpveYrHjlul1STpRi4cdbe5ehk8NQxRpOKFB_w).  
June 9.

Schoolchildren under the age of 15 are more likely to be hit by lightning than die from coronavirus, new

figures suggest, amid mounting pressure on the Government to get more to get pupils back into classrooms as quickly as possible.

Scientists from the universities of Cambridge and Oxford have called for "rational debate" based on the "tiny" risk to children, suggesting that if no vaccine is found in future it may be better for younger people to continue with their lives while the more vulnerable are shielded.

- [https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/05/california-pediatricians-question-school-reopening-guidelines-1291462?fbclid=IwAR3PvPJztkIXNBrfNE5VbFImL445tvIEbIYwbZ5NJofb\\_uJ7bpDZ9M7wuy0](https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2020/06/05/california-pediatricians-question-school-reopening-guidelines-1291462?fbclid=IwAR3PvPJztkIXNBrfNE5VbFImL445tvIEbIYwbZ5NJofb_uJ7bpDZ9M7wuy0). June 5

Pediatricians are urging school districts to reopen this fall without delay and suggesting that requiring students to wear masks and submit to daily temperature checks may not be worth the logistical nightmare it could become.

State guidelines released Friday encourage facial coverings and wellness checks for students, as well as a slew of social distancing measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus. But the Southern California chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics spoke out recently against a similar plan for Los Angeles County schools, calling it "not realistic or even developmentally appropriate" and warned that masks for younger children could hinder their language skills and other development. Kuo said recommendations to minimize movement in hallways, for example, is overboard.

"Why would we hold schools to a higher standard than what we do for hospitals and clinics?" Kuo said. "Some of the recommendations make you scratch your head. I suspect that the person writing these is not a pediatrician. ... I'm really surprised how everyone is just deferring to public health and giving them that power."

While face coverings have grown in acceptance as a way to reduce the spread of Covid-19, they are challenging for younger children, Kuo and other child health experts said. And they are a particular barrier for special education students who rely on instructional aides; autistic students who are prone to hypersensitivity; and students with respiratory issues and anxiety.

"Frankly, that temperature is only as good as that moment of time, and we also know that kids are often asymptomatic," she said. "Is that really the most effective use of our public health resources? And if they do have a fever, which tons of little kids get often for other reasons, what do we do? Exclude them all for 14 days based on those symptoms alone?"

- <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/no-child-known-to-have-passed-on-coronavirus-to-adults-global-study-finds/ar-BB13qi2t?ocid=sf&fbclid=IwAR2ebWNFI3aNdQkEJso5dCv0gnZmwiPtVBOB0qLa9EKJQI8SOgY13A2ghdg>

The review into paediatric coronavirus studies found it is likely children "do not play a significant role" in transmitting the coronavirus and are significantly less likely to become infected than adults. It also found there has not been a single case of a child under 10 transmitting COVID-19, even through contact tracing carried out by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Collated by paediatric blog Don't Forget The

Bubbles, in partnership with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), researchers looked at 78 studies from around the world, with most from China where the disease originated. The findings come as the Swiss government said grandparents are now allowed to hug their grandchildren because they concluded that "young children don't transmit the virus".

- [https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2341N7?fbclid=IwAR11K8EZ7h-j1e2Pr8v1--OQx-4KhTJvQWG6R\\_LFKZbBzAsaThMQ1JFpvg](https://www.google.com/amp/s/mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN2341N7?fbclid=IwAR11K8EZ7h-j1e2Pr8v1--OQx-4KhTJvQWG6R_LFKZbBzAsaThMQ1JFpvg). May 28

Sending children back to schools and day care centres in Denmark, the first country in Europe to do so, did not lead to an increase in coronavirus infections, according to official data, confirming similar findings from Finland on Thursday.

- [https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR0O4m\\_JVL\\_y1QgtcMDFgvEpIS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg](https://www.health.gov.au/news/getting-our-kids-back-to-school-a-matter-of-trust?fbclid=IwAR0O4m_JVL_y1QgtcMDFgvEpIS5tTwoqAee-EEofhYSxapWMeTNIHbUNTg).

Australian Government's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Nick Coatsworth.

When school closures were initially proposed to control an epidemic, planners had influenza in mind. Flu spreading within schools and children are the main source for transmission in the community. But COVID-19 is not the flu. Far fewer children are affected by COVID-19, and the number of transmissions from children to children and children to adults is far less. As an infectious diseases specialist, I have examined all of the available evidence from within Australia and around the world and, as it stands, it does not support avoiding classroom learning as a means to control COVID-19.

The main risk of going back to school is that it increases the movement and interaction of adults in the community and puts staff back in contact with each other. Importantly, this can be managed. Staff and parents must maintain their distance from each other in the school environment, avoid the school if unwell with a cold, and keep children at home when they are not feeling well.

- <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/covid-19-how-new-information-should-drive-policy> Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Roundtable - COVID-19: How New Information Should Drive Policy

Dr. David Katz' testimony:

We should adopt "total harm minimization," aimed at mitigating the direct harms of COVID19, and the indirect harms of societal upheaval and economic collapse, as our national policy objective. This is best pursued by means of risk-based (i.e. vertical) interdiction policies that shelter/protect those most vulnerable to severe infection and grave outcomes, while phasing back to relative normalcy those in lower risk groups.

- [https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054361v1?fbclid=IwAR2jOKI8QUpeE5OXWGSFdERD2uoM19fNPe59VM01OWjriHTsqyb0x\\_e-Ljl](https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054361v1?fbclid=IwAR2jOKI8QUpeE5OXWGSFdERD2uoM19fNPe59VM01OWjriHTsqyb0x_e-Ljl) COVID-19 Mortality Risk

The absolute risk of COVID-19 death ranged from 1.7 per million for people <65 years old in Germany to

79 per million in New York City. The absolute risk of COVID-19 death for people  $\geq 80$  years old ranged from approximately 1 in 6,000 in Germany to 1 in 420 in Spain. The COVID-19 death risk in people  $< 65$  years old during the period of fatalities from the epidemic was equivalent to the death risk from driving between 9 miles per day (Germany) and 415 miles per day (New York City).

CONCLUSIONS: People  $< 65$  years old have very small risks of COVID-19 death even in the hotbeds of the pandemic and deaths for people  $< 65$  years without underlying predisposing conditions are remarkably uncommon. Strategies focusing specifically on protecting high-risk elderly individuals should be considered in managing the pandemic.

- [https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32405162/?fbclid=IwAR1LHQnVmn1CEkmYWLfTJcDC0yxVTIzF12tKr\\_s5VG8GHAuyB2Ht\\_vP8-iA](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32405162/?fbclid=IwAR1LHQnVmn1CEkmYWLfTJcDC0yxVTIzF12tKr_s5VG8GHAuyB2Ht_vP8-iA). Case study of asymptomatic person infected. None of the 455 contacts were infected, despite 4-5 days median contact time. This supports the premise that asymptomatic carriers are unlikely to infect others.

455 contacts who were exposed to the asymptomatic COVID-19 virus carrier became the subjects of our research. They were divided into three groups: 35 patients, 196 family members and 224 hospital staffs. The median contact time for patients was four days and that for family members was five days. All CT images showed no sign of COVID-19 infection. No severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) infections was detected in 455 contacts by nucleic acid test. Conclusion: In summary, all the 455 contacts were excluded from SARS-CoV-2 infection and we conclude that the infectivity of some asymptomatic SARS-CoV-2 carriers might be weak.

- <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/08/asymptomatic-coronavirus-patients-arent-spreading-new-infections-who-says.html?fbclid=IwAR3DUyNJIqZkgbKpEh79iTiixtd92UQ9sdryaZHorg4dLVgCaRCRmNRVEWk>. Regarding asymptomatic spread.

Government responses should focus on detecting and isolating infected people with symptoms, the World Health Organization said.

Coronavirus patients without symptoms aren't driving the spread of the virus, World Health Organization officials said Monday, casting doubt on concerns by some researchers that the disease could be difficult to contain due to asymptomatic infections.

"From the data we have, it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits onward to a secondary individual," Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, head of WHO's emerging diseases and zoonosis unit, said at a news briefing from the United Nations agency's Geneva headquarters. "It's very rare."

"We have a number of reports from countries who are doing very detailed contact tracing," she said. "They're following asymptomatic cases. They're following contacts. And they're not finding secondary transmission onward. It's very rare."

- <https://www.foxnews.com/health/cdc-now-says-coronavirus-does-not-spread-easily-via-contaminated-surfaces?fbclid=IwAR0Pa53HR2JITHsyVkyXR-TEPxbz4pNtBaREDqjHluosxnXEM4z3pnBTo>. Finally the CDC officially said contagion through surfaces unlikely.

- [https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH\\_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx\\_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U](https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2020/04/commentary-masks-all-covid-19-not-based-sound-data?fbclid=IwAR0H4sgA3csDpH_OYyWQRCf932fKX3qx_m92M7s0M2pc6bmYluTFNDAsx3U). This article from the Universities of MN by two professors and experts on respiratory infection concluded "We do not recommend requiring the general public who do not have symptoms of COVID-19-like illness to routinely wear cloth or surgical masks." It then explains why.

June 22, 2020

Ms. Fritz,

I am writing this letter as a parent of a soon to be 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grader, PTA president and community supporter.

Our kids deserve to be back in the classrooms this fall. **No restrictions, no precautions, just back to learning at its fullest.** Distance learning is not learning, but rather holding the line. I fear that students have already lost ground and will be close to a year behind if this continues. For the mental and physical health as well as educational advancement, each and every student deserves to be back in the school. Students need the one on one support of teachers and support staff to feel connected, properly supported and to get the very best out of the education experience. Students thrive on interaction with peers – to see how their actions impact others, to offer good competition, teamwork and so much more.

The parents that have means will turn to tutors, private schools or other sources to ensure their students will succeed. Those without this option will fall further behind. I never selected home schooling or on-line schooling for my children. This type of schooling does not work for all. I selected for public schools to teach my kids in person for a reason. I am an educated parent with more than a 4 year degree, but I am not a teacher. They need the in-person training from a licensed individual to properly comprehend and apply new topics. Yes, in person. No, my kids do not have an IEP, they are typically at the top quarter of their class, BUT that is because they are in class and have that interaction. They struggled this last distance learning period. I can't imagine what parents of younger children, IEPs, or other factors that make learning more complicated went through and the frustration those students felt. I have spoken to many in this situation, but will not digress into their story as it is theirs to tell.

I am saddened by the scare tactics that have been used to strong hold the students. Their futures are becoming bleaker by each missed day in class. The science that is supporting the "lock down" is flawed. These students and the majority of the teaching and support staff are not at risk. The missed in-class time to the students will be a much larger detriment that this virus will ever be.

I ask you to stop the suffering of many to protect the few.

Best Regards,

*Nicole Folkerts*

Nicole Folkerts  
210 Jasmine Lane  
St. Joseph, MN 56374

Dear MN legislators,

I feel compelled to write to you on behalf of our 12yo son and the importance of having school at school this fall without special conditions/mandates/social distancing/mask wearing.

Our son is fortunate to have a safe home life, but for many students that is not the case. Time spent at school is a much needed respite where they are safe, fed, nurtured, and cared for. Our son is fortunate to have two parents who are available, but that is not the case for many students.

Even with a safe, nurturing, home life where he received help during distance learning, our son struggled. Distance learning did not go well for him. It was overwhelming and frustrating for him and it is not because his teachers didn't do a good job—I feel they did a fantastic job with what they were dealing with. Distance learning does not allow for the high standard of instruction he receives in the classroom. Distance learning doesn't allow for him to learn how to navigate interpersonal relationships. Distance learning was not good for his mental health. He was anxious, frustrated, and being away from his classmates and teachers was very hard for him. Distance learning doesn't allow for so much of what children need to thrive.

It is very difficult for working parents to give their children the help they need during distance learning. Distance learning this past spring was also very stressful for parents.

Please consider allowing individual districts to determine what is best for their schools and communities. We purposely chose a small, more rural area to raise our family and a small school to have our children attend. The proposed mandates are not necessary for all areas. Teachers and administrators are very able to determine what is best for their students.

Please listen to what parents want for their children. Please listen to what teachers want for their students.

The data we have does not warrant the measures currently being considered. Our children need to be in school, with their peers and teachers, and without masks.

Thank you,

Ted and Erica Slathar

Norwood Young America, MN

## Parent Feedback Regarding Distance Learning

Hearing June 24, 2020

I offer this statement as a parent of students in the Wayzata School District. My daughter will be a senior in the fall and my son will be a sophomore. I can not stress enough how important that the children attend school in the fall as normal. The spring was a complete disaster with distance learning. Their education suffered and their mental health deteriorated. I simply can not fathom a scenario where I have to tell them they are not attending school as normal in the fall, it would be devastating. My daughter had many days of depression and crying and our son simply went non-verbal. We just couldn't get him to talk or open up at all. To keep this brief, I offer the following points:

1. The point of the distance learning and order in place was to flatten the curve, Minnesota has been successful in that regard, covid is trending downward in our state;
2. There have been zero deaths in the age category 0-30 years old in Minnesota, children are simply not at a great risk;
3. The argument that they will spread it to others just does not hold water when you consider, stores, restaurants, casinos, airports and everything else is open, it is irresponsible to make the children sacrifice any further;
4. A hybrid model would be a total logistical nightmare. How can two parents that work full time be expected to stay home half the week and teach their children? It's simply ridiculous; and
5. The rural and lesser affluent districts suffered greatly. The achievement gap is going to be astounding, I can't even imagine how many children fell through the cracks this passed spring not to mention some children are in abusive homes and without enough food who rely on school for refuge and stability.

In conclusion, it is imperative the children are able to get back to their regular routines in the fall. At that point they will have been home 6 months, can you imagine the back slide in education? This cannot continue; it is not reasonable or a viable option. We have asked these kids to sacrifice enough, they need their lives back. To be honest, I don't understand why this is even a question, children belong in school, it is literally the law. I do not believe this administration has the authority to deem otherwise. The repercussions of continuing with this nonsense will cause irreparable harm to our young.

Signed,

Extremely concerned and frustrated parent.

June 22, 2020

Dear Ms. Fritz,

I am writing to you today as a concerned parent of two young boys. They are entering 1st and 3rd grade this fall. Their entire education in front of them. Their entire educational experience and their view on themselves, classmates and schools in general, lies in your hands.

Minnesota schools need to open this fall AND they need to open as normal without unrealistic restrictions and guidelines.

I am not going to write about science and data surrounding COVID-19, I know you are well aware of the numbers. You are well aware there are zero deaths in Minnesota under the age of 20. You are well aware the risk of dying from this virus is extremely low, unless you live in a long term care facility, specifically in Minnesota.

It is not your responsibility to save all of us from catching a virus. We live with viruses every day. There will be more and new ones in our future. It is your responsibility to educate us on best practices to avoid getting sick and then we utilize them. We've been doing this for hundreds of years. We can handle it.

The basics of life should be available to our children, they are our future. They deserve an education in a normal environment. They deserve to see their friends' faces and to have unmasked teachers so they can see their expressions and hear them clearly. They deserve to eat lunch with their peers in a big, loud crazy lunchroom, they deserve to play and laugh and run at recess with all their friends as they are doing today, right now...

At this moment, in every neighborhood in Minnesota, kids are intermingling with each other, right now. These same kids who will be going to school together are sharing toys, swimming in neighborhood pools, entering each other's homes, going to summer camps, beginning to play sports again and going to daycares which have never closed. **Kids are playing with each other as normal in every neighborhood right now.** Go see for yourselves.

We only have one shot at this thing called life, I want my kids to live it normally. They're my kids. This should be my choice. Open up schools as normal. Those who are scared can homeschool their kids. Teachers or staff who are scared can become online instructors or find a new job where they feel more comfortable. There have always been alternatives for those who have not wanted to attend public schools. There is no alternative for those who embrace public schools and want our kids to attend them as normal.

Schools should resume this fall and be normal. Those who don't agree with it should adjust, not the other way around.

I am begging you to open up schools in the fall. I am begging you to open up schools without unrealistic restrictions and guidelines. I cannot write this letter with enough passion. You are responsible for what my children's future looks like. I am counting on you.

Sincerely,

Amy Schmidt  
Hennepin County, Wayzata School District #284

Dear Alyssa Fritz,

I am writing to you today about the school year for 2020-2021. I understand how difficult this must be trying to make decisions for an upcoming year. From my point of view...I have 3 daughters who are in White Bear Lake School District. While WBL did an amazing job with the quick change to distant learning I feel like my children did not thrive. They did well with the adjustment and we were fortunate that I was able to stay home and my husband did more of the day to day with our real estate business. Learning in groups, working together, working through difficult situations are instrumental to a student's development. I was able to be home and they did have each other to sometimes work together and did so much better when they would be working together.

In the event that schools open with requirements of masks I will not be sending my children to go to school made to live in fear of this virus on a day to day basis. More washing hands, extra cleaning, health screening even, WONDERFUL but isolated lunch, lack of recess, limited PE, limited singing, masks, etc... I will not be sending my children to school. Our children have been playing with neighbors, playing pick up games of softball, basketball, playing at the parks and are thriving with their social interactions.

Without a back to "normal" experience with minor modifications I will opt to homeschool my daughters (6th, 4th & 2nd grade) I feel like with planning I can put together with assistance a better program that is feasible to the parents time vs 3 kids on 3 different lessons/schedules was very overwhelming. Imagine if I was trying to work also. I hope you take this point of view to heart and weigh the options heavily on the kids in MN and the working parents.

If you have any questions at all I would be happy to discuss our experience though very positive and I thought WBL did an amazing job just not the right education and childhood I chose to have my kids experience again.

Sincerely,

Tracy Peltier

651-249-8754

[TracyPeltier@edinarealty.com](mailto:TracyPeltier@edinarealty.com)

To the Committee for Re-Opening Schools fall of 2020:

I am a mother of 2 in the Wayzata school district. My kids will be entering their Freshman and 6<sup>th</sup> Grade year respectively. It is my opinion and belief that all our children should return to school in the fall without social distancing and without masks. In other words – it should look and feel *exactly* like fall 2019 – Normal. The guidelines published by the CDC are just that, guidelines and do not have to be followed. I ask you to check your hearts and use your critical thinking and logic skills to do what I trust you know is right. That children are not at risk from this virus. That there always have been viruses and always will be viruses. That it should be the parents looking out for their children's health and well-being and that we should not be subjected to draconian, irrational, and damaging measures. That going back to school in an environment outlined in the CDC guidelines will undoubtedly do damage to them. To their bodies, their minds, and their spirits.

Here are some additional examples and thoughts on why the genie is out the box so to speak and therefore implementing any of the CDC guidelines would be costly (dollars and mental) and end up proving completely worthless. They will have already been around hundreds if not thousands of people. Here's a few examples:

- Children have been and will continue to play together up to the point of going back to school
- They are attending sporting tournaments out of state
- They are traveling to see family/friends or go on vacation
- They are already practicing their fall sport with teammates

NO distance learning. In my household it was an abject failure. My eldest did fine academically but his mental well-being suffered the last few weeks seriously from lack of peer engagement and interaction with live human beings. My younger one needs me by her side constantly and with the 6+ hours a day of stated work at her elem. that is just not sustainable. Parents need to work, teachers need to teach.

Protect those most vulnerable you say? My youngest is in the high risk category so this argument is very personal to me. I am responsible for her health and I do not accept the government stepping in and telling me how to protect her. Give those teachers and families the option. Buy the teachers out, give them early retirement or change of assignment – whatever will work for them. Make one or two rooms in the school for those kids whose parents feel strongly that masks, etc. are important for them. Give them transportation accommodations. I think you'd be surprised at the very few that would request / require this. I'm imagining the cost difference would be substantial to implement only for a few than for everyone.

Thank you for reading this and for caring. We need our teachers. They are all amazing, wonderful people. The kids are our future. We need to care more deeply about the lasting wounds these choices will inflict.

Sincerely,

Kayleen Litterer

*I am writing you as a concerned parent of 4 kids in MN public schools. While my family survived distant learning it was not ideal. This school year I had an 8th grader, 6th grader, 3rd grader and 1st grader. Not one of my children thrived despite having both parents home the entire time. My husband and I are both pretty intelligent and both good with technology. What we faced with distant learning despite our combined skills was not ideal. My older two are both A students and both had their worst grades they've ever had. I feel like my kids were advantaged during distant learning by having both parents here and available to help and to help keep them on track. They also have access to multiple computers in the house and did not need to depend on the school issued Chromebook. Despite these advantages they did not thrive.*

*I would say our major drawback for distant learning was our lack of quality internet options. While in normal circumstances it is adequate for most of our daily needs, during this time our provider could not keep up with the demands and they were unwilling to reduce data caps. Our speeds range from .19 mbps to 15mbps. The slowest speeds were generally in the evening, however there were times during the school day they were super slow. The higher speeds were not happening very often either. My children were not able to participate in a single zoom opportunity because of this. The ironic thing is century link has fiber optics buried in front of our house and we can't even get internet through them. Rural MN is completely disadvantaged by distant learning due to lack of internet options.*

*The emotional toll distant learning has taken on my kids is far deeper than I imagined it would be. If distant learning continues in the fall the long term mental health effects of it are far greater consequence than actually getting covid19 based on what we know for kids getting covid19.*

*I feel 100% comfortable with my 4 kids returning to public schools in a pre-covid19 manner. Kids playing together, sitting together for lunch, not wearing masks, not practicing social distancing, kids participating in gym class and singing in music class. Increased hand washing would be good and something that should have been happening pre-covid19.*

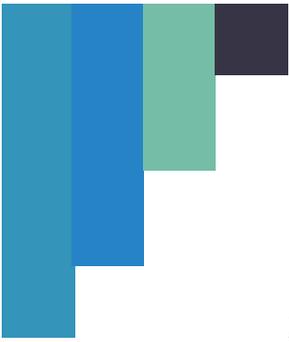
*While I believe all schools should be opening back up, basing everything on the metro schools is not fair to the rural schools. Pine County has 97 cases of Covid19, 73 of which are at Willow River jail. Kids in a small community will all still be seeing each other when not in school, whether it's at daycare or if they don't get put on the same day as their best friend or their cousin so limiting the kids to two days a week doesn't really do much here.*

*My husband has been working from home since March 17th and his work will continue to take priority for our internet usage. He will likely work from home the remainder of the year as covid19 has greatly impacted the company he works for. If distant learning continues in the fall there is a high chance I will find a home schooling option instead. Trying to deal with 20 teachers for 4 students in such an unorganized manner is not something we plan to deal with again.*

*Besides the benefit our children have from school being in session, there are huge economic impacts. I run a photography business and because of school events being canceled I lost approximately \$10,000 in income. Also my husband has lost 20% of his yearly income because the company he works for depends on prom for the bulk of their profits. Thankfully he still has a job. School starting is so much more than just the kids getting educated. It keeps the food supply going too. Look at how many farmers had to dump milk this spring.*

*Thank you for your time. Please consider all avenues of what school represents when you make these choices, academics are only a small portion of school beginning.*

*Dorothy Karas*



## 2020-2021 School Year

June 23, 2020

To Whom This May Concern,

I am writing this letter as a concerned parent of an elementary aged child currently enrolled in the South Washington County public school system (district 833). This letter is designed to express my hopes for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year.

For the social and emotional well being of our children, the only path for success for them is to reopen schools without any “new normal.” Our children must be allowed to congregate in schools where they can receive the direct support and interaction of those around them, including the wonderful teachers that our school system employs. I do not support a hybrid model of education unless there are extenuating circumstances. I do not support children wearing masks and being kept socially isolated within one classroom. I do not support drastically reduced class sizes. Children have shown an amazing level of resiliency during this pandemic, but continuing to deprive them of the education they deserve will have lasting impacts on their lives.

More specifically, I am advocating the below:

- In-person schooling
- No mandated social distancing
- No mandated masks for students or teachers
- Maintain recess and free play
- Keep the cafeteria open
- Extra handwashing
- Daily temperature checks upon arrival
- Updated sick policy

The success of our children depends on the choices made during this upcoming school year. I implore you to choose option 1 and bring our children back into schools.

**David Coyle – 9702 Dunes Lane, Cottage Grove, MN 55016 – [david.coyle@va.gov](mailto:david.coyle@va.gov)**

To Whom It May Concern-

I am writing regarding school in the fall. In my opinion, school should resume in full capacity with zero restrictions.

Children are not susceptible to COVID, as evidence suggests. It will be impossible for children to wear masks all day. It has been proven that masks cause greater risk to one's health.

Our family did not do well with at home learning. I feel children will suffer tremendously with at home learning. They will fall behind, fail, suffer from depression, loneliness, and will not flourish from the social interaction that is needed to thrive.

Please consideration opening schools in fall at full capacity with no restrictions!

Sincerely

Scott Westphal

To Whom It May Concern-

I am writing regarding school in the fall. In my opinion, school should resume in full capacity with zero restrictions.

Children are not susceptible to COVID, as evidence suggests. It will be impossible for children to wear masks all day. It has been proven that masks cause greater risk to one's health.

Our family did not do well with at home learning. I feel children will suffer tremendously with at home learning. They will fall behind, fail, suffer from depression, loneliness, and will not flourish from the social interaction that is needed to thrive.

Please consideration opening schools in fall at full capacity with no restrictions!

Sincerely

Jessica Westphal

"A Concerned Parent"

June 23, 2020

Dear Ms. Fritz,

I am writing to you today as a concerned parent about what school will look like in the fall. The data continues to show that Covid19 is not as dangerous as first thought and children are not at high risk. I realize children may be around family members who are at high risk, but that burden of taking precautions should be on individual families, not on all Minnesota children. Why are we putting the responsibility of "protecting the vulnerable" on our children? It is the adult's responsibility to care for themselves. If a child comes home after school to a vulnerable household, then the adult(s) in that household need to take responsibility by having the child wash their hands, change their clothes, sanitize their backpack, etc.

I know there are teachers and staff who are at high risk. Again, taking responsibility for their health is on them, not another person, and especially not on children. Those that are at highest risk have pre-existing conditions. The majority of these pre-existing conditions are because of choices these people made earlier in their life that have now resulted in heart disease, diabetes, and COPD, just to name a few. It is not the children's responsibility to save this adult from getting sick or even dying.

As a solo parent (I'm a widow, so there is no other parent), distant learning was not easy for my children or myself. It is difficult to be the sole provider for my family and be their teachers. Distant learning was lacking in many ways as there is just no way to duplicate in person learning for science labs, gym, sports, industrial tech, choir/band and many more. Students need hands on help with all subjects from their teachers. Humans need interaction, and this is especially true with children. They need be with their peers.

Long term mask wearing is not safe. According to OSHA, oxygen levels need to be at 19.5% or higher. If they fall below that level, killing of brain cells occur. This is not acceptable! Teachers, staff and children cannot be expected to wear masks that can cause brain damage, CO2 poisoning, as well as other negative side effects from reduced oxygen.

I fully expect school to return to 100% normal in the fall. No masks. No social distancing. No eating alone. No distant learning. Viruses and bacteria have been around forever, and they are here to stay. We can't cover our faces, social distance or hide away in our homes because we are afraid of dying. That is not living. Living is making the most of the time we have on earth, with the people who are in our lives today. None of us is promised tomorrow, but living is fear is not living.

Sincerely,  
Amy Johnson  
Lakeville, MN

To Whom It May Concern:

I am not a special education teacher. I don't want to learn how to become a special education teacher. I am the mother of a child who needs special education. He needs in person, one-on-one attention and instruction that I cannot provide. He is very social and needs recess to stimulate his brain. He wants to go to school without masks. He doesn't want to be taught over a computer. He needs more help than I can provide. He's lost so much time and regressed so much.

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year we were so hopeful for my then 10-year-old son, Jacob. He had started fifth grade at a private school, Bloomington Lutheran. He has struggled in school since Kindergarten. In August of 2019, he received an academic neuropsychology evaluation from the University of Minnesota and was diagnosed with Neurodevelopmental Disorder and ADHD. Jacob's decreased cognitive abilities and attentional deficits have led to lower performance in school.

He qualified for intervention services and was determined to be a candidate for Special Education in November of 2019. Finally, an IEP was developed by Normandale Hills Elementary, a public school in Bloomington, where Jacob started receiving services four days a week beginning on February 11, 2020. He had a Special Ed team of two teachers for math, reading, spelling, and writing and had separate therapists for speech articulation, and occupational therapy for handwriting and motor skills. He was given course work that was at his level of learning and he was finally enjoying learning as well. It was beautiful to watch his self-esteem grow. It was encouraging as his parents that we had found the answer to helping our son. He had just a month and four days of these amazing services before it was all taken away on March 15 when the schools closed.

In a nutshell, Jacob was basically denied the services everyone else was getting this spring except for nine days in May because he was a private school student getting services from a public school that couldn't figure out how to share Seesaw with a Google Classroom. I did an internet search and saw how to do that with instructions with pictures and videos. It was 100% possible. Our private tutor had done it as a Rosemount special education public school teacher for the private school students she works with at St. Joseph School in Rosemount. The thing is Jacob was a Bloomington 271 public school student! I had to register him at Normandale Hills in October 2019 to get the evaluation for the IEP to be scheduled.

### Timeline

March 17 – I was told by his Special Education teacher at Normandale Hills that “On March 27 I will have a better plan for you as to his online learning. We, as a school, are trying to figure out how to merge our Bloomington Lutheran kids with our online learning plans (just a little bit different since they have different email servers than we do.)”

March 30 – Email from Jennifer McIntyre, Executive Director of Special Education & Health Services for Bloomington PS 271 says in part, “On Monday, March 30, our district will begin

distance learning for all students. Your child's special education case manager or staff will contact you to discuss a plan and expectation for delivering special education services remotely, including via telephone or online. We will be working with our general education teachers to ensure that we are developing an equitable experience for our students who receive special education."

April 8 – A Google Word Doc was sent to Jacob. It had two panes in the middle. On the left side, his teachers and therapists would leave lengthy written instructions on how Jacob should perform an assignment. On the right side he was supposed to write his responses. Sometimes they would paste a photo of a page in a book for him to read. Other times a link would be pasted there for him to open and read a website. For speech therapy, he was asked to look at a website, find the consonant sound he needed help with, read it aloud, record himself doing it, and then send it back to the speech therapist. She didn't say how he was supposed to do that or where to send it. The purpose of speech therapy is to make corrections in the moment to draw attention to the speech issue. For OT, he had to write sentences on paper, photograph them and attach it to the Word document. He literally had no idea how to do what was being asked of him most of the time! He is a child who struggles with reading, writing, spelling, composing and organizing his thoughts and linear thinking. If I was confused by it then he was completely lost! I spent most of my time emailing teachers asking for clarification to find out how I was supposed to complete this work with my son. Their written directions were often unclear and the document quickly became unorganized as assignments and responses were out of order. I had to ask if the four teachers could respond to Jacob using different colors so he knew whose questions he was responding to and if more frames could be added to the document to keep the daily assignments listed together. It was a disaster!

April 16 – First contact made with Jacob on the Google Word Doc with the speech therapist and the occupational therapist.

April 22 – My email to Email from Special Education teacher at Normandale Hills, "I am concerned that there hasn't been any one-on-one work or video interaction with Jacob. Does he not qualify for that? Or is that a capability that Normandale Hills doesn't have? I am crushed for him that we waited all year for him to get the help he needs and now he can only use a Google Doc to interact with you. Is this all that's available for him?"

Teacher responds the same day: – "Due to the fact that Jacob isn't a Normandale Hills student he doesn't have access to the platform I am using (Seesaw). He has access to it through Bloomington Lutheran and it won't let us share if that makes sense. Google Docs is the one thing that has been working for students who are at private schools currently."

April 23 – Email from Special Education teacher at Normandale Hills, "We have been working on being able to add students to Bloomington Public School's Seesaw classes while they are in the non-public Seesaw "network." Some tech people in the district have been working on it on the backend of the things."

April 29 – Received a link in the Google Doc with an invite to a Google MeetUp. That was the first interactive, face to face meeting/teaching session with Normandale Hills.

May 5 – Email from Special Education teacher at Normandale Hills, “The tech department in Bloomington was finally able to get Bloomington Lutheran kids on our Seesaw platform! You have been sent an invite. This is how you can see what I assign Jacob and how he does on his work. I have set Jacob up through his google doc.”

May 14 – Last day of online communications from Normandale.

June 3 – End of the year progress report is sent to me, it says in part, that Jacob “participated in Distance Learning activities on 9 of the 9 days.”

Distance learning for my family was a failure. It’s a failure for parents and teachers and kids. It’s especially a failure for children with IEP’s. This is an issue that needs to be addressed so these kids can continue to get the help they need.

My 8-year-old daughter thrives in the classroom. She loves school and learning. She definitely struggled with distance learning. She often missed or misunderstood the written directions. There were often four different documents for each assignment for her to follow with a video or audio recording, a slideshow or PDF to review in addition to a workbook page that needed to be photographed and then uploaded or completed on paper first and then the answers were entered into a Google Form on Google Classroom. She began asking her teacher for help online, but still not understanding the assignment and not asking us, her parents, for help either. She began not completing assignments and lying about it. She has always been very good about completing her assignments before school ended. She missed her teacher, her friends, and the structure and routine of school. She felt successful at school and her self-esteem took a hit when she was not being successful with distance learning. She is not looking forward to going to school if there are masks or other restrictions. We are seriously looking at home schooling her, even though I would totally suck at being a teacher.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Andrew  
Jacob (11) and Kayla’s (8) mom  
Burnsville, MN  
[jennifer@jgdesignmn.com](mailto:jennifer@jgdesignmn.com)  
612-810-1583

As a teacher and parent I'm writing to express my concerns about the coming school year. I feel very strongly that kids need to return to school, despite some small risk. My son has severe food allergies and we have assumed this risk as part of his daily life, sending him to school with precautions, because we value the social and emotional benefits school brings. We could have chosen to homeschool, but the depth of learning would not have been the same. Here are my main reasons for supporting a full return to school:

- Mental health, especially for middle schoolers and teens who already face higher rates of depression and suicidal thoughts. The loss of social interaction and milestone moments is hitting us all, and we need a reason to live.

- Physical health...Having spent full days working remotely, sitting in a chair for hours isn't good for anyone.

- Lack of motivation in distance learning (How long will it take students to unlearn this apathy towards excellence?)

- Depth of knowledge – students are not thinking or learning as deeply as they do in the classroom, ideas are not being shared. They aren't spending time with those who may challenge their perspectives or expose them to new ideas.

- Too much unstructured time – I think we're seeing the results of this already, and it's sure to be worse when kids are left home alone and parents are back at work.

-

We need school to be in session and normal. No masks, No social distancing just let kids be kids. They need a normal life this is getting out of control and not healthy for them in anyway. I have a kid going into 6th grade which is middle school here. She missed out at the end of elementary for her last year, don't take away her 1st year in middle school. I will homeschool before my child will wear a mask in school or be kept from her friends.

Thank You

## **To whom it may concern,**

Although we made distance learning work. It was still very difficult. With no WiFi access at daycare and two parents who work on the front lines in healthcare it was quite a challenge to fit in all the school lessons at night, after work. Quite frankly it was exhausting. To come home tired from taking care of covid patients all day and trying to navigate programs I had never seen before, trying to help my elementary age child figure out assignments with little direction. After all the struggle making sure we got all the assignments done he didn't get grades for the last trimester. It felt like a slap in the face. It makes me wonder if distance learning would result the education necessary to progress in life. Distance learning is a disservice to our youth.

Our children need to get back to school as normal. The social interaction cannot be taken

away. Children need to follow directions from other authorities, not just parents. Children need to have friends and participate in discussions face to face, collaborate in groups.

Compromise would be to offer a distance program for those who don't feel safe to coming into the schools. Children could also mask if they or their parents feel it is appropriate. Masks pose their own risk of breathing your own CO2 and possibility of mold build up.

We NEED to have the freedom to choose. Freedom is what makes our country what it is. I understand the risks and I am very capable of making decisions for my family. I want school to open as normal. No masks, no distance learning.

Sincerely,  
Shannon Chase

June 18, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a Mom to three school aged children. I also have my Master's in Education. Our teachers did the best they could, but the final quarter of this school year was very detrimental to my children's learning and emotional states. My children were in 11th, 9th and 6th grades, so I imagine we had an easier time than those with elementary students. As a former elementary teacher, I can honestly say there is zero chance I could have done even a decent job teaching my 2nd and 3rd graders through a screen. Screens. We do our best to limit our children's screen time on the advice of their doctors, but for months it was screen time all the time. What damage did that do to their eyes?

My junior fared the best academically, but I suspect the work load was lightened and because one of his classes was lab based, the teacher had to switch the curriculum so it mirrored another class he had already taken. He suffered most because he lost his lacrosse season. Junior season is a big year for lacrosse recruiting. He has no game footage to share and because he missed his sophomore season with a broken ankle, he has no film to share period. Because he can drive, he and his friends were able to have parking lot meet ups throughout the shut down, so he also fared better emotionally than the others in that respect.

My freshman had her sites set on being a Board Scholar, and went into the 4th quarter with only one B in her first three quarters, but her 2 "B"s this last quarter have made qualifying anything but a certainty. She needs to be able to ask questions in real time so she learns things correctly. The video lessons that could not be rewound, unless you wanted to start the entire lesson over, fell flat. She spent hours on Facetime with her friends, but that isn't the same as seeing them every day.

Distance Learning was the hardest on our youngest. He has learning struggles and receives extra help when at school for reading. He doesn't like school, but even he admitted, "Doing school at school is way better than doing it at home, because at least there I can see my friends." He had "F"s in all of his classes for most of the quarter and he is usually a B/C student. His struggled to know how to turn in assignments and when links didn't work, struggled to find where to even find them. Yes, there were plenty of people at home to help him, but a stubborn kid who hates to ask for help, struggles with this too. He also thrives on time with his friends, so having none of that for weeks and weeks, put him into a funk that didn't make school any easier. Once he could play with friends again, he was an entirely different child.

We are blessed. We have good internet. We have computers that each child can use on top of the supplied iPads. But what about the children in this state who don't have those things? How many students never checked in once? How many children know school is their safe place away from an abusive home life? How many students did not have enough food?

We now know that children do not die from this virus, nor are they even efficient spreaders. It is not the responsibility of our children to keep the adults healthy. School needs to open as usual in the fall with no masks, no distancing and regular lunches and recess. Our children need their athletics and activities, each other and school. They should not live in a world of fear.

Thank you,  
Stacey Buckingham, Prior Lake, MN

To Education Committee members,

My name is Steven Scott. My daughter Matilda Scott is enrolled in South St. Paul Public schools at Kaposia Education Center. My daughter and I support the full reopening of Minnesota schools without any restrictions on classroom or school functions as a result of the Governor's arbitrary, personally manufactured, unilateral, disproven political emergency agenda.

My daughter Matilda suffers from Dyslexia and last school year's distance learning process was a frustrating nightmare for her. The distance learning model afforded a too-limited level of student-teacher interaction and enrichment for Matilda. The at-home setting proved to be a constant distraction for Matilda, given her perception of the informality of our home with regard to her learning process. The lack of interaction with her fellow students caused Matilda a great deal of sometimes violently severe anxiety and depression that my wife and I perpetually struggled to mitigate, never effectively overcoming - even to this date.

Matilda struggles to read in a linear style. She has hearing impairments that cause her to incorrectly perceive letter sounds. She has a similar impairment with regard to mathematical calculations. Matilda struggles with number order and its function in computation of math problems. Matilda suffers a short attention span that is exacerbated by distractions at home. My wife and I lack the skills and resources to overcome these challenges. The distance learning model was completely insufficient at meeting Matilda's needs. By the end of the school year both my wife and I agreed that Matilda did not receive the level of knowledge nor enrichment that would be cognisant of a person having completed second grade. The restrictions placed on the school district by the state that led to the district being closed for in-person learning were the direct cause of Matilda's troubles.

Matilda's teacher was able to communicate by video and voice calls with her, but through none of those interactions did Matilda ever feel adequately comfortable proceeding with learning as a result. The constant state of fear imposed by the Governor and DFL legislature that Matilda bore witness to throughout the past months was a complete forbearance of just governance and general operation in the goal of public service. Matilda was made to equate the school setting as unsafe and we as a family were never given any justification by the governor or DFL that followed a scientific process - only tabloid fear driven by a party that sought to dismantle a once peaceful and adequately run state in the name of a virus that was not understood, only projected without evidence.

The resulting stress on our family could have been abated by a healthy in-school experience, which the South St. Paul Public School system has always provided visible evidence of. The second guessing that the Governor and his agents have pushed has never been supported with evidence. The Governor has relied on conjecture and since disproven models to keep our educational systems running visibly ineffective and substandard for Matilda. She with great daily frequency asks us for reasons as to why she is unable to have a normal social existence and is unable to comprehend with confidence the material which was forced remotely onto her.

We have had no justifiable response for her.

Our only available suggestion for her is the evidence of the misapplication of one-sided guessing by a single party operating rogue within the elected government to cause chaos and instability where none previously existed in our society. The artificial nature of the fear surrounding COVID-19 is not lost in its lack of pragmatism and lack of empirical scientific evidence on even an eight-year-old. The fear surrounding the government's justifications for shuttering her school has left Matilda with an innate and vocal distrust of the government that is currently causing her elevated anxiety and obvious learning deficiencies.

The DFL government, functioning on conjecture and fear cannot be justified by myself to my daughter. I have no answers for her regarding her emotional issues that have been exacerbated during distance learning. I refuse to provide the one-sided conjecture and projections lacking any epidemiological basis when the truth that she and I witness daily in our neighborhood, state, region and nation do not support the false narrative driven by the DFL government's destruction of our society.

We have taught our daughter, as a family, the common sense function of personal hygiene as it relates to keeping our community safe. The restrictions you have set on our society in the form of social distancing are without merit in the scientific community, representing a slim margin of conjecture by politically elevated organizations in direct defiance of the reality that the true epidemiology of COVID-19 is playing out. Your government's ignorance of the truth surrounding how common sense hygiene completely mitigates any potential virulent threats is an affront to all that has been taught our children. It is a false narrative that has no place in our public schools.

Furthermore, Matilda suffers asthma. The use of face masks is completely without medical merit as it relates to COVID-19. As a food safety certified kitchen manager I understand the means by which viruses are transmitted. The usage of face masks is unhygienic, causing wearers to make increased contact with saliva-soaked fabric, spreading pathogens by contact with greater frequency than without masks. In my daughter's case, any reduction in oxygen causes a contribution towards asthmatic distress. My daughter had not had an asthma attack in four years prior to her step mother making her wear one in public during the manufactured fear of late.

I will not abide by my daughter's school district imposing a moratorium on students who cannot wear masks attending daily in-person classes within the physical school building that my tax dollars support. I will be forced to unenroll my daughter from South St. Paul Public Schools should social distancing or face masks be a requirement of in-school classroom functions. I will not abide the degradation of my daughter's education and health for the DFL's relentless assault on the justifiable normal operation of our society. I will not enrich my daughter with the lies your government stands for in pursuit of a fear-based agenda.

Our family will continue to support Matilda with truth. She will be educated with confidence in proven common sense hygiene and tested scientific procedure. We will not adhere to the DFL tabloid fear driven by incorrect reactions that are not supported by scientific evidence. My daughter will receive an education in the truths of fact and American heritage that continue to sustain our society outside of the DFL's hysteria. Your definition of my daughter's education can only be considered reasonable to our family if it is conducted in the physical school she trusts and without any restrictions based on unjustified fear. REOPEN MINNESOTA

SCHOOLS THIS FALL WITHOUT ANY RESTRICTIONS, OR I WILL WITHDRAW MY DAUGHTER FROM HER SCHOOL DISTRICT!

Faithful to the true America,

Steven Scott  
988 Reaney Ave  
St. Paul, MN 55106  
35mmsteve@gmail.com

Ps. Prior to this past March I had voted DFL in every election of my lifetime. The party's fear-based tactics of late and degradation of citizens' personal liberties have forever lost my vote to DFL challengers in all settings. This pandemic scenario is not supported by reality and the DFL's efforts are losing their voters all over the state. Reconsider your fascist positions before your party loses the entire election to common sense candidates.

I need the schools to be open. Both my husband and I have worked full time during this distance learning. My son was still in daycare but is not anymore because he will be starting preschool. But my daughter was doing the distance learning and I struggled not with doing it but having a place for her to go because we were both working and neither of our works were open for us to work from home. Thank God for my sister but who says I will have her this fall she might be back to her job. The government needs to tell employers they need to be more flexible with parents with kids in school.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am the parent of two teenage boys, one class of 2019 graduate and now at Gustavus and the other class of 2021. Eden Prairie High School is our school. It is a credit to the school that we are desperate for our youngest to have his Senior year there. He has worked for this since Kindergarten!

It is clear that this age group is NOT affected by this virus, nor are they spreaders. I am not going to include links to data and articles as it is my guess that everyone is aware of this by now. I am concerned that the choice will be made to ignore this evidence and this troubles me.

My son who graduated in 2019 was on an IEP for Autism throughout his time in the school system. We advocated for him, his teachers advocated him, and most importantly he was taught to advocate for himself. His years in Eden Prairie taught him hard work and perseverance. His teachers and case managers were absolutely pivotal to his incredible success, admission to college and a B average for his Freshman year. I cannot imagine what his future might be had he not been in the school community with the support and socialization of his school. Can you? What would have become of him and his future goals if he were forced to stay home for a virus that has NO statistical chance of harming him?

Minnesota touts themselves as a state who cares about the "less than" population. It is clear that if school is not reopened normally, many children will be harmed. The achievement gap will grow, kids like my son will fail, racial disparity highlighted, the list goes on.

It is imperative schools open, normally in the Fall.

Respectfully,

Liz Wilkins

Good Morning,

I am writing this letter to push for our schools to go back to normal school this fall, face to face with NO restrictions. Distance learning did not work, period. There was a huge lack of materials and teaching in general. I have three children, one that was in 1st grade, one that was in 3rd grade and one that was in 5th grade during distance learning. My 1st grader was asked to watch video after video after video during a 2 hour period, he learned absolutely nothing new in the 3 months of distance learning. My son went from loving school to hating it, he would cry everyday when it was time to do school. He became very tired and bored during school and was not engaged at all.

My daughter was in 3rd grade and I found myself asking, how can these students continue to learn new material when the teachers are recording a 5 minute video and asking them to answer 2-3 questions, then the next day they move on to something entirely different? For example, a new math concept was maybe learned by a few students who can learn something new in 5 minutes but for the majority of students who need repetition to learn, that lesson went in and then right out the window, all forgotten.

My 5th grader struggled the most, he received math lessons from a different teacher, other than his own, and watched the 5-7 minute video and then had to do 4-6 questions. During this math video he was not able to raise his hand to ask questions, the teacher was not able to look out across her classroom and see that students were staring with blank faces, she was not able to reteach the lesson or teach it a different way the students could understand better. He had no science or social studies lessons, which he enjoys. A lot of my son's assignments were just busy work, something to fill the time.

In all three of my children's classes, they did not get the education that my taxpayer dollars are paying for. The system failed my children and they are now behind and I feel if you chose to do distance learning again in the fall, they will fall even more behind.

As for sending the students back to school where they have to wear masks for 7+ hours a day, that is ludicrous. As far as I know the FDA has NOT approved a mask that children are able to wear. It will be impossible to get the students to wear them all day and wear them correctly. Wearing a mask will cause them to touch their face more than they normally would, I have seen adults do this while out in public. What makes you think that children will be able to do it? Also when cold season hits and these students get runny noses or coughs, if they are wearing a mask they are essentially breathing bad bacteria back in and down into their lungs. So you go from a common cold to now having bronchitis or pneumonia. What about the students and staff members who get headaches or feel nauseous while wearing masks? What about the students that have asthma, allergies, anxiety, claustrophobia, ADHD, Autism, etc. who can not wear masks? Will they be looked at differently from the other children? Will they feel isolated? The answer is yes, they will be looked at differently, students will question why they don't have to wear masks when they have to and these children will feel isolated from the rest of the children.

How long do you foresee the changes that you are projecting? I hear that things will be different once a vaccine is available. Well, we are still far from that happening. Also, when a vaccine is available you are not going to have every single child receive it, I will not get it for my

three children or myself until I know that it is safe and see what the side effects of it are. So are we going to be going through this every single year for the next 5 or so years? It is unrealistic and it is not sustainable. You have parents who work full time, distance learning does not work for them. Once again, the students are going to fall behind even more than they already have.

I believe that every child has already been affected by Covid whether parents realize it or not. Our children should NOT have to go back to school with a bunch of restrictions causing more FEAR in them. My daughter suffers from anxiety and while she is on medication for it, her anxiety has gotten worse through all of this. I know if she has to go back to school wearing a mask or constantly being reminded that she needs to stay 6ft away from her friends, not being able to go outside for some fresh air and to be "free" for a bit, and not being able to eat lunch in the lunchroom with her friends, her confidence will go down and she will become unhappy about going to school. Whether children have anxiety or not, I foresee them feeling this way. School should not feel like a prison. For some children, school is their only "safe" place and these restrictions would be taking that away from them.

We NEED to think about the mental and emotional health of our children. Have you talked to the school psychologists, the social workers or any therapists? If you are planning on reopening schools with restrictions or doing distance learning again, where is the support for our children going to be? You can not expect that one social worker and one school psychologist per building will be enough to handle the damage that this is doing to our children.

I believe what we as parents and teachers need to be doing in schools is practicing good hand washing skills with soap and water, emphasizing good healthy eating habits, emphasizing the importance of sleep and to emphasize to stay home when you are sick.

Bottom line is, if you choose distance learning or reopen schools with restrictions such as masks, temperature checks, no recess, no hot lunch, no eating in the lunchroom, I will NOT be sending my children back. I will either homeschool myself or will enroll them in public online school.

Sincerely,  
Christina Willkom  
Mom & Employee of District 833  
9749 Dunes Lane S.  
Cottage Grove, MN 55016

June 23, 2020

Dear Alyssa,

I can only imagine your challenge in organizing all of these parents' thoughts.

I have thoughts and concerns for a few areas when it comes to distance learning...

- 1) I am not a teacher: I do not want to be a teacher.
  - a. I want the best education for my children. I do not have an interest in teaching my children in the direction of education.
  - b. I still have a full-time job as well as my husband and if we are forced to distance learn as we found out this spring my children's learning curve will drastically be pushed to the side as we still have to work.
  - c. I also do not know the best learning techniques if we are having challenges. And if teachers are not a part of the teaching and only giving out assignments and expectations, they CAN NOT know what special needs our children need to advance and learn.
- 2) I pay taxes for schools and I expect for that to be addressed.
  - a. We pay taxes to schools: we will be very upset if we keep paying the same amount in taxes when we have to work extra hard to do all the work
  - b. There are plenty of on line schools for those families that choose that direction but for those of us choosing to use public schools we do not have the ability or desire to on line school or home school we will be angry not seeing a tax credit on school funding.
  - c. BY-BY SCHOOLS: This is not good. By-by team work skills, athletics....
  - d. Hello poor communication skills, mental health issues....
- 3) Expectations for children when back in school.
  - a. Modifying our schools to focus on this issue is needed in maintenance and cleaning.
  - b. My children do not need to wear masks... There are other health issues for those using masks all day every day.
  - c. Seeing facial expressions are key to learning and understanding human interaction.

This is very bullet pointed per our needs. There are many children that have it way worse than my children. We do not have issues with physical challenges or abuse. No issues in not being able to afford lunch or breakfast but those are huge fears and my heart breaks for those children and families that have these challenges. That puts even more of a burden on a family like ours as we can not sit aside and let these families struggle on their own.

Sincerely,

Theresa Mann

Dear MN State Legislature,

I am a parent of a Kindergartener and 2<sup>nd</sup> grader. I am in full support of the children going back to school full-time with no restrictions. Below are my reasons why:

- I am a single parent who works full-time. It is not possible to be a teacher to young kids, a day care provider and work full time. I can't be in two places at the same time. At 6 & 8, my kids are not old enough to stay home alone and I can't bring them to work. **I 100% do not support full-time distance learning.**
- Distance learning with 2 younger, school age children requires four hours a day of teaching. They need constant supervision and help due to their ages and attention spans. I can't teach and work at the same time. It's physically not possible and incredibly stressful.
- Distance learning was extremely ineffective. The kids had google meets calls during the day with their teachers where no teaching took place, it was show and tell every day. It was on me to do the teaching. Given that I work full time and need to keep a roof over our heads, they didn't learn much. The kids are falling behind in their education.
- The desire to make sure a very small population of Minnesota (elderly and those with comorbidities) do not get exposed to COVID is understandable, but it should not come at the expense of our children's education and or the jobs of their parents. You need to find ways to isolate the vulnerable without punishing our children.
- I can also appreciate the desire to protect the teachers. However, in protecting the few we punish the masses. Allow the few vulnerable teachers to opt out for the year and let the thousands of children return to school.
- If the state of MN allowed protests of thousands of people gathering shoulder to shoulder, then our children should be afforded the right to be able to attend school without restriction
- Paid Daycare centers were allowed to remain open since the beginning stages of COVID. Having had two kids go to Daycare for many years, I can say without doubt, that Daycare centers have far more illness spread than elementary schools. There is no reason Daycare centers should have the right to be open and Public schools remain closed or partially closed
- The U of M will be fully open in the fall. If college age students can cohabitate with thousands of other kids in the Dorms, sit shoulder to shoulder in lecture halls, stand shoulder to shoulder in bars, there is no good reason for public schools to remain closed
- Children need to be around other children for social and emotional growth. It is unhealthy to keep them isolated.
- There are so many children who come from unhealthy and abusive family environments who rely on school as their safe space, who find comfort in caring teachers and a place to get food. No allowing children this opportunity puts many, many children at higher risk for abuse.

For all of the reasons above, I do not support distance learning or partial distance learning. My request is the schools open up fully and without restriction.

Sincerely,

Shannon Smith

June 22, 2022

Dear Ms. Fritz,

We are writing to express my desire as a parents of 3 school age children (entering grades 3, 4 and 7) for schools to open up without restrictions for the 2020/2021 school year. We support in person, 5 day a week school for every grade. We expect recess and lunch, as well as specials such as band, music, art, gym, etc. for my children. We are in the Anoka-Hennepin school district.

We support in person, no restrictions school for the following reasons:

1. Distance learning did not work. Our children each suffered with distance learning for different reasons - one struggles with attention and video lessons were not appropriate for him. One child cried many times over missing school and had a significant change in her mental health in regards to school. Our oldest lost interest in school and her regular straight A's turned into missing classwork and struggling to get things done. None of our children advanced as we expected them to academically
2. The only reason distance learning had ANY sort of success was due to the fact our children had their teachers for 6 months prior to beginning distance learning. Distance learning without having a relationship with students is not a feasible option. Furthermore, I (Katie) work 10 hours a week and work 100% from home. I was able to provide an extensive amount of assistance to our children, especially our youngest.
3. Distance learning (either 100% or as a hybrid option) does not provide equal opportunity learning. Even in our home, our 2nd grader got a much more decreased education than my 3rd grader. *This is in one family*. Many students do not have parents available to be at home, high speed internet, access to necessary technology or resources. Many older children were needing to watch younger children and unable to focus on school work. It is unreasonable to expect that this will improve at all with any sort of distance learning - with the economy moving towards opening up more and more parents will be required to be at work much more than they were during distance learning of last year.
4. Covid-19 does not impact children. As we have seen throughout the world, children are not susceptible to severe impacts of Covid-19. There is absolutely no risk to children (they are at a higher risk of dying from influenza), therefore, there is no reason to not have in person, regular learning. Here in Minnesota, 79% of deaths have been in nursing homes. We cannot and should not deny children normal, regular schooling due to deaths in congregate living centers for elderly.
5. The argument that children can be carriers of Covid-19 has not been proven. We absolutely cannot deny children education and socialization due to a POSSIBLE fear. Childcare centers that have been open during stay at home orders, with children of families who have been the most likely to have been exposed, have not seen massive outbreaks among children or childcare workers. We can expect the same in a school setting.
6. It should not have to be said, but education is essential.

7. It is absurd that we are throwing away decades of science data on what works for education for children. We are taking new, unknown, always changing “science and data” about covid-19 and it is currently trumping everything we know about children and education. Children need to be able to learn audibly, visually, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. Children need to learn how to work in groups and with peers. Children need the arts and physical education. We absolutely cannot throw this all away for some sort of “hybrid” education system or worse, distance learning.
8. Should some sort of hybrid system be chosen to help minimize “health risks,” we hope you see the absurd ridiculousness of this choice. Children who need childcare will be in school some days exposed to one group, and then in a childcare setting for some days exposed to an *entirely different set of children*. The rationale that this is better “for the health” of the school system is absolutely preposterous. In a school setting, teachers know exactly who children are around at all parts of the day with the exception of recess and lunch - and we all know that germs do not spread outdoors. My elementary children have assigned tables at lunch, therefore, even at lunch my younger kids are not at any additional “exposure.”

We do recognize that Covid-19 is a real virus and it does pose a risk to those over 60 and with significant underlying health concerns. Increase hand washing and hand sanitizing in schools. Allow teachers more sick days and encourage them to use them if they are ill. Be more flexible with students missing school if they are sick. Allow students to bring their own water bottles to class. Allow increased passing time for older students to allow time for hand washing, water bottle filling, and allow teachers time to wipe down desks with sanitizing wipes. These are reasonable, actionable, and healthy things we can do in a public school setting to allow for increased health and wellness for our students and staff.

If Minnesota Public Schools choose to go to a hybrid system of education or distance learning, we will with almost 100% certainty pull our children from the public school system and enroll them in a private school or homeschool. We have already begun looking into these options, so this is not an empty threat. If Minnesota continues to put our children’s mental health, social health, and academic learning at the bottom of the priority list we can no longer continue to support public schooling. Furthermore, you will lose many quality teachers that my children have come to respect and enjoy.

urge you to open up Minnesota Public Schools for in person, 5 days a week learning with no restrictions.

Sincerely,

Katie Peterson  
11521 Kentucky Ave N  
Champlin, MN  
55316

CC:

Minnesota Department of Health

Minnesota Department of Education

Governor Tim Walz

Anoka Hennepin School Board

Representative Zach Stephenson

Representative John Hoffman

## Written Testimony for distance learning hearing on June 24, 2020

I am writing to request that our **MINNESOTA SCHOOLS be OPEN, fully in person with NO masks and NO social distancing** while crafting creative and responsive ideas that leverage the things we learned through crisis schooling in March, April and May of 2020. The state level government agencies can act as a resource for ideas and NOT be imposing any of those on individual schools or districts. Below I outline only some of the reasons I am making this request.

I bring to this conversation background and experience in the public sector along with having obtained a Master's in Public Administration. I would like to remind everyone that when developing public policies it is IMPERATIVE that all options are weighed fully by considering the unintended consequences that could come from any decision. This virus does not operate in a vacuum and therefore the mental health, educational opportunities and economic viability of our community MUST be weighed.

- 1) **Be flexible and provide options.** There is not reason that state agencies or government should be requiring any limitations on schools. If we have learned anything, it is that we CAN adapt quickly. We were forced to lockdown with very little advance notice and people adapted. Leverage that adaptability by re-opening fully and normally with no distance learning, no masks, and no social distancing while allowing for more vulnerable families to have choices. For the short term (possibly of this next school year) remote learning options could be made available. We cannot force our entire society into a box that is sized only for the most vulnerable but we can offer them viable options as they figure out how to best manage their own risk tolerance.
- 2) **Families MUST have the option to have their children inside the school building full-time.**
  - a. **Achievement gaps:** We live in a state where reportedly, "...achievement gaps across race and socioeconomic status have persisted for decades." (from A Statewide Crisis: Minnesota's Education Achievement Gaps by Rob Grunewald, Economist Anusha Nath, Research Economist OCTOBER 11, 2019) It does not take a formal study to surmise that any measures requiring remote or distance learning will only serve to further the divide in achievement gaps.
  - b. **Parents cannot work AND teach:** Most notably, single parent homes or homes where both parents work cannot also serve to educate their children. Additionally, how are families who have parents as teachers AND have elementary age children at home supposed to manage any required days of distance learning?
  - c. **Self-directed online learning is not appropriate** for most elementary age students. Those are the same students who cannot be left home alone.
  - d. **Daycares open/schools closed makes no sense:** Daycares have been open this whole time being considered more "essential" than others however that logic just does not work...remove them from schools and put them in daycares while parents work. Families MUST have the option to have their children in school buildings full-time.
  - e. **Statistics for this virus do not support compromising our children's education and future.** The statistics on the miniscule impact Covid-19 has had on children does not support harming our children emotionally, mentally and compromising the education of so many. "Skating out" the last few months of a school year while we learned a lot about the virus is an entirely different

proposition to beginning a school year that includes any remote or distance learning, more adequately called crisis learning.

- f. **Health is more than protection from acquiring a virus.** Health includes mental health. In talking to your neighbor, your children, your extended family, your constituents, mental health professionals, and reviewing your survey I'm confident you are finding innumerable accounts of the mental health challenges everyone faces. In no way does the current Minnesota response, including talks of remote or distance learning address the long term mental health consequences on our children. Most children need a stable, safe school environment that is inside a school building socializing safely with other classmates.
- 3) **Do not turn schools in to prisons.** Cutting out recess, lunches, distancing measures or masks do not create a safe environment for our children. They create modified prisons for our children, at critical developmental ages. Again, be flexible as suggested above but allow the majority of children to socialize like they need to in order to develop fully.
- 4) **STOP moving the goalposts.** We were asked to participate and flatten the curve. Great, our state accomplished that weeks into the lockdown. Now months in to this the goalposts have been moved and the original goal of these policies is not the same, nor is it justified. Holding our schools and children hostage to this political game is devastating to our entire community.
- 5) **We cannot legislate health.** Like I said before, health is not only about avoiding Covid-19. There are so many more complex layers to our lives and our health. Providing OPTIONS for all families including those who are not living in fear of a virus will provide a more stable future for everyone.
- 6) **My own anecdotal experience with remote learning.** My daughter has had straight A's in all of her classes. For the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2019/2020 school year (i.e. remote learning due to lockdown) she got a C-, a C, multiple Bs and an A. This shows for me that remote learning in no way works for my family. That is not education. While I applaud the teachers and their efforts, remote learning cannot be any part of a standard for education for our children. I can only be offered as an option.
- 7) I strongly urge you to **OPEN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS fully in person with NO masks and NO social distancing** while crafting creative and responsive ideas that leverage the things we learned through crisis schooling in March, April and May of 2020. The state level government agencies should act as a resource for ideas and NOT be imposing any of those on individual schools or districts.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lastoka  
Bloomington, MN

I am writing as a parent of students in the Eden Prairie School District. I believe our schools need to be 100% open this fall. The MN Department of Education should focus on ensuring a smooth transition back to class, using guidelines as defined in Scenario 1 of the Stay Safe MN 2020-2021 Planning Guide for Schools. While I understand the rationale for documenting Scenarios 2 and 3 these should be considered as back-up options and our focus should be fully on Scenario 1.

I am increasingly concerned that Governor Walz and his administration are erring on the side of continuing in a distance learning model due to what might happen with COVID-19. While there is a risk with cases rising again in the future, Governor Walz is losing sight of what we know will happen if our children do not return to school. Not just this fall but the longer-term. The significant impact, both immediate and future, of our students, families and state is clear and it is real. Children are being denied a learning environment where they can thrive and become their best selves. Many students do not have family support to assist with learning while some parents have had to leave their jobs to essentially homeschool children. The quality of learning has diminished, which will be extremely hard to make up and will be even worse if distance learning continues this year. Students who were already struggling academically and/or live in challenging home life situations will face an even greater uphill battle if they do not return to classrooms this fall. Looking forward I fear that we will see students drop out of high school or not attend college due to the lack of education and decreased expectations experienced during distance learning. Governor Walz and the MN Department of Education need to look more broadly and into the future, recognizing the lives that will be impacted and lost by not returning to school this fall.

There are no metrics that justify keeping schools closed. The data instead shows that keeping schools closed would be detrimental to the education and mental and physical health of our students. Daily peer interaction, growth of social/emotional skills and verbal and non-verbal communication lost without in person learning have a significant impact on the healthy growth and development of our youth.

It is unreasonable and unfair to expect districts to plan for 3 unique scenarios, and then be given just a few weeks to fully vet and implement

when a decision is made the last week of July. The data is showing that in person learning is a reasonable expectation so the administration should help districts work toward a successful reopening in the fall.

I'm also curious why there has not been more information made available about online learning options and what guidance these programs are being given to expand their offerings for those families who prefer distance learning or who are otherwise not comfortable returning to in person learning. These programs are designed for online learning, where other schools simply are not designed to support distance learning.

Minnesota schools have a national reputation for producing high achieving, well-educated students and are designed around in person learning. The sudden shift to distance learning allowed students to finish the school year but the quality of education was diminished and the expectations lowered because our schools are not designed for this model. It is not sustainable. The school system is not designed for distance learning. Period. Teachers are not trained for distance learning, classes are not structured this way and students and families did not choose to learn remotely. It is simply not right to force schools and students into this model knowing the significant impact it will have on our youth and the future of our state.

Our family fully supports a 100% return to in person classes this fall. This includes all activities, athletics and classroom learning. There is currently no data that justifies any other option than to allow school districts to plan for Scenario 1. COVID-19 cases may increase but the trend is going down and the risk to our youth is extremely small. However, the impact on the future of our children through distance learning is real, and it is significant, and should be treated as such. Let's be leaders and find a way to re-open our schools.

I honestly can't believe I'm actually having to write this letter. How is it possible that I need to encourage our state government to find a way to open our schools? Education should be the priority. We should be focused on working towards a safe return to in person learning so our youth can learn and become the socially adjusted and mentally strong future leaders they are meant to be!

Thank you,  
Carol Gschwendtner  
[jcgschwendtner@gmail.com](mailto:jcgschwendtner@gmail.com)  
612-247-2746

June 22, 2020

Alyssa Fritz

MN House of Representatives

Dear Ms. Fritz,

I am writing in support of opening all schools fully in September. The negative impact from distance learning is already a large hurdle for our students and teachers to overcome, and any continuation of this policy is rife with compounding social, emotional, and educational deficiencies.

As the parent of a child with an IEP, I am extremely concerned for children who cannot learn online even with easy access to technology. Those kids with learning differences who do not have access to broadband need even more support from you. Not only are these kids' educational and other needs (nutritional, therapies, etc.) not being met, it is not legal for you to deny these services to them. In fact, you can expect complaints and lawsuits for the 2.5 months that MDE did not deliver on the legal requirements granted via thousands of IEPs and 520 plans throughout the state. Continuing this into the fall will create even bigger concerns for MDE and the state as a whole. But more importantly, it puts the most at-risk children in an even more precarious position.

Since Covid-19 does not create serious illness or death in young people, and since there have not been any associations of disease outbreaks with care provided via the schools for children of essential workers, it would be hard for MDE to justify keeping kids out of school.

Furthermore, the online "learning" was a dismal failure on all counts. The platforms crashed daily, teacher requirements for homework were frequently met with upload limitations, science labs could not be successfully completed, which impacted a wholistic learning of the sciences. The list goes on and on regarding the failures of this style of learning. While there are some kids who thrive via online learning, the majority of kids do much better with in-person learning. Furthermore, a hybrid option is inadequate in controlling the spread of disease, and only compounds the struggles of online and in-person learning.

In the fall, if there are parents who prefer an online option for their children, they can enroll in one of the online schools that are already in existence in Minnesota. The argument that children might pass Covid to a teacher is hollow at best: why should teachers have special treatment? If the rest of us go to work every day, there's not a serious reason why teachers cannot. Nurses, police officers, grocery workers, etc. have been going to work every day without any major impact to their health as a whole. If a teacher chooses to not teach, they are welcome to find a new career where they can work from the safety of their home.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer Alexander

June 23, 2020

TO: Representative Cheryl Youakim, Chairwoman of the Education Finance Division  
All Members of the Education Finance Division  
Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker, MN Dept of Education  
Governor Tim Walz

*Sent via email to [alyssa.fritz@house.mn](mailto:alyssa.fritz@house.mn)*

**SUBJECT: Written Testimony for distance learning hearing on June 24, 2020**

Dear Chairwoman Youakim,

I'm writing as a father of 4 children who are students at ISD 108 – Central Public Schools in Norwood Young America, MN. My children are going into grades 6, 8, 10 & 12 for the 2020-21 school year. During the distance learning period last spring, while our children were diligent in performing their requested tasks, their overall experiences were not favorable. While I understand why the decisions were made last spring, however, we now have more data about the COVID-19 virus, and I strongly feel this approach should not carry over into the next school year.

Here are some of the reasons why distance learning was not a good experience:

- 1) The current education structure is not set up for an effective online learning system. To no fault of their own, today's teachers are not equipped or well-trained to be effective virtual educators. Therefore, today's students are falling behind, and it's going to be challenging to get them caught-up if distance learning is to continue.
- 2) The teacher-student relationship was lacking during the distance learning time-period, and the kids were the ones who suffered from it. My kids missed their teachers, their friends, and their activities. The teachers at our schools are great role models, and our children were not able to have the same relationship with their teachers over a video.
- 3) The mental stress on our children was noticeable. Considering all of the news was scary, both parents were asked to work from home, all activities were cancelled, and school had to be done remotely, this created an environment where our kids felt isolated and alone. They were not received the proper support they were accustomed to from their teachers. It was challenging for them to ask questions and get timely responses if they didn't understand a lesson or assignment.
- 4) As the parents had to work from home and having 4 children in the house needing devices to log-on for school, adequate technology was not available for everyone to meet their needs during the day.

As a parent, I'd like to see schools open up as normal this fall. That means face-to-face learning in our schools. No hybrids and no distance learning. At bare minimum, give each school the flexibility to make decisions how to operate. One-size fits all will not work. More and more data is becoming available on the impact of COVID-19 on certain population groups. While healthy school-aged children may get the

virus, the risks of hospitalization or death is very rare. In our area, total COVID cases for all age-groups have been extremely low (11 as of June 22<sup>nd</sup>).

Our kids need the social interaction with their friends and teachers. They need to get back to participating in their extra-curricular activities. Therefore, I'd like to things need to get back to normal as quickly as possible. I'm more concerned about the overall well-being of our children than I am of the COVID-19 virus. Children and the elderly have been the most impacted from the decisions made on COVID-19. However, I believe they cannot be treated the same because the risks associated in these age groups are not comparable. Open up schools – it's what's best for MN and best for the kids.

Thank you,  
Kyle Strickfaden

Hello,

I'm writing to you to express my concern over the current K-12 education situation in Minnesota and my worry about the future of students given the three potential scenarios for fall.

I have a daughter who is an incoming 2<sup>nd</sup> grader at Red Rock Elementary (So Wash 833) in Woodbury. While her school and teacher have done their best despite the current situation, the virtual connections have not contributed to the social and emotional development needs of a 7 year-old. I saw my daughter taking steps back to the early days of 1st grade and even kindergarten that I imagine will only worsen as she experiences many more months of being without the structure and interaction that only an in-person environment can provide. As distance learning continued on for months, I saw the level of effort she put into her schoolwork weakening. I don't know that she truly learned any new material. She got easily frustrated doing simple tasks and showed regressive behavior like thumb sucking. While the zoom calls with her teacher and class were a good add on, they were not actual conversations, rather a few statements back and forth and the silliness you would expect from young kids surrounded by distractions.

My husband and I are very lucky to be employed and primarily working from home for the time being. However, we work in industries that are incredibly important right now (consumer insights at General Mills, lab safety for the MN Dept of Health) and struggled trying to juggle work meetings and deadlines with her schoolwork. We loved the days when schoolwork was done early but then felt guilty as we caught up on work while she tried to find anything to keep herself busy the rest of the day, oftentimes turning to a screen. My husband has been gradually returning to work to assist with ramping up COVID testing. I don't know how long my employer will allow working from home and even if they are extremely flexible, there is no way I can both help my daughter learn and be a good employee. A hybrid learning setting does not work for full time working parents. If anything, this will result in kids being exposed to even more kids through daycare or at-risk grandparents.

Since school has completed, my daughter has been relieved to feel a sense of normalcy once again, playing with a (small) set of neighborhood kids and attending our 3 year old son's daycare full time. I feel like I've gotten the daughter we know back as she thrives in structure and socialization in a safe environment. The daycare has taken additional cleaning measures and had parents drop off at the door. There aren't any masks or social distancing and they've even been able to take a few safe field trips to places like the Minneapolis sculpture garden. There have zero issues.

I keep thinking that, as challenging of a situation as we were in in our house, we are a best case scenario! I cannot imagine what this situation is doing to the kids that don't have a support system at home, where English is not a first language, etc. I worked as an e-mentor through my employer and know that the school we were working with only had 50% of students logging in to school during distance learning. I've heard both governor and deputy education commissioner say in recent weeks that we need to end systemic racism and put equity at the forefront, but a continuation of distance or hybrid learning will only result in certain racial, ethnic, and income groups being disproportionately affected. Will principals and teachers be going and knocking on doors to get students to log in? Will they be providing wifi connections? In person learning support?

While I don't doubt the severity of this virus, especially for those that are elderly and with compromised immune systems, there have been very few deaths worldwide among people under the age of 18, zero in Minnesota. We owe it to our children to be able to meet their needs in person full time this coming school year. I can't imagine her learning remotely with a new teacher, classmates, and material. Zoom and Seesaw will never be a replacement for face to face instruction and socialization and if this type of instruction continues through the fall or longer, I fear there will be academic, social, and mental ramifications for many years to come, especially for those in young elementary grades. It's what keeps me up at night more than the virus itself. Dr. Osterholm has said many times that we need to find ways to live with this virus. Two of the three scenarios planned for fall do not allow the vast majority of students and parents to do that.

Please start making plans for how we can get these kids back in school full time in the fall.

Thank you,

Kelly Hammersley

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to ask you to send kids back to school as they were before this all started. Distance learning was not learning. My children did not learn anything new. If anything they attempted to maintain what they had. Being in front of a computer screen is NOT what our kids need. Studies show this is not a sickness of children so there is no reason to punish and traumatize them further. Spend your time and money focusing on the elderly who are at risk.

Thank you,  
Karma Steffens  
Eden Prairie, MN

## Written Testimony for distance learning hearing on June 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

To whom it may concern:

I am a mother of three: and 8 yr old going into 3<sup>rd</sup> grad, a 5 1/2 year old going into Kindergarten and a 2 ½ year old in a home day care setting. Distance learning for my 8 year old was not the same as in person, teacher directed and what peer related activity should have been for the 2019-2020 school year. My husband and I were abruptly forced to upend our lives to both set up to work from home and figure out how to home school a child and occupy the time of two younger children. My office decided to move forward with an account platform transition at the same time the world decided to shut everything down. This project consumed 120% of my time. I did not have the time, energy or focus to assist my child with teaching, instructing and helping her learn. My husband tried to help, but mommy was the preferred “instructor”. We printed the assignments each week, struggled through them each day as to check off the ‘done’ box. Most days it felt like we were just going through the motions to get it done. I don’t know if any of it made a difference to her. She missed her friends, she missed her teachers, and she missed the activities they did each day. She did enjoy playing games with daddy when he could take a break and bike rides when the nice weather taunted us – those were certainly the perks of being together, but distance learning is not a replacement for in person instruction.

I urge you to allow the schools of Minnesota to open in the fall and conduct school and instruction in NORMAL fashion. All schools: primary, secondary, grade school, middle school, high school, post-secondary school, trade schools, all colleges. NORMAL fashion. NO restrictions, NO masks, NO gloves, NO temperature checks, NO social distancing, NO restricting children’s movement, NO vaccine mandate, NO contact tracing, NO mandatory testing.

School must be a place for children to learn, explore, develop and be safe, but not a social experiment controlled by the government.

For any portion of in school/in person instruction:

NO MASKS for children or adults. Covering one's face with a mask has many negative connotations.

Psychological: a child, in particular should be able to see the entire face of his/her teacher. They should be able to see the entire facial expression and communication posture of their instructor. Allowing for only their eyes to be seen is not effective and could possibly be detrimental to the student. Children and teachers need to be able to communicate effectively with each other. A mask will limit this interaction. The physiological effects of these actions need to be closely considered.

Physical: Wearing a mask limits our ability to take in fresh oxygen. Limiting fresh oxygen limits blood flow to the brain. Limiting blood flow to the brain will cause any number of issues. (Behavioral, decrease in health, lethargy, etc). Breathing in one's own CO<sub>2</sub> and exhaled lung germs can lead to major health problems. Reports of children dying, people passing out and lung infections are now starting to surface, all as a result of mask wearing. It is not practical for people outside of a hospital setting to wear a mask for the duration of a school day. Mask wearing would prove to be a great

distraction for all. Irritating their face, constantly touching it, drawing them towards their face and eyes, leading to risk of infection. Meal time, snack time, they would be on and off all day long. And what if a kid drops it on the ground or in the sink or the toilet? There is no way a mask is going to stay 'clean' and free of contamination. Students potentially now have a new toy to fiddle with – all – day – long. The physical effects of mask wearing need to be closely evaluated.

Emotional: children are affected and shaped by what they see, hear, touch, feel, smell and experience. This ties the psychological and physical together. Seeing their classmates and instructors in masks, gloves and a constant reminder to stay away from each other is NOT setting up an environment for students to have a positive learning experience.

Symbolism: What is the reason for someone putting their hand over another's mouth? (Imagine a child is about to spill the beans about what their sibling just did and they rush to cover their mouth to silence them). Covering one's mouth is symbolic for silencing them. I would hope we want our children to critically think for themselves and be able to articulate knowledge and opinions without being silenced.

**NO GLOVES** Unless gloves are changed each and every time something is touched, they are ineffective.

**NO TEMPERATURE CHECKS** at school. This is invasive of our personal body autonomy and should not be performed in public for all children to witness. Temperature screening would result in long lines and waiting and children having to be monitored. It could potentially delay the school day each day and be disruptive to the classroom. If necessary, this should be performed at home.

**NO SOCIAL DISTANCING** Humans are social beings. We are meant to engage with one another, embrace each other (by this I mean in a positive and friendship type of context), kids like to high five each other and bump shoulders. There are studies that show babies left and never held or touched eventually die. That is an extreme example, but w/o social interaction no human can thrive. Constantly telling students to distance themselves from one another or not to touch this or that is not practical and could cause significant psychological harm. Interaction such as playing and socializing is central to child development and should not be discouraged.

**NO VACCINE MANDATE** Mandating a vaccine or the entire recommended CDC schedule in order to attend school is discriminatory. Each human being is created uniquely. Not every child, teen or adult can withstand the same level of foreign matter being injected into their system. Thousands of children are injured, damaged and suffer death because of vaccines. Over \$4 Billion dollars have been paid out of the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program paid for by the Department of Treasury (actually funded by a \$.75 excise tax on vaccines). Forcing students and teachers to receive a rushed, under tested, under studied, un-labile if injury or death occurs is WRONG. Historically vaccine development has been a long, complex process that can last for up to 10-15 years. Two-four years for the exploratory stage, 1-2 years for pre-clinical, several more for vaccine trials, and then application for licensure and disbursement to the public. Sure, technology has advanced, but the human factor as it relates to trials cannot be expedited. If a vaccine for COVID-19 were ready by year end or early 2021, is a huge red flag that the claimed testing, evaluating, inspection and production

has been rushed, corners have been cut and the level of “safety and efficacy” this industry claims is sub-par at best.

**NO CONTACT TRACING** This is an invasion of privacy and our children and educators should not be our test subjects in this phenomenon a greater evil craves. You track criminals, not children.

**NO MANDATORY TESTING** What does this prove? Are the tests accurate? Is the truth about results being told? Testing does nothing but create more fear.

As for the virus itself it is evident only certain group of people are really susceptible to it: the elderly and those with underlying medical/immune system issues. There are only a handful of cases that involve children and the overall recovery rate for all from this is between 97 and 99.75%. If a virus has this sort of recovery rate, **WHY ARE WE EVEN HAVING THIS DISCUSSION? WHY ARE WE EVEN CONTEMPLATING IF AND HOW OUR CHILDREN CAN RETURN TO SCHOOL?** This makes very little sense.

A common sense approach to hygiene and cleaning practices should be the normal. Teach and practice proper hand washing, avoid touching the face, nose and mouth (and if there is NO mask on their face, there is NO trigger to cause them to touch their face). Implement a regular schedule for washing hands (before eating food –lunch or snack), after using the restroom, after arriving for the day or coming in from outside. Teach and implement a cleaning schedule for the class room. Teach and remind children and adults to cover their cough or sneeze and stay home if sick! Combine this with a focus on proper health and nutrition - eating a healthy balanced diet of protein, fruits, vegetables and healthy fats, along with plenty of outdoor time and proper rest at night, the chances of infection or spreading are very low.

Our children and educators need to return to school as normal so they can experience a consistent, structured, stable and enjoyable environment and education. Viruses and bacteria are all around us – we actually require them to live and have a healthy immune system. We need to quell the fear of this virus and learn to live in a respective balance of practical and common sense methods to protect our most valuable asset: our children and the next generation of greatness.

Tina Newman  
Lakeville, MN

June 22, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

The order to remove kids from school and degrade their education has hurt them in many ways. We won't list the immediate and lasting consequences for all kids here as they are obvious. In particular, our daughter was starting her evaluation for special education. The shutdown has led to a disheartening end and uncertain future for this program we had such high hopes for. Our daughter is missing out on this valuable resource and it cannot be made up for. This time is passing her by.

Minnesota excels in healthcare and education. Let's take care of the elderly and get our children the education we owe them. We all have our joyful memories of childhood and our kids should have theirs – they last forever. Are the children of other states immune because crossing state lines is just too much hassle for a virus?

A bright spotlight is shining on the values of leadership when casinos, the NFL, and liquor stores can be packed, but the young children of this state will lose out because those leaders failed to focus resources on the frail and elderly.

Our understanding is that accommodations will be made for students whose parents do not want them exposed to other students at school. Will accommodations be made for students whose parents want them to have the best education possible? Who want them to interact, play, learn, make friends, lose friends, exceed and fail - requirements for a child to develop into a healthy adult.

We want to ensure our children get the education and childhood Minnesota is known for throughout the country.

Jim and Jillian Stocker

Minnetonka Schools

Good afternoon Ms. Fritz,

I am contacting you as a concerned parent to a special needs student in the Elk River school district (ISD 728). Thank you for the opportunity to share my special education distance learning experience this past school year. If you are able, please kindly respond with a confirmation of receipt of this email.

My son just turned 6 years old. He attended the Discovery Learning Preschool in Otsego, MN and has been placed on an IEP for the last three years. My son's list of diagnoses is long and overwhelming...Autism Spectrum Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, Receptive & Expressive Language Disorder, Sensory Processing Disorder and significant motor skills delays.

In the time my son attended preschool in ISD 728, my husband and I wholeheartedly believe he received a top-notch education and excellent special education services.

When school transitioned to distance learning for the final third of the school year, I knew it would be a challenge for my son and my family. His teachers were amazing during the unprecedented time. They reached out to families on a regular basis and offered as much distance assistance and support as they could. I know all teachers worked very hard and accomplished a lot with limited resources, and I'm not diminishing any of that - I fully appreciated their efforts.

But the fact of the matter is very young children with social and cognitive disabilities (such as my son) cannot receive an education virtually or receive speech therapy and occupational therapy via worksheets. Due to his Autism, my child is not like most preschool or Kindergarten children who may happily sit down and complete a school activity online. I tried unsuccessfully for weeks. I attempted everything I could think of to convince my son to at least try the activities sent via Seesaw. But he simply would not. I am not a special education teacher or a therapist. I cannot make my child learn. In our case, distance learning completely failed us. My son, and other special needs students, require in-person instruction and social interaction...there's no way around it. And when you compound the fact that he is not receiving his private therapies, school therapies, or classroom instruction, my son lost all progress he gained in a year in a matter of weeks. As a result, I simply gave up and resigned myself to the fact that my child was on a six-month long summer break. He is sitting idle and will be completely unprepared for Kindergarten in the fall...which brings me to my next point.

Will my child even experience Kindergarten? There's a possibility that distance learning will remain intact through the fall term. If that's the case, again, my son with special needs cannot distance learn or receive virtual therapies. So, he will remain idle. We cannot allow our son to sit idle at home next school year, for any amount of time. So, we are prepared to quickly relocate to another state where schools are open.

In closing, I understand that schools were ordered closed by powers bigger than the school districts. I believe ISD 728 did the best they could with limited time, resources and knowledge. But unfortunately, I believe students who receive special education services were dismissed during this pandemic simply because the district didn't know what else to do with them. Going forward, if any sort of distance learning is enacted at the start of the 2020-2021 school year, I implore you to allow the IEP students to attend school in person, five days a week. The special education students cannot continue to be left behind. They have already lost so much and cannot afford to lose more.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Amy Wenell

Dear Ms. Fritz,

I am a concerned parent of two elementary aged children in the Prior Lake Savage Area school district. My son just completed Kindergarten and my daughter first grade. I am urging you to read the facts and statistics and reopen schools fully, face to face, as soon as possible, without masks and many of the restrictions currently being recommended by the governor of MN.

At the end of March, schools were closed with little notice and we as parents were given no choice or options for childcare and expected to have our children participate in Distance Learning. For most parents of "normal" elementary children even under the best circumstances (access to internet, devices, and someone available to assist them and care for them during the day) this was extremely challenging and did not result in a quality education for children. For us, two full time employed parents, with one "normal" child and the other child with special needs, this was an impossible expectation!

Our first grader with special needs and on an IEP has a long medical history and several diagnoses including cerebral palsy, nonverbal learning disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – inattentive type, and developmental dyslexia (disorder of reading). She is not capable of operating an iPad or laptop computer independently to participate in distance learning. Her ability to learn during this time was dependent on adult assistance and 100% supervision and support. This was largely not possible since no direct contact with educators was accepted during this time and my husband and I work full time during normal business hours when teachers were available for distance learning. After a couple of weeks we were able to find some paid but inconsistent part-time child care to assist her and my kindergartner, however, due to her disabilities she is unable to maintain focus and does not have the ability to see and follow what is happening on a screen to then carry that instruction to complete a task on paper or in App and lacks the fine motor to complete most tasks on an iPad. On several occasions she broke down crying from frustration during attempted distance learning sessions, one time putting her head down on her desk and looked up at me with tears in her eyes stating, "I can't see her and see the screen".

The distance learning period for her was a nightmare. She did not progress in learning and as a result she is now even further behind on her goals and her peers. Not only did it impact her education but also her mental state and behavior health. Prior to the start of distance learning we had our children on a screen freeze, per the advice of her special education teacher, which had great positive impact to their moods and behavior. Due to the absence of school and adult supervision, they spent many days in front of screens while we worked, sadly up to 6 hours some days. Then we would spend our evenings trying to catch up on distance learning assignments without teacher support and they most often ended in frustration, tears and yelling. We saw rages over homework from my daughter that resulted in tearing up paper, throwing pencils/pens/iPads across the room, scratching & hitting her brother and I to the point of drawing blood, banging on walls, and destructive behavior including breaking the door off of our laundry shoot, and shaking the medicine cabinet so hard in her bathroom that the mirror fell off on her head.

We were looking forward to summer months of a much-needed break and then summer school to help catch her up. Unfortunately, even though the district was given a choice and could have opened face to face summer school, they chose to continue with distance learning, and we had to opt out. We are now in a position where we cannot rely on the public-school system to educate our child. We had to seek out and pay for expensive private tutoring this summer. Ironically, these services that we are paying for

are being offered by multiple teachers from the district with face to face instruction (yet apparently it is not safe for them to resume to school to provide this same instruction?). We are also forced to seek out alternative options for education for later this summer and fall in order to guarantee face to face instruction, which private schools are happily providing though at a hefty cost. Far from ideal to drive and pay for, but we are very fortunate to be able to afford these services when many families across the state are not in a position to do so. These children who are already far behind their peers have now fallen further behind and sadly distance learning has caused the disparity to widen even further for the most vulnerable children.

I am appalled at the lack of initiative by the Governor of Minnesota, Department of Health and the MDE to work toward finding a safe learning environment for all children but especially those with disabilities and children who cannot learn remotely. Businesses are open and working under the same conditions and in most cases carry higher risks and have found ways to provide safe environments. Citizens of MN have been able to purchase liquor, shop at big box stores, travel on airplanes, obtain abortion services, and can now eat at restaurants, get pedicures, go to a gym, get a tattoo, etc. etc. yet no progress to providing face to face **free appropriate public education** has been found for our children? I also believe this is in direct violation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This school closure and lack of face to face education was not based on medical facts or risks and is unjustified and unwarranted for the lowest risk age groups (0-19) during COVID19 for which there have been 0 deaths in the state of MN and the CDC is reporting essentially 0% fatality rate less than the seasonal flu. We are also not comfortable subjecting our children to the extreme recommendations being made regarding elementary age children wearing masks for 8-9-hour days. Children need to be in a friendly environment, see facial expressions, and much of the learning they experience in school is as a result of being social, in the lunchroom and out at recess. My children have been forced to wear masks at grocery stores and medical appointments for just minutes and I can see how much they touch their faces and fidget with their masks after touching surfaces, likely spreading more germs to their face, mouth and nose. There is also no medical research or science that shows children wearing masks will reduce the spread of COVID19. Mask wearing should be a choice and recommended only for those children and instructors who are high risk or medically fragile.

I appreciate your attention to this matter of special needs children and the necessity of face to face education for them, for working parents and for the future of all children. **Distance learning is not an option** for elementary education, please reopen the schools!

Thank you

Jessica Mason

jessica.a.johnston@gmail.com

952-239-4861

Most of us are full-time working parents and cannot afford to try to work AND homeschool our kids. We pay a lot of money in taxes and have supported our schools financially for years, and we need our taxpayer dollars to work for the benefit of our kids' learning and development. It's devastating to have little kids glued to the screen while parents are desperately trying to stay on top of their work without losing their minds.

Above all, ALL THE DATA PROVES that children are not at risk, and they should not be treated as such. The very few who are vulnerable can take different/special measures, but our best bet against diseases is herd immunity. With COVID, most of have been exposed and could possibly already have had it and are fine. Continuing to allow exposure for healthy people will be much better for protecting the vulnerable and all healthy people. We cannot continue avoiding all germs and viruses.

Please open schools again. It will be devastating for generations if you don't (due to parents being unable to work and homeschool) and because 1/3 of kids in Minnesota (one of the more educated states) have never logged in to e-learning in the spring time, and about ½ regularly missed checking in, let alone doing any work. That will only cause a bigger divide between the kids who succeed and the economically/educationally vulnerable kids who may not if schools don't open again. Virtual learning is ineffective.

Thank you,

 Cristina Edelstein-Skurat

Hello,

I received your email from my sister. I would like to express my opinion on the future of our school schedule. I strongly think that students need to go back to school in the Fall with NO restrictions and NO social distancing. I do not want my kids in this type of environment and feel that it would be detrimental to their education. Distance Learning was very difficult and not feasible with two parents working full time. Thank you for your time and attention on this topic.

Sincerely,

Rochelle H.

Hi - I am writing in regards to my opinion with distance learning. Simply stated...it didn't work and here's why.

My husband and I are both full time essential workers. My husband is a self employed Dairy Farmer. They operate with 2 farms, 1 farm is milking around 175 cows and the other 50-75. Milking is 2 times a day, morning and night. He does the evening milking of 175 cows which takes an average of 4

hours. From everyday farm challenges to field work, he usually puts in a 15 hour + day which means he is not home until 11-1130 at night.

I am a Certified Medical Assistant at Lakeview Clinic in Waconia. I am gone every morning by 7 and usually not home until 6pm. With that being said, we struggled to do all distant learning during the Pandemic. We have 2 girls, 8 and 5. During the week day, they are with dad at the farm working because it was safer to send them there vs Kids Company at school. My 5 year old pretty much had "fun" homework being she was in Preschool so that wasn't terrible but still time consuming. My 8 year old struggled. She doesn't sit still any longer than she has to which made it even harder. By the time I would be done with work, pick up the girls and get home, it was 6:30, which at that point, they were either hungry and wanted dinner or wanted to play. Not do homework. Being at the farm all day means that they have to shower before dinner which makes things get even later. By that time, homework was a struggle. We fought. We yelled. We cried. Everyday. My husband not being home at night made the struggle even harder. There were multiple times we were doing 2-3 days of homework at once, just to get caught up so we would be able to hand in what was due. We were able to complete the required work but quite honestly, she didn't learn anything from it. She got it done and that was about it. Things are taught completely different now compared to when I was in school 20 years ago so it was challenging for me to explain things.

Bottom line to my email is that these kids need to be back in school, 100% of the time. They need their teachers. Teachers need to teach them the correct way. They need interaction with their peers. Some kids need the meals. Some kids need the mental health aspect of being with their friends. Some kids find school to be a safe place if they live in a abusive home.

If it comes down to distant learning again, we very likely will not send them which is the last thing I want as a parent, to happen to my girls as well as any other student.

Could you send me a confirmation email so I k is this was received? Thanks!

Corey & Katie Feltmann

Please understand the overwhelming support for in-session school this fall, without social distancing or masks.

Shana Krantz

I am writing to you as I have 2 students that go to Forest Lake High School and my daughter is 14 and my son is 16, it was very hard for both of them doing online classes only. My son has autism and he felt really overwhelmed and stressed as he said. He did have a Para , which normally he doesn't need but it was still very hard on him. My daughter was then in the Middle School and got the worst grades she has ever gotten! She said she would email her teachers with questions but they didn't get back to her for a few days and by then she had moved on.

I feel it is necessary to have access to your teachers and also peers, it's definitely not the same online! At the very least they should be able to go half and half. If they don't get back to school and socialize doesn't that set them up for getting sick with viruses when they finally are able to be around people? Thank you for listening to my opinion in these uncertain times.

Lori Ronayne

[lronayne2008@hotmail.com](mailto:lronayne2008@hotmail.com)

Dear Sir or Madam,

I have 3 children - 1st, 6th, and 8th grade. They are enrolled in the public school system (ISD 2071 - LCWM).

I have great concerns about the consideration of further "distance learning" for the fall of 20-21 school year. I STRONGLY believe that our children should be back in the school buildings this fall without restrictions!!

The stats on the virus deaths for those under the age of 20 are ZERO. I realize that they can carry the virus, but there IS NO WAY to prevent the spread of this virus. No matter how you pretend that you can separate students from each other (be it with 1/2 days, every other day, smaller classes) these human being and the teachers and staff that surround them will cross paths. I can not state this enough. There is no way to keep them from each other!!!

Sending kids to school with PPE or masked and caped teachers and staff would be traumatic. No small child entering school should have to learn while wearing a mask or try to learn from a teacher wearing a mask would be scary for them to say the least. (Even our gov't "leaders" who talk to the public remove their masks when addressing the state.) Imagine a 6 year old on their first day of Kindergarten entering a room full of masked adults. Not being able to see their smiles and understand that the teachers are there to help due to the fact they can't read their facial expressions! Scary to say the least. For the older children - the separation from classmates, lack of facial expressions and reading their teachers lips when they talk only force them to think harder and make comprehension, in my opinion, even more difficult.

What I want you to know regarding OUR Distance Learning experience is that I have great students - and it was a huge struggle. My husband and I both work full time jobs - and were essential. That meant no help for our 1st grader until 5-6pm or later. At that point - it was useless. My 6 and 8th grader were expected to watch their younger sister while they tried to do schoolwork. NOT FAIR TO THEM AT ALL, but it was the only option in our household. When it came time for the school district to announce the grading policy for the last qtr of the year I was disappointed to say the least. My kids worked their tails off - tears and all - to get their good grades - all A's. However - now that they know all they had to do was get 55% (a "passing grade") in their classes to keep the good grades they had before Covid - good luck with the motivation should we have to attempt this again. It won't happen. While I teach personal responsibility and completing what is assigned - why on earth would I push, argue with and create anxiety for my kids to TEACH THEMSELVES and to struggle with every assignment when I know they are going to "pass". Reading and answering questions based on daily lessons is not learning and is not the "education" they deserve. The long term effects of this shutdown will impact this generation of kids that is in school. Not just for 1 year - but life long detriments. Learning is being in a classroom and being

pressed by teachers to think, use the info they have just learned and apply it. Computers can not do that for our kids. While our district's teachers were wonderful at being available and help where they could - PLEASE let them do their job and EDUCATE our kids, not just be there to answer email questions and be tech support. Teachers do so much more than develop lesson plans to put on the computer. They engage kids, they talk with kids, they push kids to question why - let them do their jobs and let us as parents (not the government and the MDE) worry about their health and well-being.

PLEASE, PLEASE realize that this virus is no worse than the flu virus. No worse than H1N1, SARS..... we survived all of those. Families that have health concerns can and should stay home. The rest of us that choose public education for our children should be allowed to partake in it this fall, as normal. We understand the risks. We have learned the way we should be handling personal hygiene.

My final thought is a short story. I am the manager of our local grocery store. Our store employs about 15 high school age students. Three days after distance learning had started, yes only 3 days.... I began asking each of my employees how school was going and if they were handling it ok. Without fail, all 15 answered with a resounding statement of I would rather be IN school, being taught by my teachers than online assignments and classes. Just more food for thought.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ann Lange  
51668 Eagle Lane  
Lake Crystal, MN. 56055  
507-340-8404

Normal school is what needs to be done. The Governor took everything away from the kids. By turning 15 days into months it just shows it's really not about the kids. There have been too many kids left behind that won't be able to recover. By standing by and staying quite your silence is response enough to also say it is not about the kids. How many kids will be forgotten by the time this is all over. And how will the dept of education respond to all the teachers that have been absent when it came to reaching kids who's parents have to work and missed school. Politicians seem to forget that in the real world both parents work. So in all schools better be back to normal by September or the ones keeping it closed will be needing to find a new line of work after being voted out.

Concerned Citizen who is for the free thinking child.

I'm the mom of 5 littles, 3 of which will be attending K-12 school this fall. We will have a 1st grader, 4th grader and 5th grader. I will not send my kids back to their charter school if they will be required to socially distance or wear masks. We will homeschool.

Thanks so much for your work.

Sarah Schuety, Blaine MN

I think it is of utmost importance that our students return to school, in all of Minnesota, as normal this fall. I have my Masters in Education and can vouch for the fact that teachers do not mind being in the classroom, we are essential workers. Our students need to be in the classroom. The content loss that occurs with distance learning is staggering. The inequality gaps will widen and continue to widen in staggering fashion.

When the protests happened, our health officials said...

“We should always evaluate the risks and benefits of efforts to control the virus,” Jennifer Nuzzo, a Johns Hopkins epidemiologist, tweeted on Tuesday. “In this moment the public health risks of not protesting to demand an end to systemic racism greatly exceed the harms of the virus.”

Education should be viewed through the same lens. The risks of our students NOT being in the classroom out way the risk of the virus. Science shows this is not dangerous to this population. I implore you to look at education as we viewed the protests. Our students NEED to be in school at full capacity.

Kindly,

Tracy Kenow

I am writing to you as a concerned mother first and foremost, and as a former infectious disease scientist with a background in immunology. I'd like to discuss my concerns about lengthy school closures and the effect this is having on our children and community. I would like to take this time to give you my perspective on the current COVID-19 situation and its impact on our children, and why I believe we need to reopen as normal (scenario 1).

As I'm sure you are aware, brain and social development is a continual on-going process from babies until young adulthood. Over the past few months our children have had little to no social interaction with their peers nor have they had any real instruction from their teachers. Online zoom meetings just don't cut it and not all children have adequate access to internet and computers. Children have had little to no physical activity either. No gym class, no basketball practice, no ballet, no play dates, and no chess club. They've had nothing more than the occasional walk or bike ride in the neighborhood if Minnesota weather permits (and we know that doesn't happen often from March through May). I've heard from many parents that television, video games, and tablet screen time has increased mainly to keep them occupied while mom or dad work. In addition, we've completed a semester of distance learning, and it's been terrible. My kids have not learned anything sufficient or of substance. You just can't compare the quality of education that is received daily sitting in a classroom, to a couple zoom meetings. It's poor quality, it's disorganized, not all assignments are available to download/print, and if they are online, not all children are computer saavy enough to complete the sheets online. Math has been completed using online multiple choice systems, not paper/pencil with thought. If children have a question and they don't understand the content, they can't raise their hands and have that 1:1 interaction with the teacher. Online school DOES NOT work well for my young children.

Underprivileged children have been hit ever harder. Many of these children already come from low-income households or single parent homes with less than adequate resources. These children largely depend on school for education, socialization, and healthy meals. I can't imagine how distance

learning has affected their progress (if they haven't had the resources around them). The long-term school closures will eventually negatively impact our children's development, both academically and socially. Children are not born to remain quarantined for long periods of time. We can't continue to quarantine children and continue to keep the schools closed. Losing 6 months-1 year of quality education and social interaction will negatively impact their development. Will they need to repeat a grade? Or will they be given a 'pass' while moving the next grade un-prepared to do so, resulting in failure? As a mother of three small elementary aged children, I urge you to think of all of the consequences. Not just the immediate consequences, but long-term as well.

I fully understand that COVID-19 is a transmittable virus that can develop into acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) in vulnerable populations and may lead to serious conditions or even death (1). I am not diminishing the seriousness of the virus and I know that we have been in quarantine to work towards flattening the curve. However, this may never actually be possible, ever (see below from Minnesota Dept of Health FAQs sheet). As with influenza and respiratory syncytial virus infections, the majority of COVID infections are asymptomatic or render mild flu-like symptoms (1). We also know that most COVID deaths have been in those with serious underlying conditions and older age groups (2). Thus, I would like to present a few facts below (with supporting citations) regarding COVID-19 in the pediatric population.

- ② COVID related disease is less frequent and less aggressive in children (3).
- ② In the rare cases of covid death in the pediatric population (paper from China), all had serious underlying conditions, such as congenitive heart disease, kidney disease, leukemia, etc. (4)
- ② As of today, there are zero COVID deaths in pediatric patients in the state of Minnesota (5).
- ② In Italy only about 1% of positive cases were under 18 years of age, and no deaths were recorded before 29 years of age (6).
- ② According to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, children aged 1–10 years old represented only 0.9% of COVID-19 cases while children and adolescents aged 10–19 years old were 1.2% of the 44,672 confirmed positive subjects (3).

You can never outrun viruses and bacteria. They are here to stay; they are a part of our ecosystem and will always pose a danger in some capacity. While COVID is a concern, we must look at the facts. Most individuals (>80%) with COVID have mild/moderate symptoms and 35% are asymptomatic (7,8). The focus should remain on protecting those who are vulnerable, including self-isolation of those with underlying conditions and the elderly. As of today:

- ② There have been ~1300 deaths in MN with a median age of the deaths in MN around 82, most were in long-term care facilities (5).
- ② Nursing facilities are renowned to have deadly outbreaks (such as c. difficile infections, MRSA, etc.) all of which pose public health threats (9,10).
- ② Nosocomial infections are known to be introduced to this population while patient sharing, between these nursing facilities and hospitals (11).
- ② The propensity for nosocomial spreading and the dominant role played by symptomatic patients in the spreading of the infection is supported by basic virology (12).

Currently studies are on-going and looking at preventative prophylactic treatment with antivirals that might be used to prophylactically treat vulnerable individuals (in particular the elderly and patients with existing medical problems) that have a high risk of viral exposure (13). This should remain the priority.

However, one of most beneficial way to stop the spread of COVID (aside from isolating oneself in a sterile room) is effective handwashing and disinfection (14). I am certain that if we implement more handwashing breaks, sanitizer stations, and have the children wipe off their chairs and desks with

disinfecting wipes, our children can persevere through these times. Humans are resilient. Most families are strong and healthy, and they should be able to return to schools this fall and build immunities, build friendships, and resume their education as normal.

I urge you to consider all options when it comes to reopening our schools this fall and consider all the options and not solely base all closures on the joint UMN and MN DOH Covid models. My concern is that the expected numbers from the COVID models were ill-conceived to begin with.

☒ One of the first models presented in April (ver 2.0) projected that we could have upwards of 50,000 deaths in Minnesota if we had no mitigations (no social distancing, no stay-at-home order) (15).

☒ With social distancing and stay home order, these projections were 20,000 deaths (ver 2.0) (15).

☒ Then numbers were adjusted further to account for lower proportion of cases requiring hospitalization (asymptomatic patient role) → lower expected hospitalizations, and Lower length of hospital stay (15).

☒ The newest COVID model (3.0) somehow estimates that with the new stay-at-home order extended for 6 weeks, our mortality will actually increase and is projected at 29,000 (16,000 to 44,000) instead of the 22,000 that was projected in version 2.0 (16).

However, this is not what real-life hospital data demonstrates. Models are based on algorithms and assumptions after all. As someone who has worked with algorithms, the same data can render different results if you adjust the parameters. There will likely be another adjustment of the models again (ver 4.0) and eventually once this passes there will be reasons as to why there were such large discrepancies. What's unfortunate is that people are not held accountable for the immense destruction these models have caused to our economy, our livelihood, and our children's education. There are no repercussions for presenting questionable data to our politicians. Our politicians lack the scientific background and expertise to question these results and may not be getting a well-balanced presentation from individuals with opposing opinions. In fact, there is a handy FAQ sheet on the MN DOH website which they've published that essentially gives them a free pass to wiggle out of any responsibility if their numbers are off. Here are a couple of quotes from the Q&A from the website (17):

☒ Questions: Why do my calculations for infections and deaths not match the model estimates?

o Answer: Although the model is able to estimate the actual number of prevalent infections (i.e., both detected and undetected cases), the risks for hospitalizations, ICU need, and death *cannot be uniformly applied* across all infections.

☒ Question: Why don't we see a flattening of the curve with mitigation strategies?

o Answer: Social distancing is an effective tool for reducing transmission but *it cannot stop it*.

These risks have always been there during previous pandemics, influenza outbreaks, bacterial outbreaks. As you know, children have unfortunately also died from common childhood bacterial infections such as strep throat and meningitis. It's heartbreaking and unimaginable.

☒ This year in MN (2019-2020) there have been 4,146 hospitalizations (to-date) from confirmed the flu (18).

☒ There have been 73 cases this year (to-date) of death from the FLU, of those 3 were children (18).

☒ In the 2017-2018 MN alone, we had 5 pediatric deaths from Influenza, and 10 in 2014-2015 (19).

There will always be a risk of infection and death to anyone at any time. Nonetheless, I believe the benefits of opening the schools for our children outweigh the risks and that we can resume to some type of normalcy while being safe and reducing the risk of transmission to the vulnerable

populations. Together we can think outside of the box and come to a middle ground with families like mine who would like the schools to re-open normally (in-person) while keeping everyone safe, without taking these crazy measures like having children 6 ft apart with no physical contact.

I appreciate your time in reading this lengthy letter and I hope that I've provided some facts and reassurances when it comes to our children's health and wellbeing during this pandemic. As a mother, I would never send my children in harm's way. As a scientist, I know how to interpret data, facts, and hopefully give you another perspective for your consideration.

Kind regards,  
Mrs. Delila Peri  
Mother of 3  
Minnetonka, MN

Thank you for including my previous email as part of the committee meeting. If not too late, I also wanted to add a new statement that has just come out recently. The world renowned Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto (ranked in the top 30 globally) has recently come out with a statement today on reopening schools this fall. They had an advisory meeting with the top experts and I urge everyone to read alternative opinions on these matters. <http://www.sickkids.ca/PDFs/About-SickKids/81407-COVID19-Recommendations-for-School-Reopening-SickKids.pdf> and <http://www.sickkids.ca/AboutSickKids/Newsroom/Past-News/2020/covid19-recommendations-school-reopening.html>.

As a former scientist, I know the field of academia and scientists, and while they contribute to the advancement of science, there (on occasion) can be a tendency to also live in echo chamber. We are all just humans and even scientists have been wrong or have made mistakes. In this case, I think overestimation has caused the non-scientific community to go into hysteria and panic. I quote a few bullets below from the recommendations:

"We have to accept that COVID-19 will stay with us for a long time. We **must move on with certain activities in our lives, such as schooling, while keeping in mind that there are a lot of ways to mitigate risk,**" says Dr. Ronald Cohn, President and CEO of SickKids and one of the authors of the document.

**"Not opening schools in September would continue to have a negative impact on the mental, behavioural and developmental health of children. We hope these recommendations help provide a framework to keep everyone safe when school doors reopen."**

Developed by experts from SickKids and Unity Health Toronto, with input from scientists at the University of Toronto and SickKids' Family Advisory Network, the recommendations include important topics such as screening, hand hygiene, physical distancing, use of non-medical masks, and more.

In particular **they do NOT** recommend face masks.

3. Non-Medical and Medical Face Masks for children Non-medical masks may reduce transmission from individuals who are shedding the virus. **However, the extent of this benefit is unknown (especially in children) and would only be potentially beneficial if done properly. In fact, if worn incorrectly, it could lead to increased risk of infection and it is not practical for a child to wear a mask properly for the duration of a school day.** It is noteworthy that several European countries have had children successfully return to school without face masks. Guidance statement(s): **• Non-medical and medical face masks are not required or recommended for children returning to school.**

Again, I am trying to get the message out. We need our children to go back to school normally, without crazy and illogical measures (masks, desks 6ft apart, no touching, etc.) Kids need human interaction, touch, love, affection, to grow and develop. We cannot achieve this through online zoom meetings! My kids need their teachers and schools. They love their teachers and miss them. Again, protect the elderly and take daily temperatures, quarantine the sick, but please I urge you to consider all sides of the matter and do not take drastic measures that may negatively impact our children's education. Every week, month, and year of education is critical. We can't afford to lose another 3-6 months of education. COVID will too pass.

Thank you kindly,

Delila Peri

My name is Rebecca Roesler, and I am from Andover, MN. My son is seven years old, and attends Wilson Elementary School. I am sending this email to request that my son be allowed to return to school this fall under a "Normal school environment".

Thank you!

Rebecca Roesler

To Whom It May Concern,

I am in support of "Normal School, with no social distancing and no face masks. I believe it is in the best interest of the children to give them a normal learning environment.

Please count this opinion with many others who believe our children need to return to the regular learning environment without wearing masks or being distanced from others.

Thank you,

Dan

Good Evening,

I am in support of "Normal School, with no social distancing and NO FACE MASKS. I believe it is in the best interest of the children to give them a normal learning environment.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and opinion.

Roxanne Soderquist

On behalf of my husband and our fifteen year old triplets at Prior Lake High School, PLEASE let our kids go back to regular school in the fall!!! We don't need masks and we don't need nor want distance learning!!! Kids age K-12 NEED to have normalcy in their learning process and distance learning is not working for many families like ours. There are so many other factors that kids need to thrive in school and staying isolated behind a computer M-F, 6 hours/day, 5 days a week is hurting them and their educational development. The lack of socializing and interaction with their teachers and their classmates took a big toll this spring on our family and many others. The stats of infections and survival rates of Covid prove this demographic of kids is the least affected by the "virus" that our Governor has blown so much out of proportion. In fact, I don't know one single person who has had COVID. Not one!!! Yet our kids had to give up school, graduations, prom, sports, etc. and for what?

BOTTOM LINE, please get our kids back in school, no masks, no distance learning, all week and let them partake in their activities!!! Other states are and it's time we stop the fear and start living again. Especially our kids!!!

Tina Clark

14049 Kings Ct.

Savage, MN 55378

I hope that students who are able to do so return to school with few restrictions and NO MASKS. They are at the lowest risk for serious Covid complications and need to be back in the classroom and normal schedules with as few encumbrances as possible.

Thank you,

Jane Anderson

Arden Hills, MN.

,

A friend gave me your contact information and encouraged me to send an email. I have a 14 and 9 year

old (entering 9th and 5th grade). I am 100% oppose to them going back to in-school learning IF they are required to wear masks and have restrictions.

I understand the concern and the thought behind this; however I want my kids to be kids. I want each family to take necessary precautions for what's in their best interests and those around them. However, I feel making my children wear masks and have restrictions where the learning environment is difficult and takes away from the joy of an education and friendships. I will however support and respect those families (and teach my children) who decide wearing a mask is in their best interest.

I too have a 20 year old who is finishing her senior year at SCSU. She was notified today that they will be required to wear masks and she is very upset about this.

Let's protect our elderly and those most at risk, please. And while we do that, please stop the implementation of silly precautions for the majority, including our children!

Thank you!

Sara Wolf  
Anoka Hennepin & Spring Lake Park School Districts

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you in regards to our children going back to the physical school this fall and the impact that distance learning had on our children, their education and our family this past spring. I am a parent of three young boys, ages 12 (going into 7th grade), 10 (going into 5th grade) and 6 (going into 1st grade).

First and foremost, I must recognize our school district in Norwood Young America. We are a small school with small resources, but have the best resources in our teachers and administration. We continually were asked for and gave feedback on how things were going with distance learning. Our school listened, modified, and asked again. They adapted to our new reality and were flexible with our work schedules and children's needs in mind. They offered support and resources while recognizing the limits and barriers we were encountering on a daily basis.

Despite their best efforts, distance learning was not a fit for our children, their education, or our family for many reasons.

Education: Again, despite our best efforts our children didn't gain education from this experience, as they would in school. They likely didn't go too far backwards, but certainly didn't move forward, as they should. As parents who are Master prepared and Doctorally prepared individuals in their respective fields, we really struggled to be teachers for our boys. Teaching is a skill that, as parents, we do in various ways for our children. However, we are not skilled at teaching in the sense that is and should be expected from a trained teacher and from someone who has devoted their lives to this career.

Additionally, we were still expected by our employers to fulfill our work obligations that had increased significantly due to the COVID-19 crisis. This obligation for work will continue this fall and our children's education is not a factor in our company's plans or expectations of us as employees. My husband works for the State of Minnesota and I work for a healthcare system. Our work or the expectations of our jobs didn't stop for us to facilitate online learning for our boys.

The 'summer slide' is going to be significant for my children and I feel we are engaged and supportive parents. What happens to the children that truly don't have this support at home? What about those that don't have internet or access to a reliable computer? What about the non-English speaking students? Packets of homework aren't education. We don't pay taxes to have our children be taught by ourselves or to do packets of homework and watch their teachers online.

Our boys all hated online learning. They were disengaged, despite our efforts as parents and the efforts of their teachers. They did what they had to do to get by and nothing more. They

survived, but certainly didn't thrive. Academically, this was not a fit for our boys or our family. If this continues, we will be considering moving to a different state. That should tell you how hard it was on our boys and our family.

Social-Emotional Health: Our children not only gain education from school, but also social interactions with their peers that we are unable to replicate on a zoom video conference session or any distance learning platform. They missed their friends and all the social growing up that happens while in school-- learning to work in a group, work as a team, control their emotions and be polite. I recognize the root of this work happens in the home, but it is reiterated and supported with their interactions at school and support of their teachers and leaders at school.

Safety measures: In speaking to teachers and other parents about what school might look like when the children are allowed back physically in the buildings, I want to express my deep concern with a few things.

The first of these being the possibility of having the children wear masks. I wear a mask for work, sometimes all day. I work in a hospital and still feel it's not necessary or appropriate all the time for my work and definitely disagree with ever making a child wear this that isn't immune-compromised. The risk vs benefit is something that I would heavily weigh, as masks on children likely won't be as effective simply because they will touch them all the time.

Additionally, they need recess, should be allowed to eat in the lunchrooms, have all extra curricular activities and not be forced to be exposed to extreme toxic disinfectants. All of these things have an impact on their physical, social, and mental wellbeing and health. I recognize some disagree with me on these factors, but then they certainly have the right to homeschool or opt for online learning that already exists.

One size doesn't necessarily fit all: Unlike what our Governor chose to do with businesses, I would hope that you will take into consideration that not all areas of Minnesota are the same. I realize in the Minneapolis area, likely schools are small and class sizes may be large. However, that may not be the case with private schools in the same area. In the rural areas where we live, our schools can easily allow for plenty of space and smaller class sizes. Please don't base your decisions as a one size fits all answer.

What barriers face a crowded inner city school are not the same barriers that a school in rural Minnesota face. PLEASE allow the schools to self-regulate and put into place what will work best in their schools. No one knows these schools and cares more about the particular students in those schools than the teachers and administrators of that local school. Trust them to do what is best for their schools, their staff, their teachers and their communities.

Don't reinvent the wheel: For those families that want online learning or want to homeschool, they already have these options. Don't force schools to create online learning options when it already exists. As a parent, I can choose to do either of those options. If a hybrid model is a fit for me, that already exists, as well. Many homeschool students come to schools for certain classes, like band. Again, don't spend all this time and money to create programming that

already exists. If someone is scared of having their child exposed to COVID-19, they can already make the choice to keep their child at home and utilize online learning or homeschool. Teachers in our schools have chosen to teach to be with children, not teach online curriculum. Those that want to do this, do so already with existing online schooling options.

Timeline: Making a decision at the end of July is ridiculous to expect schools to accommodate their already small budgets (which likely were already due to be approved earlier in the year/summer) to properly engage in distance learning, in both technology acquisition and curriculum planning. This decision timeline alone should tell you the right thing to do is allow each school flexibility to do what is best for their school and students.

With all of this being said, I cannot express enough that I hope and pray you will not make a broad decision for the whole state to continue with distance learning. It is not a fit for our boys or our family. Children need to be in school with no restrictions starting this fall. If for some reason you don't feel this is a fit state-wide, you need to let local school leaders make the decisions that are best for their schools and students. Trust those to lead and they will show you they can and will step up to ensure a safe and productive learning environment.

Sincerely,

Becky & Jason Pauly

Concerned tax-paying citizens and parents

Norwood Young America, MN

I am a grandmother who had the honor of helping my 4th grade granddaughter when distance learning was put into effect and as much as I enjoyed spending the time with her this is NO way for our youth to learn! They need the time spent with their friends and the opportunity to learn like the rest of us did!! DO NOT take this away from them the results of that would be detrimental for the rest of their educational years!! They need to go back to school as they were!! A Concerned Grandmother

June 22, 2020

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to you to express my opinion that Minnesota children should be back in school, in person, this fall. I have 10 children. Six of them will be in school this fall. Distance learning did not work well for us. The children did not learn well through a screen. It was extremely difficult to motivate them. They need to be in the classroom with their teachers and classmates. Some of my kids who were at the top of their classes during the normal school year were failing during distance learning. Children are at virtually no risk from COVID-19. JAMA Pediatrics, a well-known and respected medical journal, published a statement saying that children are at MUCH higher risk of serious illness from influenza, yet we don't shut down the schools for influenza. I understand that you may be worried that they will spread the virus to vulnerable people at home. Look at the countries in Europe that have opened schools. They have not seen an increase in cases, and studies have shown that children are not spreading the virus to others. Precautions can be taken to protect teachers and staff who are older than 60.

I believe children's mental health and education could be irreversibly damaged by continuing distance learning in the fall. Please send them back to the classroom.

Sincerely,  
Heidi Streiff  
Northfield, MN

To the MDE and Govern Walz,

I do not ever wish to be in a potion you are all in. In that being said I am looking out for my family's well being and what my community needs.

I am in Monticello MN. For the past 2 or so months our neighborhood kids have been running around playing with each other. The parents in our neighborhood have been mixed, some working from home others working out of the home. Many families have been going to visit their other family members. But yet not 1 of them has been sick since the lockdown. There have been many of us that were sick pre-lock down. Which may or maynot have been the corna virus. But my point to this comment is that this threat yes I believe is real, just like I believe the flu is real. I do believe that it is a bit more serious than the flu, but its is not more serious than Ebola, SARS, H1N1 and the list goes on. We did not shut down for those scares, why are we shutting down for this? By all means take extra cleaning precautions, have the kids wash their hands multiple times a day (please have extra lotion as well, as MN winters are hard on hands). But please do not go overboard and continue this shut down. The kids need to be kids! They need to be in school with their peers. This is how we can make them acceptable adults! This is where they learn their social skills. This shut down it, taking it away from them.

The youtube link below is 1 of many videos or articles out there concerning the CDC's recommendations. At this point Govern Walz and the CDC need to stop. Govern Walz how can you go

to a funeral with how many hundreds in attendance, but you can say the schools need to be shut down or the business. I believe this is very hipricatal of you. Do as I say not as I do.

I believe (and I am not a medical professional) but the social distancing will be far worse mentally than the illness that we pick up. We need that cross contamination of germs to help our immune system. For example when my children were in daycare we used to have neighbors that had a stay at home dad. When they finally took their kids out to socialize they would end up sick but our kids would be fine. This is due to their weak immune system, they never built it up because they were always sheltered at home. Where as my kids got dirty and spread the germs around!

I know there are teachers, students, family members with compromised immune systems and I hope that you are able to do something extra or find a work around to assist them. But for the other 80 percent of the pollution we should not be caused additional medical issues on top of that.

I truly hope this is read by all of you and you open up the schools this fall. Absolutely take extra precautions, I am all for that. But let the sports and school resume.

Thank you for your time.

Antoinette McDonald  
Monticello MN

Hello,

I am writing to express my concerns about school not resuming properly in the fall.

The CDC and WHO continues to put out new information regularly that supports classes resuming in a normal fashion. They found the virus doesn't remain well on surfaces. The mortality is significantly lower than originally thought and is predominantly relegated to the same demographic susceptible to seasonal flu death/complications. And most recently have revealed asymptomatic carriers to rarely spread the virus.

As a parent I am concerned for my childs mental health as well as the quality of her education. The two months on e- learning where abysmal. My child who normally laments attending school (she is a solid A/B student by the way) was wishing desperately to go back. The Art classes she looked forward to became a chore without classroom instruction. Psychology class offered no depth without the conversation between students and teacher that broadens the topic at hand. And Geography was just a relentless labor of research in order to answer written questions and lacked the necessary anecdotal evidence of human populations and their spread.

I am certain we are not the only family who feels our childs education fell flat. This fall my daughter will be starting her Senior year of high school ( we have been in ISD15 since kindergarten). Fortunately my child has no question about finishing high school. I do wonder how many will be dropping out if school doesn't resume properly. I wonder what the overall effect an increase in dropouts would have on our community. I wonder who is advocating for the future success of our children.

Janice Burgess

I am adamant that my children return to normal school in the fall. We will not be supporting social distancing or mask wearing for our young children as that will do more harm than good. Please take this information with you as you attend the upcoming hearings regarding going back to school in the fall.

Danielle

**We EMPHATICALLY support in-person K-12 this Fall**

Just wanted to make sure our voice was included in the decision making. Thank you!

William Hines

I would like to be a voice amongst the many you are receiving.

I would like to say I want my kids to be able to attend school without masks or - anything out of the ordinary. I have done a lot of reading and I feel I understand both sides of the issue. I would also hope that the voice of the experts and science are not being stifled.

OSHA has come out showing the dangers of mask.

The CDC has shown the numbers to not be as inflated as the media would like us to believe, nor is it nearly as contagious.

Germs, getting sick strengthen our immune system. The stats are now showing the ones who stay home are the ones getting sick. Being isolated is not protecting anyone.

And not to mention the psychological implications of children not being able to see proper mirroring - which can lead to mental illness. We need each other and we need to be able to communicate without visible and invisible walls.

If changes are made, it is most likely a change that will forever impact the future. No one has the power to beat nature. It is a force of its own.

I don't want this to be long e-mail so I'm simply giving bullet points, however, I do believe there will be harsher and longer lasting negative impacts on our children if these draconian measures are taken in the name of safety. I implore everyone who has a vote, to vote for life to go back to normal. If they do not, I for one, will pull my 4 children from the school system.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Sarah deBlois

I am a mom in MN and I am BEGGING for normal school in the fall. I do not believe it is good for my children's immune systems for them to be forced to wear a mask at school, and the science behind it all shows kids so unlikely to suffer from the virus, and when they get it, it shows that they recover so well and easily. Thank you for considering this. PLEASE FIGHT FOR REGULAR SCHOOL IN THE FALL!!

Kelsie Buchanan  
📧

I am the mother of a 13 year old girl. She has an IEP, . Distance learning does not work for us.. She would have done better if you just cancelled school in March. I had to use vacation time to stay with her everyday to get her through the spring..... WE CAN NOT DO THAT AGAIN.

The anxiety that you caused by her having to go online every day to try to do school work was horrible. The school did a great job of having them keep the same schedule and check into every class where the teacher was online, they went through worksheet or the assignments and discussed everything but it was very difficult. signing in, getting to the next zoom meeting or google classroom. Not every kid is good on the computer, mine absolutely HATES it. It is difficult to make the computer work, there is no one to ask if it does not.

We live rural so the internet is iffy and spotty at best. The nearest tower is 6 miles away and then our dish is 4 acres from the house. That is the only place we can put it to catch a connection on the only internet choice we have in our area.

Her school is a public charter school so will have to follow the larger public schools around our area. There were 100 kids in her school 6-12 grade last year but there are 20 in her class, with a teacher and 2-3 para's or 2 teachers and 2 para's. but still was very tough to get help, let alone learn anything.

PLEASE open up schools, the students need interaction with fellow classmates, not on a screen, and teachers. We need to get back to learning, we need the lunch program, and art class and gym class. We need music class, and hugs from our teachers.....

Families are stressed, nothing good is happening with distance learning and for some of us homeschooling is Not a workable option.

NO online, no splitting the class to every other day, no 1/2 days rotated between two classes.

OPEN OUR SCHOOL JUST LIKE ANY OTHER SEPTEMBER!!!

Hello,

I am writing you as a concerned parents with a child in the Savage Prior Lake Schools.

Our child & all children need to go back to school. Distant learning was a complete set back in their learning. Every parent & child I know (and we are fortunate ones to have a safe place with devices & internet), just about gave up on distance learning. Luckily, both my husband & I were able to continue working through all of the quarantined period, but that meant that we had to spend 9 hours a day, focused on work. Who can teach and provide the right level of attention to a child, when you're on conference calls & under deadlines!?! Children need and deserve better than that. Let's not forget us parents need to work to put food on the table & for the children to have a safe home. So many of us were stressed because we feared losing our jobs but then we felt like complete failures for our child(ren). So although I may be speaking on my behalf, I can tell you that ALL of our friends had the exact same issues. Through those conversations we easily identified a complete lack in consistency seen across school districts and the amount of "teaching" that was done.

Our child has started back at Kids Co, at the school. The kids are not wearing masks per the MN Department of Health recommendation. This does not concern us in the least. They ask health related questions & I take his temperature each morning. I do not want the children to have to wear masks as it is proven dangerous for that amount of time and it will instill further fear.

Going back to Kids Co has given us our child back. He is happy again. We witnessed a change in his mental health through all of this, and he couldn't articulate what it was specifically when we tried to talk to him about it. Going back to Kids Co is supplying with necessary interaction and socialization, as well as structure. Children need this. To keep them isolated further may have long term effects on their mental health. How is the State and/or the School Districts focusing on this potential risk?

In-school learning is a must, as there isn't the right structure and consistency in place to effectively teach long term via distance learning. While this virus is very scary, it's even more scary to think about the long term effects on our future. The US is falling behind in our educational system, and this will only exacerbate the issue. The future is bleak if we continue down this path, because we do not have the time to convert the entire education system to properly support distance learning.

While we understand that this isn't a simple solution either, as this virus affects us all differently. There are children or family members that are in high risk situations, and perhaps the risk is too high to send

them into a situation filled with that risk. If teachers are educating a partially full classroom, then technology can be leveraged to conduct live streaming of those classes so the kids that cannot go back to school. It should be a parental decision, but we have to have options. If you decide that there will only be distance learning, you have taken away our option and forced a sub-par learning experience on our children. You have taken away our options.

Our child and the majority of children need to go back to school.

Sincerely,  
Stephany & Nathan Schmitz

I understand there will be hearings in the days to come to about what school will look like for my children. I understand the precautions and enacting distance-learning was thought to be the best option to keep everybody safe back in March.

Distance-learning was extremely difficult mentally and emotionally on my children. (A kindergartner and 4th grader.) It was devastating to not see their teachers in person, to not be in a social environment and get the emotional support school provides. Their young minds need more than Math, English, History and Science lessons to thrive.

There also is the mental health of the parents you need to keep in mind. I had to put my business on hold for three months in order to teach my kids. As a result my business suffered.

There is new data that is coming out every single day showing that the coronavirus does not as easily spread as we once thought. There also have been no known cases where a child has passed the coronavirus to an adult. <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/no-child-known-to-have-passed-on-coronavirus-to-adults-global-study-finds/ar-BB13qi2t>

WHO: Data suggests it's "very rare" for corona virus to spread through asymptomatics

<https://www.axios.com/who-coronavirus-asymptomatic-patients-08d84e31-1846-44d8-8fe1-2343ff850764.html>

I also do not support children having to wear masks in school. There are numerous studies, doctors and immunologists who have spoken out about ineffectiveness case of wearing masks in public if you are healthy. It is hard enough to keep kids from touching their faces. Put a masks on them, they're gonna be touching it nonstop all day.

Please. Listen to the new data. Set politics aside. Give my girls a normal school year. I am a mom who has done everything I could to normalize my daughter's lives in the last four months. It was not enough. That is terribly hard for me to admit. There is not much I can control, but I can fight for my daughters right to an education.

Thank you for your time,

Jacqueline Washburn

763-267-4293

Leave politics out of our children's education and send them back to school, as it was when this political scam started. NO MASKS, NO DISTANCING! Normal just like it was in January of 2020!

Jay Hoenk

Hi, I am emailing you to please help all kids and parents by sending them to school in the fall as normal. Please no mask, no restrictions. The distance learning has had lasting effects on my whole family. Kids need to have social interaction with others, sports need to be played, or kids will be so devastated and will have no incentive to do well. I believe that the area I live in is very low risk, we have small class sizes and everyone cares for everyone's safety and well being. Just please take this in consideration. Thank you for reading and may God Bless.

Sincerely, Jolene Bootsma

Mom of 4 boys, 2 that need special reading and speech classes

Hello! Kids need to return to normal school this fall! No masks, no social distancing, no distance learning!!!! Please!!!!

Shelly Nibbelink

Edgerton, MN

I support "normal school". That is, in person classes with no social distancing or masks. Please follow the science and the research that shows kids aren't effected. Adults are hardly affected if you look at the number of cases vs population. Please, we need our children to not have this fear and over-reaction projected on to them. They already have experienced so many setbacks from this. Also, how can parents work out of the home and properly supervise their children if they have to stay home and do online

school. I have been a teacher for 10+ years and now own a chain of childcare centers. If you force teachers to teach differently than they signed up for, many will quit. That will negatively affect so many things.

Thank you,

Tiffany Simon

I believe that it is in the best interest of my children and other students to have a normal school environment for Fall 2020. That is, in person classes with no social distancing or masks. While distance learning served its purpose last Spring I do not feel my children learned as well from it and did a lot less work. I want my children in class where there are less distractions than at home.

Sincerely,

Danette Smit  
Edgerton, MN

I am writing to you today to voice my concern for school in the fall. I have 2 children in the public school system and feel that they deserve to attend public school with some normalcy, without the requirement of masks or social distancing.

If they don't have this opportunity then we will be exploring other options.

Thank you for your time,

Matt and Lisa Marjama

I am writing in support of "normal school" with no distance learning (or as little as possible) for the 2020-2021 school year.

Erica Silva  
Coon Rapids, MN  
[Ericalynnsilva@gmail.com](mailto:Ericalynnsilva@gmail.com)

Hi there,

This is off of Facebook that you are on a committee regarding distance learning for the fall 2020-2021 school year.

If this is not the case, please just delete.

In short summary, these are some of the following reasons I feel school should open in the fall normally

- We know more on this virus and are more prepared now. Study after study shows children are very spared from this and are not big contagious spreaders.
- We have not locked down schools before unless there are outbreaks of illnesses. Influenza killed 600 kids last year, schools that had outbreaks shut down for a few days to clean but not for the rest of the year. H1N1 killed many kids and we didn't shut down then
- Kids are suffering tremendously academically and mentally from these prolonged shutdown. All the teachers I know had 2 to 4 students in their class NEVER log in. Teachers had both police and they themselves went to check on them, no response. Hopefully these children are alive because severe child abuse is up too with stressed out unemployed parents. A teacher friend of mine her own young child was placed on depression medication for the first time. Again how many others did this happen to, and is it fixable?

Although my child had to learn at daycare because we both worked outside of the home, we spent our whole stimulus check on daycare. Now that worked for us, but what about parents with more than one child or who didn't qualify for stimulus. Coworker of mine spent 4 hours when she got home from work doing the online schooling. I'm sure she wasn't alone and then I think of others who work longer hours.

I know of people who have completely locked down and feel this is what has to be done to save lives and they are doing their part and so should everyone else.

To me, glad it worked for you. You had a fortress you could lock up in and could do that. But are you sure you aren't being selfish? If you don't care for your village, your village cannot function and care for you.

Again hopefully we can repair the damage done to these kids who are our future. True leaders don't focus just on one issue, and in this case covid affects less than half a percent of anyone. All issues need to be considered.

Please vote to open schools normally for the school year. If there is an outbreak like influenza, shut down for a few days and clean and reopen. Please advocate for what is best for our children.

Tiffany Germann  
Rosemount MN

Please support "normal school". That is, in person classes with no social distancing or masks. The hearings are coming up soon and as a teacher, I can assure you that thriving for them is having something consist like regular school. So many of them don't have any consistency at home so please vote for business as normal.

Thank you!  
Rebecca Biermaier

I am writing as a constituent and concerned parent. It's my understanding that discussions are happening on whether school will resume in person in the fall. For my children and from many families I've spoken to over the past several months, it's critical that our children get back in school vs. continued distance learning. My children need the school and teacher interaction. I am not a teacher and continuing distance learning for my 5 year, I believe, will cause her to be behind and unable to learn and read as she should at this age.

This has also kept parents from working when their under age children are required to stay home. Not all children have another place to go.

Please hear my pleas.

Sincerely,  
Mary Campbell

My daughter will be starting 3rd grade at Nisswa Elementary, in Nisswa, Mn in the fall. As her parents, we fully support in classroom learning, with no masks or social distancing. She knows how to wash her hands, we know how to keep her home if she is sic. After watching the sadness & disappointment in her while being at home, away from friends, no teacher(except me & I am not a teacher- nor do I want to be one) she needs to be back in an environment of learning & socialization. Please have Mn schools go back in the fall.

Thank you,  
Leslie

Leslie Demgen Arnold  
218-330-8228-cell  
218-820-7386-work  
Ladarnold@gmail.com  
Lesliearnold@gulllakevacationrentals.com

Dear Commissioner,

We are writing to ask that the Minnesota Department of Education plan to reopen school as normal in the fall. Our children attend the Lac qui Parle Valley district in SW Minnesota.

We have had an extremely low incidence of COVID in this area from the very beginning, and it seems quite detrimental and unnecessary to continue the distance learning or other modified learning this coming fall. Many people are already out and about, pools open, kids with friends, summertime in

progress in spite of all of the cancellations.

Distance learning is a burden on working families, especially those with younger children. We are also very concerned about gaps in education at this point. We noticed this past spring - across the board for three children ages 11, 16 and 18 - that they could complete an entire day of work within 2-3 hours at the most. Considering what is normally packed into a school day, we had major concerns about this - what is being missed? Not to mention that it leaves children with a lot of instability in their daily routine, after that short window of work is done. A lot of parents work, and are not able to readily be around to fill that time appropriately. We are not saying this to speak negatively of their teachers at all. We are very aware that they were all doing the best they could with what they had to work with at that time, and we appreciate them greatly. We have a great district.

The model of rotating days between distance learning and in person learning seems to be quite chaotic, another means that I cannot see functioning at all for working families. Or even providing any stability or consistency for children. This is not anything we are interested in seeing.

I also work for social services, and remain very concerned for children whose safe haven is school. And the overall isolation of all the kids from their teachers and friends...I am concerned about detrimental long term mental health effects across the board.

We are also not interested in having our children wear masks or PPE, or being divided from their world with plexiglass. Mask wearing for children would seem to be quite detrimental to their brain health (oxygen deprivation) and physical health, and also mental health. And considering that the WHO does not recommend mask wearing for anyone but the actively sick, and caregivers, it seems like masks should not even be brought into the picture at this point, especially with numbers dropping. And keeping a distance of six feet does not seem to be a feasible request for a lot of buildings, no one has the extra room.

I will also be communicating with our school district. Again, we ask that school reopen AS NORMAL in the fall. If it does not, our family will seriously need to consider homeschooling our children. We greatly appreciate our district, and this is not something that we would prefer to do, but also need to look out for the well being of our children.

If you can't open schools as normal statewide, please leave it up to each individual district to decide what is best for them based on statistics, parent surveys, etc. Please do not issue a one size fits all approach for this. We function very differently out here in rural Minnesota than they do in the metro.

Anonymous

I have 3 teenagers in the Westonka school district. As we understood the initial need to move to distance learning until we knew more about the virus, we never expected or agreed that it needed to be

carried on. We live in a world where viruses surround us each and every day. It is healthy for our immune system to be exposed and to fight them. It is extremely unhealthy to stay locked up & compromise our immune system. This is detrimental to our health.

We now know the models were extremely inaccurate. I don't even understand how we can keep using them. We have the data we need. This virus has little if no complications for children. The flu kills more children than Covid 19. We now know this virus is more serious for the elderly. We should not quarantine those with little to no risk. That makes no sense! There is no basis or "science" that should lead anyone into deciding distance learning going forward.

We can tell you the distance learning was fine for the short period. It is not okay at all going forward. The kids were definitely not getting a comparable education at home. These kids need to be in the school setting interacting. Kids of all ages need this social interaction to develop properly. We could see the mental health of our children decline rapidly. They seemed incredibly depressed over that time, missing their friends and sports and overall structure. Who would be responsible for the consequences of child depression? Where are the models for the increase in depression, suicide, substance abuse, child abuse, etc.? Why is this not being considered? Is this just a political game, because parents aren't going to play! We see it!

Kids need to get back to school and activities. Their sports and activities keep them mentally and physically happy. School, athletics and activities keep children occupied so they aren't doing other harmful things. In many cases, it is their escape from not so ideal home life. You know this. You know many kids need their teachers, coaches, etc. to keep them going on the right direction. Please consider this!

There is only one choice, kids NEED to go back to schools full time without restrictions! There are numerous statements from doctors telling us how unsafe and unhealthy masks are. It depletes the oxygen levels and just traps the bacteria and viruses inside. We know this! We know kids won't be able to handle masks. I have a 14 year old daughter with anxiety, she literally freaks out when she has had to put a mask on for only minutes. There are so many like her that emotionally, mentally & physically can't wear a mask! Have you considered the damage this is doing psychologically?

Your part time option is ridiculous too. That is too much to put on schools, teachers, kids and families! This is just plain ignorance to think that would work.

I would love to know what is the hold up? More cases? That is a good thing, the virus will then weaken & die out. It already is! Look at the actual data. Increase in cases and decrease in deaths is what we want. We can't hide from a virus!

If this is simple a political stance to get mail in voting, push us into fear and socialism, you will LOSE! The citizens of Minnesota will prevail and fight for freedom at the ballot box. Trump will win! So let the kids go back and allow a fair & just election. Have a conscience.

Don't take away any more from this years senior class. They won't ever get another chance. You need

to do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Leonard

This is in regard to e-learning. It was a nightmare, and I'm not doing it again. I'm sorry, but I am not. I realize there will be some who will not want to send their children back to school. That is okay. I'm sure most districts can live stream their classes so parents can homeschool their children, or they can sign their children up for the State of Minnesota online education program. There are options for those families who are scared or have vulnerable family members. I feel for them, but we will each make our own decisions based on what works best for our families. I have three dyslexic children and two with ADHD. We are hobbling through e-learning this year, but we are DONE! Unless you plan to pay me and many other parents the teacher's salaries for next year then forget it! I didn't go to school to be a teacher, and I definitely did not go to school to be a teacher while at the same time doing a full time second job. I lived on about four hours of sleep April through early June trying to do everything, and I'm still tired. I'm hoping I don't get sick with some other illness due to how drained and exhausted my body still is right now. It is my understanding that many daycares in the state have been operating the entire time without masks, without social distancing, and there have been very few issues. These kids need to go back to school. They need the socialization. They need the movement and exercise. They need the stimulation. They need the structure most importantly! I would hate to pull my child from their local school and friends, but if kids are not allowed to go back to school five days per week I will be forced to look at other options.

Parents are back AT work. In case you didn't understand that comment.....PARENTS.....ARE.....BACK.....AT.....WORK, and the media has scared all the nannies and babysitters off. That's for the families who can even afford a nanny or to pay a babysitter some crazy hourly wage to watch their kids. Kids are not getting fed properly during the day, and that is not for a lack of food in the house although in some areas I'm sure that is the case. I would like you to show me many nine year olds who will voluntarily eat fruits or vegetables when their parents or the school isn't there to oversee and force them to do it.

In case you haven't already figured it out everyone I know is over e-learning, if they even made it to the end! I'm pretty sure my third and sixth graders now have anxiety over school due to all the fighting over missing assignments and being forced to spend the entire day in their rooms on an electronic device. Now that we are seeing other kids again I can't believe what has happened to them. What the MDE and maybe many House members don't understand is the complete lack of exercise many of these kids got within the last three months. A friend who is a financial advisor told us that he has many adult clients who have literally not even left their homes, since the first day everything was closed down. These are adults. I'm not a doctor, but I'm pretty sure from everything I have read that is not healthy! There are kids who have gone DAYS at a time where their only exercise was the few steps to the kitchen or bathroom. I cannot begin to tell you the amount of weight many of these kids have gained! I've seen many kids who have gained 10-30 pounds or more. It's crazy!!! Despite what the Department of Health might think, the two days per week of gym the middle school and elementary kids were suppose to do wasn't even happening. It definitely wasn't happening in March and April when it was colder. In high school only the kids who are taking gym this year had any sort of requirements. I will be interested to know how many kids get diagnosed with carpal tunnel within the next year or so

from all of the video games. With the parents back at work these kids are spending all day on their iPads then video games, or in some cases just video games for twelve plus hours. It can't be healthy, but you are giving parents no other options. My nine year old and the ten year old neighbor (whose parents are also back to work) decided to pull out a blender and make dog treats yesterday. (They won't eat a fruit or vegetable during the day, but they will try to make dog treats!) My nine year old has never even used a blender. I was just amazed no-one cut a finger off while us parents were at work. The neighborhood kids are running loose on their own while us parents are back to work! It should be an interesting summer of little to no adult supervision, but again you and all the cancelled camps have given parents no choice. I grew up in a rural area, and my siblings still live in a rural area. Those kids can get hurt much easier, and the closest neighbor might be a mile or more down the road. Their internet is also not reliable for the ones that even have it, and it is my understanding that many of those districts did not even attempt e-learning as it was not feasible. Those kids are being left home alone, and there are not any close neighbors to help them if they were to need assistance right away. Don't bother writing me back with a letter suggesting what I should be doing, because this is what is happening in the real world. Your theoretical ideal world is not the real world, and it is NOT what is actually happening. If you would like to discuss the achievement gap which is one of the worst in the country, just imagine how much worse that is going to get here in Minnesota. Many of the kids on the low end of the testing are going to cause that gap to grow even more as they are the ones not doing e-learning anyway. Nothing will change. They won't magically start doing it next year. The science does not support doing this to our kids. Teachers should be considered essential workers. Again, if teachers have compromised immune systems, then they should not be teaching. We can protect our vulnerable and get our kids back in school. There are options.

When considering what to do for schools in the fall worst case look at the picture from the cover of the Wall Street Journal from recently when they showed how South Korea set up the desks with dividers to send the kids back to school. I would hope that is a worst case scenario, but it is better than e-learning which doesn't work. I hope you take these issues into consideration when considering which alternative is worse. I will not police the e-learning next Fall. I will give the teachers my kids cell phones and tell them it will be their responsibility. I'm getting paid to do a different job. I don't like for my kids to use the word hate, yet I can find no other word to describe what I felt my kids and I felt for each other at the end of an e-learning day and this entire experience. The anxiety was high, and I'm sure permanent mental damage was done. Please take that into consideration when you are making your decisions for next Fall. Kids with any type of special needs, particularly ADHD, should never have to do e-learning. They are not organized. They cannot sit still. They cannot focus, and those are really the kids who definitely should not be sitting on an electronic device all day long! I spoke to a single mom with an ADHD eighth grader who said she was back to work, and her only child was at home all day by himself. The school had a para calling him every morning to try to help him, but it didn't help. She said they were in the same boat. She was fearful her child absolutely hated school now and will continue to do so going forward due to the anxiety he developed within the last three months of school from all of their fighting over missing assignments. Again, those parents who prefer e-learning and can make it work can keep their kids at home. That will put fewer kids in the classrooms anyway. Maybe you should ask your school districts to put out a survey to see how many kids will be returning to in person learning in the fall. With the way the media has scared people to death I'm sure you might have a high number who don't even want to send their kids back. If they work from home, don't work, or have a relative who can stay home and take care of their children then more power to them. Many people do not have or even want those options. There were a number of people who were trying to do it right and have their vulnerable parents watch their children. How is sending those kids to school for two to three days per week in the hybrid model going to help keep the vulnerable grandparents safe? You are better off sending kids five days per week, so the vulnerable grandparents can stay safe in their own homes and

not be forced to be exposed to the children who most likely will have little to no symptoms. Other families will be forced to put their kids in a daycare or other setting where they will be exposing them to a whole new group of people and germs. I do not see the hybrid model being a smart option at all.

Besides the issues us parents had with e-learning I have heard from a few teachers who want to go back to school. I've not heard of any who love e-learning and want it to continue. I'm sure there are a few out there though. I've been told by a few teachers that they did not become teachers to be forced to work 24/7, because parents are contacting them 24/7 expecting help for their children literally 24/7. I'm pretty sure most teachers are done with e-learning, too. I've heard teachers comment how they can't teach classes on Google Meets with their kids at home. SHOCKER how that doesn't work for ANYONE including teachers!!

The worst move the Minnesota Department of Health has made to date was requiring that schools who were ready to start e-learning right after the schools were shut down had to wait until March 27 to begin, which then turned into three weeks due to an already scheduled spring break. Kids had just spent three weeks sitting on video games and playing that the transition to e-learning was an absolute nightmare! I heard about the Federal Equity Law, and I would like to know how equitable the entire experience was for people. I'm pretty sure the only thing that happened was that the academic gap widened even more. That will only get worse with continued e-learning forced onto families who aren't even home with their children in the first place! Again, stop it with your theoretical talk of how you are picturing that things went or will go in your theoretical world, because I'm out talking to other parents and living it myself. What I'm telling you is what actually happened!

To summarize things you should take into consideration for this Fall:

Parents are back AT work

Kids will be on their own and most likely eat chips or junk for lunch, if they eat at all during the day. Very little of what they are eating is nutritional. Again, there is plenty of food in the house, but I know my kids are sick of PBJ, turkey, and ham sandwiches that they can make themselves. Worrying about what they will eat for lunch is secondary to worrying that they are not burning down the house, because you can't get anyone to nanny right now thanks to the media. Again, that is if people can even afford a nanny!

Kids will either be on video games or roaming the neighborhoods getting into trouble

Kids may or may not even do their e-learning without a parent there to watch and help them

The academic gap is going to grow at a crazy pace for those doing e-learning, and those only half or not doing e-learning not to mention those with spotty or no internet access.

Kids who get special services at school are NOT getting that help through e-learning

In case you missed it earlier.....PARENTS ARE BACK AT WORK!!! Working at home while trying to help homeschool multiple children never worked, is not currently working for anyone I know, and it will not magically change in the fall for the few still working from their homes. Many parents have gone back to work, because they can get nothing done with the kids at home.

None of this is an exaggeration. If you think it is, the House and MDE are clueless! Lastly, our Governor along with the Mayor of Minneapolis allowed 6,000 people to sit on I-35 sitting knee to knee, butt to butt, and sometimes laying over each other without any social distancing whatsoever, and many did not have on masks. That is beside the fact of the over 1,000 people who attended George Floyd's indoor memorial service.....many without masks. I don't have a problem with either of these things that happened, but I think the lockdown restrictions have already gone out the window! Please use common

sense when deciding what the better option is for the children of this state who are rarely having any symptoms at all from the virus! I realize some do have bad symptoms, but many have none at all. These children are going to be showing up with Type 2 diabetes, carpal tunnel, random injuries, and who knows what else within the next year, if kids don't go back to school in the fall. This entire situation is a child, sexual predator's dream. That also needs to be considered here, because it is all on your watch and your shoulders. Thanks for your time and attention.

A concerned Minnesota parent

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Nikki and I am a parent of 3 kids in rural MN. All 3 of my children found distance learning very difficult and they did not learn whatsoever. 1 of my children was already having difficulties and the distance learning brought all of her progress to a complete halt. Most public schools are not equipped to properly educate kids with distance learning. I want my children back in school, full time, with no restrictions for the 20/21 school year. They need teachers with hands on learning. All 3 of my kids have extreme difficulty wearing a mask and not being able to be "normal". All of the proposed restrictions are unrealistic, and detrimental to our kid's wellbeing. I beg of you to not restrict our children.

Thanks

Nikki Evans

I am writing as a mother of 5 in Milaca, MN. Like all parents with children in public school in Minnesota we took Covid 19 guidelines seriously. Our family stayed isolated in our home from the first day our school sent the kids home for distance learning in March of this year. Up until a few weeks ago we had little to no contact with anyone outside of our home to do our part to "slow the spread". We welcomed our 5th child in the middle of all this. Nothing about the past few months has been what we or anyone expected and we've done our best to keep life for our family as normal as we could given the circumstances.

This fall 4 of our children will be school age. (5th grade, 3rd grade, Kindergarten and preschool) It is our family's wish that public school will go on this fall as normal as possible. Distance learning did not work well for our family. This is at no fault to the teachers, whom we adore and who worked tirelessly to do the best that they could with what they had. Everyday there were tears and frustration from all of us. It was a very stressful time for our family. To be completely honest there wasn't much learning going on around here and it was a huge relief when it was over. Just the thought of having to do it all again with distance learning in the fall puts fear in my heart.

Our oldest son was in classes once a day to receive special help with reading and math. If school doesn't resume normally in the fall he will fall even more behind. My husband and I tried our hardest but our son responds better to his teachers at school when it comes to those things. We just can't give him the same education that in person classes can and know that we aren't the only family with this or similar situations.

We love our school, teachers and community. It's been very difficult mentally on our children to be away from the school community this long. We were even involved in multiple Early Childhood

Education Classes every week and can't wait to get back to our beloved routine. It's so important to us to continue moving towards normal. Being able to take our 3 year old to those classes helps build her a positive foundation for school and learning.

Our family has talked in depth about this fall. If distance learning does happen again we've decided to pull our kids from public school and homeschool. The same goes for if masks are required for the children. We can't see our children keeping masks on for the entire school day. It just isn't healthy or practical for their ages. Every family we've talked to about this has similar viewpoints. This is not what we want to happen and hope everyday that the decision will be made to resume as normally as possible. We respectfully ask that those making the decisions for this fall take into consideration the mental health of Minnesota's children and their families. We aren't just worried about our health anymore. It's gone beyond that and this has started to affect our mental health. The children's as well as the parents who are struggling to teach them. It is going on to affect the education of all of our children. Please consider finding ways to resume our children's education in the most normal way as possible. They are the future.

Respectfully,  
Katrina Studeman  
Milaca, MN

I am writing to you as a concerned parent with 4 children in elementary school at Holy Name of Jesus in Wayzata. We love our parochial school that our children attend and even though our circumstances with already having small class sizes and teacher-parent task forces in place working tirelessly to create an in-classroom model for our students in the fall, I know this is not the case for most Minnesota families. I know the value of public education in Minnesota as I was a recipient of it. I am deeply troubled by the lack of awareness and leadership from the MDE, MDH, and Governor Walz for not understanding the mental, emotional, social, and physical needs for our children to be back in their classrooms. Are you considering the long-term and lasting mental challenges that our youth will endure if we expect them to be educated in front of a computer screen? For some children being able to go to school is their safe haven from domestic abuse. It may also be the only outlet they have to get a balanced meal. What about our ESL students and special education students? The distance learning model did not work well when we were under the stay-at-home order and it will not be a feasible solution in the fall no matter how much planning the MDE puts in place during these next two months. All parents are not in the position to continue doing remote learning and have their children at home. The households that require both parents to work and single parent households do not have the means to continue educating their children from home. What is your answer to these parents if they have no other options but to leave their children at home for remote learning?

For the well-being of all Minnesota families, we need our children to return back to an in-person learning model in the fall. I did some research to hammer this point home. The current CDC statistics for the number of COVID-19 deaths in MN for ages 0-19 is ZERO! Yes, ZERO confirmed deaths for males and females from 2/1/20 - 6/17/20 (<https://data.cdc.gov/NCHS/Provisional-COVID-19-Death-Counts-by-Sex-Age-and-S/9bhg-hcku>). With ZERO confirmed MN deaths in children from this virus it makes absolutely no sense that we cannot return to an in-person learning model with no restrictions. Our schools need to be a place that fosters a safe learning environment. The CDC's current recommendations to turn schools

into a prison like environment by requiring face masks for children, having desks face the same direction to promote social disengagement, cutting out lunch and recess, and limiting movement throughout the day is absolutely absurd and not safe for the mental, emotional, social, and physical development of our children. Common sense good hygiene practices like thorough hand washing and staying home when you are sick still apply, right?

I'll end with a reminder of the results of the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey by the Minnesota Department of Health and your commitment quoted below to our school communities (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2019/studentsurvey101719.html?fbclid=IwAR2tFAqICF7Ej8dMEF2N4wg7wCU8BWvePUZzpBBosdSSWdXmZa8s6MRRpIY>):

**"The new data also shows more Minnesota students than ever report having long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems.** This number is up from 18 percent of students surveyed in 2016 to 23 percent in 2019. Eleventh-grade female students who report having long-term mental health, behavioral or emotional problems has more than doubled from 2013 to 2019. In the 2019 survey, of the 11th-grade female students who reported missing a full or partial day of school in the last 30 days, 24 percent reported that they missed school because they felt very sad, hopeless, anxious, stressed or angry."

**"Our students are talking to us and we must listen," said Minnesota Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker. "The results of the Minnesota Student Survey show a number of concerning pieces of data, including student vaping and declines in mental health. No matter what is happening in students' lives outside of school, we must make sure that they feel supported, safe, and welcomed when they're in the classroom so they can succeed academically. My fellow commissioners and I will be working with our school communities so we can better meet the needs of all of our students."**

Our youth had increased mental health problems over the last 3 years before COVID-19. Please do not let mental health for our youth become the next epidemic. The data is telling us that mental health challenges for our youth poses a greater health risk than contracting COVID-19. The mental health problems can be stopped if we are all in this together with reopening our schools to an in-person learning model with no restrictions for the Fall of 2020. **Parents** and **educators** my the majority are telling the MDE and Governor Walz that we need to an in-person learning model. START LISTENING TO US!

Sincerely,

Megan Rahe

Plymouth, MN

I'm writing to submit my thoughts on the distance learning discussion.

While the COVID numbers look pretty good lately, I want to be sure we don't set ourselves up for a massive failure when we had plenty of time to be prepared. I'd like the state to require all public and private schools to have measures in place to deal with not only children that are symptomatic, but also those parents that don't feel comfortable sending their children to school. Based on all kinds of mom FB groups I'm in, there are a lot of families out there that will homeschool if schools don't allow families to make that choice on their own. Schools need to be able to accommodate a hybrid model or we will have a mass exodus from the schools and our school budgets will be in even more trouble.

I understand there are a lot of families that are feeling good about their children being back in a school setting, but you can't just pander to them. Those of us that have elderly family members or spouses with high exposure jobs need to be able to be accommodated as well.

Thank you for your consideration!  
Erika Adams

Distance learning along with everything else took a toll on us. My 4th grader was almost always frustrated and in tears as he was trying to figure things out which ended up with me either upset with him and we would argue, or me sitting with him everyday and basically doing his work for him just so we could be done. I am not sure he really learned anything. My 2nd grader had an easier time but is one who enjoys being around others so he struggled to do things on his own as well. My preschooler didn't do but maybe two assignments because everything required my help and I was already so busy with our older two. We also have a two year old so she struggled from not having the attention she normally got as well. My children ended up watching a lot of tv just so I could help with assignments and it led to lots of outbursts when we would finally take it away. My children missed their friends and teachers. We are praying things go back to normal this fall. No social distancing, no masks, no heavy use of chemicals and hand sanitizer, and no distance learning! We feel very strongly that our children are healthy and can handle catching this virus. Children seem to be the least affected by it and how great would it be to have many with herd immunity. Looking forward to hearing the plans for fall but if it's not normal like before we will end up pulling them and doing our own homeschool co-op. Thank you for your time.

Rachel Blaisdell

Please please please hear us out. We need school to come back normal-business as usual this fall. The mental effect it has had on my two teenagers and myself has been horrible! Horrible like darkest time in our lives and we are still digging out of that dark hole. As for learning new things there was NONE. If normal school doesn't return in the fall. My family may have to move to a state that does have school. So unfair to our kids if it turns into distant learning. Wash your hands, don't touch your face should

always be normal. Masks are seeming to be unsafe for the healthy.  
Buffalo , MN parent of soon to be 8th and 9th grade.

Good morning

I want to write regarding the hearing on Wednesday to encourage schools to reopen this fall as normal.

The data regarding corona virus does not support distance learning which in my opinion negatively impacts not only the child's educational opportunities but their mental health as well.

My son told me the distance learning was a waste of time and he did not learn anything! Teachers were not always available as they should be, there were struggles with technology and some assignments were so easy they were laughable.

His classes build (math and chemistry) so missing 3 months is bad enough but if you try to skip this fall in person they will only fall further behind.

In addition we saw increased issues with his ADD and new anxiety as a result of the distance learning.

Asking kids to wear masks is not a viable thing. Our kids need exposure to some bacteria to keep their immune system strong. Isolating them further could re-introduce a whole host of other illnesses.

We all need to get back to work and school. The goal was to slow the curve and build up supplies. That has been done. With most deaths in long term care (mostly due to the government placing sick patients there) it does not warrant keeping these extremely low risk students out of school. If a student has underlying conditions, offer them distance learning. If a teacher has health concerns let them take short term disability this fall.

It is a constitutional right that kids receive an education. Distance learning or even part time at school is not a full education.

Please re-open this fall as normal with more handwashing breaks but no masks or part-time in person scenarios.

Julie Pawlowski  
Parent -Elk River School District.

I support all ages go back to school! Normally, no masks, social distancing garbage. Yes to field trips, recess, lunch socialization.

Sheri Finney

I would like to see the kids go back to school. It is in the kids best interest.

Thank you

**Debbie Hanson**

I am writing as a concerned mom of three in Elk River Minnesota. My children have for the most part been pretty good students with the exception of my eight-year-old. He just completed second grade and has been a little behind academically since kindergarten and had some behavioral and attention issues that the teachers have worked with him on. Going into distance-learning he was still behind in reading but mostly caught up in other ways. However, distance-learning was not conducive to the style of learning that he needs. He's an active kid and needs hands on engagement and in person interaction in order to engage in school. A relationship with a computer did not work for him. It turned into a battle every evening or on my days off of work. My husband and I both worked outside the home throughout this and his older siblings were working on their own schooling. Internet connections were intermittent at best and frustrations were extremely high for the entire family. The dynamics of our family unit were strained to the max even though I'm sure we had a better situation than many other families. This brought out the absolute worst in both my husband and I and as parents. I'm very concerned about the mental health of all children if there is not a return to in person schooling.

I also have many concerns as to what requirements there might be and what the school environment will look like. From what I've seen of some of the suggestions in regards to the mask wearing and no social interaction with lunch or recess, I am highly concerned for the mental health of our children in the future. Those suggestions make it seem like a prison sentence at school and I would hate to see our youth being treated that way. Kids need the social aspect of school every bit as much as they need the academic portion.

There are always going to be germs and there are always going to be illnesses traveling around to human beings. Keeping kids from all having access to a quality education cannot be sacrificed in the interest of sanitizing every inch of our environment. Our resources need to be better spent on getting the health of Americans better so that when we encounter the every day germs, viruses and organisms, our bodies can fight them the way they are meant to be fought.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lisa Shear

As a parent of 3 young children, a nurse & a wife of a first responder (fire fighter), I FULLY support allowing our children to go back to NORMAL school. That is, in person classes with no social distancing or masks.

My children need to see the faces of their teachers, friends & peers. They need to play on the playground and have art & gym. They need to not live in fear & believe in their immune systems. Our bodies fight off bacteria & viruses EVERYDAY!

Please allow our children to BE CHILDREN! And let them allow them to enjoy school without masks, distancing and in person.

Thank you for your time,  
Sara Wagner

Hi,

I'm writing to encourage you to empower school leaders, teachers, and above all families to lead their families with their wisdom and not the threat of government intervention.

Please vote to keep getting 'back to school' mostly normal and instead fight to give finances and incentives to problem solvers and not just avoid litigation.

Thank you for listening to kids and families who need you take action that gets balance restored without fear.

Ken Jones  
Director / Creative  
(605) 484-2827  
[www.kenjonesdirector.com](http://www.kenjonesdirector.com)

I have 4 children in the Public School system going into grades 6, 8, 10 and 12. I feel very strongly that school should resume as normal in the fall.

Distance learning was basically a quick patch to finish the school year, but it didn't compare at all to what kids receive in the classroom.

Besides not having enough devices, my husband and I both work full-time and do not have the time or knowledge in some of their subjects to help them. It was very frustrating and from what I observed, just involved a lot of sharing assignments at the high school level. If there was any kind of distance learning, I would definitely have my oldest to pseo, so she can get something out of her last year in high school.

All four of my kids are very active in sports and not having that outlet was really hard on them. I'm hoping that we can have a return to all sports this fall. My senior daughter loves volleyball and is a few hundred assists away from our school record. My sophomore son has dreams of playing college football. They both have put in a lot of work in our garage weight room this spring and summer to prepare for this. My younger two get a lot of joy and socialization out of playing sports and that is where they have formed their closest friendships.

I feel like we need to find a way to live with this virus, and most of the new data suggests that kids are not at much risk at all. I am a healthcare professional in the western suburbs and I can gladly say our hospital is not and has not ever been overwhelmed with Covid-19 patients. I am all for good hand washing and sanitizing, but I do not believe masks would be effective at all. As soon as you touch your face or mask, it's not effective. And I can't imagine kids being comfortable wearing one all day. The projections for Covid-19 have been inaccurate, which has hurt our children long enough. Please give parents a choice in this matter and let us send our kids back to school.

Thank you,  
Sara Strickfaden

Please open schools with everything being back to normal, no distance learning, no masks, let the kids have a normal regular school year.

Please don't put on any restrictions because of covid.....if someone is not comfortable sending their kid then that is their choice, but please let the others go that want to go.

Thank you  
Janet Carlson

Good Afternoon,

I hope this finds you well. I am a mother of three and two that are attending school in Prior Lake, Scott county. I'll keep it short and sweet, I'm sure you are busy and I want to respect your time.

- I am in support of "Normal Classrooms" meaning NO MASK and NO SOCIAL DISTANCING.
- The data and science, does NOT support kids wearing masks or distancing from each other.
- The guidelines to try to suggest people or children need to be wearing masks and social distancing is a form of Tyranny, yes I said Tyranny.
- Forcing and oppressing these ridiculous guidelines of masks and social distancing on my children is Anti-American, and I will not stand for it. Please refer to the Constitution of the United States.

Thank you, for your time and consideration.

Kelly Handevitd

I just wanted to let you know as a concerned parent in Southwest Minnesota that I support sending our kids back to school this fall with no restrictions in the classroom or on the bus. The kids are not at risk for COVID-19 and I believe we as a community can stay safe even with our kids back in the classroom. They need to be educated with their classmates and by their teachers.

Thank you,

Julie Ruiter

I am writing as a concerned parent and special education paraprofessional. I urge leaders to ensure we return to school IN PERSON with no limitations outside of encouraging increased hygiene among students. I say no increased fogging or disinfecting of the school as my own child and I heard of others who got sick from the chemicals used to sanitize surfaces.

My own four children suffered with distant learning. Our teachers in Chatfield did an amazing job however were so limited on that personal connection with the kids. My normally outgoing kids were quiet and distant at home. They displayed increased resistive and depressive issues. They did the bare minimum when usually they are A students. Our school altered the grading system which I believe allows for misinterpreted success rate of distant Learning. I know of several who passed and graffitied who did very little to zero work.

As far as special ed students, they are suffering immeasurably with distant learning. Parents are not equipped with adaptive equipment or techniques for students to be productive and grow.

Continuing distant learning or anything outside of normal in person education will be a travesty to our young people.

Lisa Erding

Upon the upcoming hearings regarding return to school in MN this fall, please, ensure that schools return to session as NORMAL!

1. Summer youth activities need to be allowed to fully resume and Schools must reopen this fall. This virus is not a threat to children and digital learning is totally ineffective. We found the content to be invaluable busy work that did not advance our child's academic abilities. Parents need to be able to work to support their families and not have to be forced to choose economic security over the education of their children. Children need to be in school, socializing with their peers. Additional distance learning will put children's mental health at risk. Children over-using digital devices is also a risk to their mental and emotional health. Also, schools not being open will only serve to spread the achievement gap even farther as those students are less likely to have a supportive adult to help them. Please, do not allow the Governor to further his abuse of power by keeping schools closed. Our children deserve better! I'll be pursuing legal action if schools do not reopen and consider not paying my property taxes as that is what funds education.

2. You need to oppose any further extension of Walz's emergency powers and Businesses need to fully reopen. His actions have crippled our economy, exacerbated the racial tensions that lead to unprecedented riots and looting that have destroyed Minneapolis, and unnecessarily killed hundreds of our vulnerable elderly. It is imperative that you do not continue to support these actions!

Regards,  
Kristen Hanson

My name is David Lang and I am a board certified family practice and emergency room physician with almost 30 years in practice and I live in Stillwater, MN. I am writing to express my great concern with the possibility that schools in Minnesota will not reopen normally this fall. I have grave concerns about this both as a physician and as a parent. The distance learning that was forced on our kids was nothing short of an abject disaster.

First of all, let me say that when schools were first shut down this March, I was very much in favor of it. Our initial reports of the Covid virus were very alarming. Death rates over 5% and hundreds of thousands of deaths were widely predicted. If this turned out to be true, shutting down schools was the wisest move. However, each week since then we have found out these predictions were wildly inaccurate, often by orders of magnitude. Despite this, even as better data were obtained, Governor Walz stubbornly continued his edicts that severely compromised the education and development of our children.

Many people have made comparisons between Covid and the seasonal flu. While Covid overall has a slightly increased death rate than the seasonal flu, the distribution of those deaths is vastly different. With the seasonal flu, deaths are more spread out among different age groups. With Covid, deaths are overwhelmingly higher among the older age groups. In Minnesota, over 80% of the deaths have been in nursing home patients. According to the Minnesota Department of Health statistics, exactly 2 people under 29 and no one under 19 has died from Covid. Furthermore, the rate of infection in those under 19 is very low and the vast majority of children infected have little or no symptoms.

There is also a concern that while children may be asymptomatic or minimally symptomatic, they may spread Covid to parents or grandparents that are more vulnerable. This is a legitimate concern. But the current data show that spread of Covid from children is minimal. However, I feel it is important to have other options for children with underlying medical problems or those with family members at home with underlying conditions that make them more vulnerable.

The next issue is having children wearing masks when they return to school. From a medical point of view this is not only unnecessary but potentially dangerous. Many studies have shown the masks do not significantly stop the spread of viruses such as Covid. In fact the WHO recently advised against the routine wearing of masks by healthy people. Anthony Fauci even recently stated that masks are mostly useful to make a social statement, not to provide useful protection. (He later walked that back a bit, but he tends to walk back just about everything he says...) Any potential benefit from a mask, as minimal as it might be, is very much dependent on proper use of the mask. In the health care setting, we wear masks not to protect us from our patients, but to keep large droplets from our mouths and noses from getting on our patients. We are taught to make sure the mask is properly fitted; keep the mask on at all times, not to touch our faces and to change the mask between patients. Any of you who have walked

through a grocery store lately will see people with masks, pulled down, not fitting well and constantly being adjusted. If we can't expect adults to wear masks properly, it is ridiculous to expect kids to do so, especially during a 7-hour school day. We are basically just strapping a petri dish to their faces.

Furthermore, there is a significant downside to wearing a mask. I have seen countless patients in my ER with flare ups of asthma, COPD and other respiratory conditions from people forced to wear masks at work. I have also seen many people with severe anxiety from wearing masks unnecessarily. Many studies have shown a significant drop in oxygen levels in patients wearing masks. This can be disastrous in patients with underlying respiratory conditions. Given the large incidence of asthma in our school aged children wearing a mask can be fatal. So, given the minimal benefits and significant danger in forcing kids to wear masks at school, I do not feel it is appropriate to require children wear masks at school.

Not only am I concerned about Minnesota's return to school plans as a physician. I am even more concerned as a parent. I have two sons who were sophomores and a stepdaughter who was a junior in HS this past year. I was very dismayed at the quality of education they received. Please understand this is in absolutely in no way a criticism of their dedicated and outstanding teachers. They were put in an impossible situation, having to switch to distance learning on the fly often using technology that was unfamiliar to them.

I saw several problems with distance learning. First of all, it is a big change to go from class learning to at home learning. It takes self-discipline, a trait that many kids have yet to develop or understand its importance. The first week or so my kids were fairly dedicated to their schoolwork. By the second or third week, the kids were sleeping later and studying less. By the fourth week, they often needed threats to start studying. I am sure I am not the only parent who experienced the same thing. Many kids need a teacher to explain things to them and to hold them accountable. Parents are not the best ones to be doing this in place of their well-trained competent teachers.

The actual material I saw my kids studying was very basic, and often, in my opinion, several grade levels below their actual grade. This is understandable given the limitations of distance learning, but I feel kids at this level should be expected to have a deeper understanding of the material. Also many classes, such as band, chemistry and other hands on classes would seem to be impossible to teach via distance learning.

Kids were all given the option of taking their classes pass/fail. Again, this is understandable given the limitations, but once this was an option, many kids, mine included, clearly stopped giving their best effort to learn the material well, instead choosing to do just enough to eke out a passing grade. This is not the attitude that we should want in our kids. They should always be asked to strive for excellence not just to get by. This attitude once set in place may be hard to reverse in any of their future endeavors.

Also, the benefit of school is not just to learn the subjects that are being taught. It is also to develop social skills that they need in life. This obviously cannot be done with distance learning. As the weeks stuck at home dragged on and on with any interaction with their friends, I could see my kids become more frustrated and often withdrawn. In my ER, I saw an unusual amount of kids I had to refer for

mental health issues, including many suicide attempts. This is a very real and worrisome effect of the school shutdown.

School sports being stopped is not an insignificant problem. Team sports teach excellence, leadership as well as physical fitness. Many kids train year-round for their sport and to have their season pulled out from under them had to be devastating. Sports and fitness should be developed for a lifetime. Not allowing kids that outlet should not be taken lightly.

Our family is fortunate that we have readily available high-speed internet that they can use for distance learning. Many families are not that fortunate, especially families with parents that are working from home and who are also using up bandwidth. This needs to be considered also when planning for school in the fall.

Many kids have special needs, including IEPs that are being addressed at school in order to allow them to get full benefit from their educational opportunities. I have no idea how this would be addressed with distance learning. These kids will be permanently harmed if they are not back in school.

Lastly, having kids in school allows many parents to work outside the home. This may have been less of an issue this year as many parents were not working or working from home. As the workforce returns to normal and parents return to work, they will be faced with the problem of having someone watch their kids while they work. This is not ideal, from a cost point of view, and it is doubtful that a nanny or babysitter will provide adequate supervision or to do the work of a well-trained teacher.

In summary, I see a myriad of reasons that not allowing kids to return to a normal school situation in the fall would be an unmitigated disaster from both a medical and social point of view. I strongly advocate full opening of all schools with appropriate social distancing where possible and frequent and vigorous hand washing, cleaning and general hygiene measures. Masks should be optional, but not required. If a parent feels more comfortable with their child wearing a mask, then they should do so. Well planned and thought out distance learning should be readily available for those children who might be more vulnerable or whose parents might feel more comfortable not sending their kids to school. But the vast majority of kids should be allowed a school year that is as close to normal as possible. School sports should be allowed to go on as much as possible. To do anything other than these things would be to seriously jeopardize the futures of a generation of our children. This cannot be allowed.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my opinions and I would love to have the chance to discuss these items further if that is desired. I feel very strongly about this. Thank you.

Good morning,

I would appreciate a confirmation that you have received and read this email.

I wanted to voice my opinion on distance learning and what the upcoming school year should look like.

I had 4 children that were suddenly thrust into distance learning in March. NOT ONE had a good experience with it. One of my younger children (6th grade) has autism and was full time special ed. That "special ed" thing went out the window immediately and I got a letter from the District basically saying they were relaxing the State's requirements to educate my child because of distance learning. Only one mainstream teacher (music) offered any sort of modification of the curriculum. The others expected the same work as the other children in their classes. I struggled to teach him the 4 stages of addition when he doesn't even understand what a drug or cigarette is. (This is just one example of dozens.) The work that the special ed teacher sent home is on the level of what he did as a 1st and 2nd grader, basically busy work. So I had to teach him math and science concepts all on my own, in my "spare time." I spent at least 4 hours a day (usually more like 5) trying to get through his classes with him. I have a full time job I was also trying to do, a job that often involves field work to respond to incidents. There were many meltdowns, a lot of crying, and cajoling, but he did manage to get most of the work done.

Child #2 (also 6th grade) was the only one who didn't totally melt down over distance learning. She struggled with classes being taught through video, with no ability for her to interact with the teachers or ask questions. She was failing 3 classes (she is normally an A-B student) before I intervened and worked with her at least 2 hours a day.

Child #3 (9th grade) struggled hard with self-motivation. He is very social and learns best by doing. Imagine how well this trimester went, with teachers sending out power points (no lecture or interaction of any sort with the teacher) and then a quiz. In SCIENCE. No experiments, no explanation, nothing. Three of his 5 classes worked this way. By the end of the trimester, I was spending at least 2 hours a day working directly with him to help him understand what he was learning. And spent a HUGE amount of time reminding him to check in with his classes, urging him to get busy learning, etc. Within 2 weeks, he was so upset and stressed out over distance learning, that he went from a diagnosis of "mild anxiety" to needing weekly therapy with a psychiatrist for anxiety and OCD disorders. His therapist is saying that this is not uncommon right now, there has been an enormous uptake in patients at their clinic.

Child #4 (12th grade) has a learning disability and has a difficult time understanding what she reads. Imagine how tough it was for her to go from having a teacher to interact with to just having to read EVERYTHING and try to understand. So, I ended up having to help her at least 2 hours a day with her work. Mainly reading things aloud to her so she could better grasp the concepts and graduate.

So, if you're following the math, I spent AT LEAST 10 hours a day assisting my kids with distance learning. These are kids that are mostly A-B students, with good study habits and are generally motivated to learn and do well at school. This is on top of my doing a full time job and having to provide for meals for the family.

Distance Learning was a complete and utter disaster. In short, we worked all day long only to have none of it "count" for anything. I have spoken with numerous friends and neighbors, many of whom said that they just plain quit doing it after a few weeks. One of the kids' teachers sent out a video BEGGING the kids to do work. She literally said, "Please just turn something in." That tells me all I need to know. Very little education happened these last 3 months of the school year.

In my neighborhood, the kids are all out playing together, no social distancing. Kids whose parents have to work are in daycare, not social distancing or wearing masks. So, I believe that kids should go back to school full time as normal. Kids are not the ones dying from this, it's the elderly.

Based on our horrible experience with distance learning (I do believe it was traumatic for all of us), if you all choose anything other than normal learning in the fall, I likely will homeschool. I have seriously considered doing it several times in the past. I know I could do it, I already did a worst-case scenario the last three months. At least if I was homeschooling, I could choose the curriculum and implement it my way.

If you choose back to school with masks, two of my children would not be able to go to school - as they cannot wear masks. One has a significant congenital heart defect and a blood oxygen level of 85%. Her cardiologist has stated that she cannot wear a mask. The other is my child with autism. He has a lot of sensory issues and would never allow that on his face. He is upset when he has seen others wearing them. He cannot read their facial expressions and a lot of how he processes things is by watching facial expressions. Knowing how middle schoolers are, I know that these two would be bullied and ridiculed for being "different" if all the kids are wearing masks and they aren't. I won't be exposing my children to that.

Thank you for taking this time to read this, I realize that it's long, but I feel VERY strongly about this topic. I understand that a lot of people are afraid of the disease and I don't want to minimize their fear. However, I cannot allow my children to go through this again.

Denise Mangini  
Andover, MN

Hello,  
My name is John Wong. We have one daughter in the 621 district MVSH. She will be a junior this coming fall.

I am writing you this to support the district going back to an "as normal" school year. I don't think that the students would benefit from having to social distance or wear masks. It has been proven now that the age group of 0-19 has had zero death rate from COVID. It has also been shown that these teenagers do not spread the disease. It makes no sense to make our kids suffer.

I also feel like this distance learning is not as effective as in class instruction. I feel like our kids are being damaged by not giving them the education they deserve.

COVID is here and like the flu, we know that it will come and go. But like I mentioned earlier, the kids are not vulnerable nor do they spread it easily to others. The kids need to have a sense of normalcy. Otherwise the damage to their mental health and education will be irreparable.

We all want what is best for the kids, so let us do the right thing and go back to school as normal.

Sincerely,

John Wong

Mn Dept of Health Board members and Ms. Fritz,

As more and more states, European countries, and Canadian provinces announce that they will have open schools in the fall, I urge the State of Minnesota follow and open schools fully, including fall sports. The detriment to our children of NOT having them in school, in person, educationally, physically and mentally is well documented, not only in my email below but by many many other studies, articles and opinions. If most parents are back to work, how will they manage having their children at home for school? In addition, the data regarding harm to children and likely spread from children has been shown to be extremely small. Contact tracing and testing can be the tools used to make this happen with little or no disruption to our childrens' education and fall sports and activities.

Please open all schools in the fall.

Sincerely,

Julia Nemes

Hello,

This is an email letting you know how important it is to open up all our schools in the fall. Our kids need to have one on one time and get back into a normal routine. Please add my name to the list of advocating for schools to open.

Sincerely,

Amy Krippner

Hello,

My daughter should be entering kindergarten this Fall, and I implore you to make every effort to open as normally as possible. Any restrictions are concerning to me both as a nurse and as a parent.

#1, as of 6/20/20, there have been ZERO deaths in MN for persons under 20 years old, and the vast majority of deaths have been in persons from nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Our students and staff do not live in those environments.

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/situation.html#ageg1>

#2, kids need to be able to learn in person. ESPECIALLY kids with IEPs, but even kids who don't. And especially younger kids. Online learning – even if done really well on the teachers' end – is not the way

to be presenting new concepts to youngsters. Our kids need to be able to raise their hand and ask questions as the lesson is happening, and teachers need to be able to see their kids and step in / change the way they are presenting the information when they observe that students just aren't "getting it." Increased screen time is also detrimental to developing brains.

#3, masks are not going to help prevent our children from getting COVID. Have you seen kids wearing masks in stores these past few months? They touch them, drop them, lick them.... Cloth masks, and even surgical masks, do not block virus transmission anyway. They are to keep any droplets from a cough or sneeze within the mask. IF A STUDENT OR STAFF MEMBER IS COUGHING OR SNEEZING, THEY SHOULD STAY HOME – NOT WEAR A MASK AT SCHOOL.

#4, it would be psychologically damaging to our children to have them stay "distanced" for the foreseeable future – whether by spacing desks 6' apart, or by using plexiglass dividers, etc. Kids need to have interaction with one another, to learn to develop relationships and handle conflicts and collaborate on projects. We do not want our children taught to fear each other because they might at some point catch an illness from their friend. The psychological damage this will cause to an entire generation of Minnesotans will be much more substantial than effects of COVID.

#5, as a parent of a soon-to-be elementary school child, a blended method for school (part online, part in class) will not work for our family. My husband and I both work in essential industries, and our daughter is not old enough to stay home alone. This means she would go to some form of group daycare on her "home" days – thus INCREASING our number of close contacts.

For families that online learning works well for, or for families who are not ready to send their child to classroom learning, there are well established online programs such as Connections Academy. We do not need to send our public school teachers scrambling to adjust curriculums for 3 scenarios (online / classroom / mixed).

We do also need to be concerned about our teachers, yes. However, teachers are adults who are capable of making their own risk assessment (with their own doctor who knows their medical history), and they can decide for themselves if they are ready to go back to the classroom or not. We should not prevent those teachers who are willing to go back to the classroom normally from working in that manner. Those who do not feel safe returning to the classroom may be offered reasonable accommodations at their current school to do work that does not involve close contact with students – possibly taping off the floor near the white board / teacher's desk, so students stay >6' away from where the teacher is during class; allowing the teacher to wear a mask if they wish (but not mandating

it), and are of course free to apply to work for online-only learning programs such as Connections Academy.

I would most recommend allowing school districts to put in place their own guidelines. This would allow teachers to apply for positions at districts with guidelines that they are comfortable with, and also allow students to open-enroll to districts whose guidelines fit their needs. The state can't hear from every teacher and every parent. The districts can do a much better job of managing that. I also do not see it being financially feasible for every district to provide individually packaged meals, sanitizer stations, plexiglass dividers, more teachers (so class sizes can be much smaller), and create new space to house

these additional teachers and their classes. The cost of that alone would force districts to do 100% distance learning, which simply doesn't work for the majority of Minnesotans.

Thank you for your time,

Carlye Sherrill, RN, OCN

2627 Wimbledon Drive

Woodbury, MN 55125

Good morning ma'am,

I'm writing to share my opinion that Minnesota schools should be re-opened this fall for on-site instruction with no restrictions, staggering, mandated masking or other suggested measures.

I was struggling to find the best language to professionally express my position in this submission. However, I found Dr. Daniel Golden's narrative on living life with risk to align best with my opinion as a parent and citizen.

What Can We Do to Rationally Flatten The Curve? An Opinion. Part 2

I receive a fair number of messages asking me if a particular activity is safe. Similarly, I also receive a number of messages asking me on a population level if I think it is safe for us to do something. While I completely understand the impulse to break activities down into safe and not safe categories, I think this dichotomy misses the most rational ways to move forward.

**I'll start by saying that nothing is perfectly safe.** Every year, over 300,000 people die in traffic accidents, with over 30,000 of those in the US. Every year, nearly 4,000 people die by drowning, with hundreds being in a backyard swimming pool. Even worse, a third of those pool drownings are 4 years old or under. We have deaths from all sorts of activities, many of which are common and in many cases completely voluntary.

When we see statistics like these, the goal doesn't become to ban cars or swimming pools, but rather to acknowledge that they come with some risk and operate in a manner that makes that risk manageable as a society. There are many activities that are completely voluntary that we still do. Clearly the safest way to prevent drowning in swimming pools would be to ban all swimming pools. Whether explicitly or implicitly, at some level of risk we've decided that the quality of life we gain by living in a world with swimming pools is worth the risk.

On the other hand, we do seek to mitigate those risks. We put gates around backyard pools. We warn people when there are rip currents in the ocean. We place lifeguards at common swimming spots. In this respect, we accept that an activity that comes with risk is worth the risk, but we attempt to move forward with it in a manner that limits that risk.

While the scale is different with Covid 19, the concept is no different. The question isn't whether an activity is perfectly safe, but rather whether it is worth the risk. While this seems like a bit of a subjective question (and it is to a degree), there are many places where we can make objective assessments. For example, if more harm is caused by activity avoidance than the risk from exposure from the activity

itself, then the risk is almost certainly worth it. Similarly, if the activity is part of what makes life worth living to an individual, long term avoidance may not be rational.

### **Risk Assessments With Covid 19**

When making rational assessments of risk, we need to start with an understanding that these calculations on an individual level are very different from person to person. With Covid 19, this is heavily dependent on age and medical comorbidities. This creates very different calculations for different people.

**The risk for people under 40 without significant medical comorbidities is very low. It's not zero, but it's very low. In those under 20, it's almost incalculable. Mortality in children has actually gone down during the pandemic. If you are under 20, riding on a bus full of people infected with Covid 19 is a fairly low risk activity. Yes, it is possible that you could be one of the extremely rare deaths or develop a post viral inflammatory syndrome. Yet statistically, there is a greater risk that the bus will crash than you dying from Covid 19. The bus is more risky than Covid 19 in this group.**

**In fact, statistically if you are under 50 and intentionally infected, you are still statistically more likely to die of something else than the Covid 19. If you are under 40, there is a greater risk that you will die in a car crash than from Covid 19. If you are under 40 and healthy with a normal weight, there is a greater chance statistically that you will shoot yourself than die of Covid 19.**

40-50 is a grey zone that remains fairly low risk overall, but in which things like obesity and diabetes seem to start having significant statistical risk contributions. At around the age of 50, these calculations start to shift, and they do so rapidly. Health remains a major factor in this age group, even more so than in younger cohorts. Nevertheless, just being over 50 increases your risk. This risk increases by orders of magnitude with rising age and comorbidity, to the point where there are states where around 10% of all nursing home residents. were killed by Covid 19 infection. That's not 10% of nursing home deaths, that's 10% of all total residents.

### **The Burden is Not Always the Same**

Public health interventions meant to flatten the curve do not impact everyone the same way. As we learn more about the disease, we've learned that there are clear low and high risk groups. **In many cases, the low risk groups bear the greatest burden from health interventions.**

Many businesses that were closed during the shutdown were owned by people with very low risk of dying from Covid 19 infection. Many of the newly unemployed fell into low risk groups that almost certainly will see more harm from shutdowns than from Covid 19. Yet, the greatest burdens probably fell on children.

**If you are a 10 year old in a poor household with abuse or food insecurity, you have a near zero risk of dying from Covid, but a substantial likelihood of being harmed by school closure. In fact, we have probably harmed all children more with recent health interventions than any benefit they personally would have received.**

### **Reopening Schools**

I have probably received 100s of questions about schools. Specifically, how do I think we can open schools safely. I want to be clear. There is no way to open schools in a manner that has zero risk of infection. On the other hand, I think there are many ways to open schools in ways that come with risks of death that are no different than other common activities to which we subject ourselves. I think this also needs to be weighed against the harm children receive by being locked away at home without an education. The dominant story of harm in managing school reopening goes far beyond Covid 19.

Many of the ideas for reopening that I've seen come with fantastical expectations for both students and staff. They will fail. They will fail because we keep trying to hit the same home run with school reopening that we were trying to hit with public health intervention. **By trying to make schools zero risk, we will instead create an unsustainable situation in the schools which will eventually lead to non-compliance with all measures. Many recommendations are setting us up to make the exact same mistakes again.**

**The harm to children with ongoing distancing measures is real. It will create psychological burdens and delays in normal development. Children are so low risk overall, that I believe that school measures should largely ignore children and instead focus on protecting adults.** We should let children play, interact, talk, eat together, etc... Yes, we may have some Covid infections, but the risk of transmission is relatively lower in children, and the harm from forced avoidance of these activities is not worth it. Also, how exactly are we going to enforce compliance with things like masks in 5 year olds?

**On the other hand, school interventions should focus on adults where community spread is prevalent.** They should be relaxed when it is not to avoid compliance fatigue. Teachers should lecture in a distanced fashion. Masks for teachers and limited use of common areas in locations where infections are prevalent make sense. Increased sick leave makes sense. Sick children should obviously be sent home. Sick teachers should be sent home. Attendance based grades should be suspended for the upcoming academic year.

Things like staggered drop offs or common entrances can make sense, but only if they aren't used as an excuse to provide a less wholesome education to the children. They also have to be economically sustainable within the community, or they will fail. How much extra money does your community have for more bus routes during this recession? A sustainable measure has to be practical.

### **Protecting High Risk Groups**

Older individuals and those with underlying medical problems are those who are really primarily at excess risk from Covid 19. This group also can't be locked away forever. In many cases, this group is still active and working.

In places with significant community spread, this group should consider self quarantine. We should also recognize that a curve that is too flat may make the period of quarantine in this group unsustainable. When around the high risk group, things like masks and distancing become much more important. It goes without saying that you should avoid high risk individuals if you yourself are sick.

We need strict protocols at nursing homes, but those protocols need to allow for some human connection between residents and between residents and the outside world. We should provide PPE for workers to help prevent spread. We should implement screening protocols for visitors to homes, and isolate visitors from common areas while still allowing them mechanisms to see loved ones. We should absolutely not rehab Covid 19 infections in most nursing homes, instead dedicating specific facilities for this purpose.

Rules about masking and distancing should be stricter in places that high risk people can't avoid. Masks, distancing rules, etc... should be stricter on the train or in the grocery store than at say a bar. This doesn't mean that older people shouldn't have the right to risk going to a bar, but that's an avoidable risk they've chosen to take. It's different than being exposed on the bus or while trying to obtain food.

### **A Final Point About Rules**

Humans are most likely to follow rules that are discrete, actionable, limited, and rational. The further away from this ideal we get, the lower compliance with all rules is going to be. Americans as an aggregate are particularly resistant to rules without clear benefit, and as a group are highly unlikely to just trust that the authorities are doing it for their own good.

Making rules that can't be enforced don't help. In America today, if you make a universal mask rule, how do we enforce that? Shame? The police? Covid transmission is highest in minority communities. Are we going to have the police arrest people in those communities for mask violations? If not, how do we enforce these things? if unenforceable, they are at best recommendations.

Rather than trying to focus on making transmission zero, efforts should be focused on high yield places, with a goal of maintaining R0 below 1. We should make a few high yield discrete rules. We should then make a larger number of recommendations that aren't rules, but that people can fall back on when they themselves perceive the risk to be elevated.

In summary, efforts should move away from the idea of zero risk and zero transmission. We should instead focus on maintaining a relatively flattened curve managed by high yield interventions. We should recognize that different groups have different risks, and promote activity based on those risk variations. **We should stop hurting children to provide marginal decreased risk to adults. We should avoid making "rules" we can't enforce, instead calling them recommendations. Most importantly, we should make our interventions discrete and high yield with defined end points in order to maximize compliance.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Albright

2500 West 54th St.  
Minneapolis, MN 55410  
June 19, 2020

Hi! My name is Dana Rae Barr. I am a mom of an almost 5th grader. I am also a Family Medicine Physician and work for Hennepin Healthcare. Our clinic is a site for COVID-19 testing and I have been working throughout most of the pandemic (except the 2 week furlough I had to take).

When schools were closed, my son moved into another family's home where he stayed for 5 weeks. I am a single mom and an essential health care worker. With the help of my friend, he did his distance learning and I visited him on weekends, 6 feet apart, with a mask on. I did not touch him physically from March 30-May 2!

He then returned home and completed distance learning with me and his 81 year old grandma. He did well and luckily his school did a great job of reproducing the school day on Zoom. He missed his friends and teachers and did not like the "corona". Many tears were shed.

Then the rioting which has been a terrible experience for our kids.

This was followed by cancellation of summer sports and summer day camps so even more isolation from his friends and a struggle to fill his summer with activities while I work. Again I am counting on friends to help care for my son.

Minnesota has had 32,031 cases and 3154 of those in kids less than 19. There have been ZERO pediatric deaths from COVID-19 thus far and very few hospitalizations. **I support reopening in person school in the fall, with an option for on line learning if necessary.**

- 1) I think the most important thing is we make it clear that if your child is sick, they need to stay home. If you are a teacher/staff and are sick stay home. We need employers to be supportive of that action.
- 2) There needs to be access to hand washing and hand sanitizer throughout the school.
- 3) Students and teachers do not need to wear masks.
- 4) Teachers and students who are concerned about their personal risk should have accommodations or participate in distance learning.

Number of cases is not the number we should be concerned about since we are testing more people and many are asymptomatic. Of those who become ill, a very small percent is hospitalized and an even smaller number die. A vast majority of COVID-19 patients recover entirely.

Also, the majority of the deaths in MN are in the congregate living facilities and/or in people with underlying medical problems. There are counties in MN with few cases. I do not think a statewide approach is necessarily the best approach since communities of different sizes have been affected differently.

And finally, this article from Canada's experience sums up many of the reasons to reopen schools in the fall. MN has been a leader during the COVID-19 pandemic and other states are watching. Many states are reopening "business as usual" in the fall.

[https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/hand-hygiene-no-face-masks-sickkids-experts-on-how-schools-can-safely-reopen-in-the-fall-1.4987852?fbclid=IwAR1ffR\\_qOfliI3PYUgjsZV\\_Nfuq-BIbNO4hotrrSkuMUaFjHBlapommYT1w](https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/hand-hygiene-no-face-masks-sickkids-experts-on-how-schools-can-safely-reopen-in-the-fall-1.4987852?fbclid=IwAR1ffR_qOfliI3PYUgjsZV_Nfuq-BIbNO4hotrrSkuMUaFjHBlapommYT1w)

**For the sake of Minnesota families who need to balance work and life, and for our kids well-being and education, please reopen schools in the fall.**

Thanks you.

Sincerely,

Dana Rae Barr, MD, FAAFP  
Hennepin Healthcare

I'd appreciate it if school restarted in the fall. My reasons; parents that are trying to juggle homeschooling and a job adds additional stress. Having kids tied to the computer for an enormous amount of time (especially high school students) not good for their mental health. The immune systems of our kids are going to be weakened by not having them exposed to some germs. The economy will be greatly impacted if people can't work, earn wages and spend it on goods and services. We can't be so afraid of death that we forget how to live.

Thank you for your time.

Jennifer Tomaschko

Please count my family from the Anoka-Hennepin school district as wanting the K-12 schooling to return to normal -We want no masks, no social distancing, no losing specials classes, no eating in the same room in which they are taught, no excessive hand sanitizing, no partial week schedules, and no distance learning.

Sincerely,

Hannah Svec

As a parent, the past 3 months have been difficult to watch. Difficult to see my child who is already behind in reading fall further behind, because distance learning is just not effective for most children this age and more specifically for my child who already struggles to sit still and pay attention. My child thrives based on feedback from her teacher and socialization from her peers. Sitting at a table staring at a laptop screen is not how she learns, and from what I saw, at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of her class was bouncing around & doing anything but paying attention or participating. I watch both my children (going into 2nd and 4th grade this fall) struggle with their mental health because they can't hug their teacher and can't see their friends. My husband and I are yelling more and it's impacting us all. We are not educators, we don't know how to "teach" and trying to assume this role is taking it's toll on the mental and physical health of my family. Having my children in tears all day, my husband yelling at us all the time because he can't take it anymore, and me in tears as well because I can't help my kids, can't get my work done with all the distractions, can't make them finish their schoolwork, don't understand their assignments, can't keep the kids from fighting (because no one is meant to be together 24x7 ALL THE TIME), and I'm just trying desperately to hold myself and my children together. It's not healthy for any of us, we are all struggling with mental health, and my physical health is suffering as well due to the stress of it all.

Our children need socialization, not isolation. As studies have shown just with technology & social media before the pandemic, more technology has led to more isolation, less in-person contact, an increase in mental health issues, an increase in suicides. I do not want this for my children! Our children need interaction, and they need school from real educators. They need to be able to see their teacher smile, play with their friends and get feedback. They do not need walls and masks. They need physical activity (phy ed and recess), as this helps to keep them in good physical shape which will help them stay healthy in the long run. Children may be able to catch/carry Covid-19, but they do not frequently have serious side effects or death. The risk of having school like normal (but maybe with more stringent hand washing/sanitizing practices) is low, and the benefit is great! This is what our kids need. They need to feel normal, not to be taught to fear.

Please, as a parent and a citizen, I implore you to provide recommendations for sanitizing but allow the districts to decide what is right and the parents/teachers to assess their comfort level. Please do not take this decision out of our hands and further damage our children for life! Masks, social distancing, and e-learning, are NOT the right choice for the majority of our families and children. There should be options available, but parents and administrators should be able to make these decisions as we are closest to our specific children and their needs!

I would also appreciate confirmation that this has been received, as I'm sure you are being bombarded with emails these days.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Stephanie Paulson, concerned mother

I heard you are looking for feedback regarding distance learning. 😊  
I'm a mother of three. I have two in high school and one in college.

At first, my kids were so excited to stay home from school, but as time went on the novelty worn off. My freshman would only have one hour of stuff to do a day. It was not engaging. The teachers I felt were hands off and the students were left teaching themselves. My kids had no growth in their academics this spring and both would tell you it was a waste of time.

My hope is that school opens their doors and distance learning is in the past. There is more than just learning when it comes to school. It is a time to get away from your family and have personal relationships with others. I don't think people realize how important that is. We need our relationships with our friends and teachers. Social distancing is social isolating. Students K-12 are not at risk for Covid. Schools, teachers and students can take precautions and remain in school.

Thanks for your time.

Terry Balk

I am a mother of five living in rural MN. I think it's important for school to resume in a face to face important for so many reasons. Our oldest child, 11 male, struggles with mental health. Distance learning was very hard on him. He needs and relies on routine, peer interaction, and the structure of leaving the house every week day. He excels in the classroom and this sense of accomplishment is so rewarding for him. It has been very hard to watch him miss out on the things he loves about school. His extra curricular activities are also a crucial part of his well being and helping him regulate his emotions. Our second child, 8 male, has learning disabilities, ADHD and is on an IEP. As a parent trying to become a teacher overnight and help my children learn was difficult, but to try to suddenly understand every aspect of an IEP and learning disabilities was next to impossible. I feel as though distance learning completely failed his ability to meet his goals and stay on track. I so want to state that this was NOT for anyone's lack of trying his school, teacher, IEP teacher and myself did our best and a great job of helping him. There's just only so much that can be done through distance learning and zooms. I wanted to cry with him many days as he struggled to learn and embrace the fact that mom didn't know how to help him like he was use to.

Our third child, 6 female, struggled with distance learning immensely. As a kindergartener her learning needs are hands on, busy work, sitting at a table doing worksheet after worksheet or even worse, games on an iPad is not ideal. It was also very confusing for her. I truly believe that if we do not start school in the fall in a classroom setting we are going to confuse them even more. What a strange transition for someone so young.

Our fourth child, 5 female, is supposed to head to kindergarten this fall. How are we supposed to teach them the structure of a classroom from home? How far behind will they fall because parents do not have the tools needed to teach them? We are parents, we don't know every single phonetic sound, letter rule, or reading cue to help guide them.

Our fifth, a male under the age of 2, is enrolled in a birth to three program that follows the school guidelines for openings. His speech delays are not getting the attention and focus they need when the program cannot come to in home visits. He also really struggled with the transition of distance learning. It's very hard to entertain a toddler and try to keep four children on task for their schooling. Children, mine at least, do not give their best attention when working from home.

I myself am enrolled in ECFE classes. These classes provide incredibly important information that helps better my parenting experience. I am taught skills on how to handle tricky parenting topics. In these classes we learn about child development and how we can support our children as they navigate life. These classes provide great hands on education for our children and a great outlet for parents. But again, we will lose this outlet if we are not allowed to return to school.

We made the choice to send our children to school because we know we are not equipped with the tools to teach them ourselves. We are parents and to carry the burden of trying to hold down full time jobs, maintain a home, run farms, small businesses and teach our children is to ask us to do the impossible. As parents we also have other children in the home. So now we need to maintain all the above while carrying for a newborn, or navigating the trials of a curious toddler. As parents this pace wears on us quickly. We end up burnt out, struggling, yelling when we should be forgiving. Disciplining when we should be showing patience.

A whole other aspect that needs considered is the amount of children living in poverty, abusive situations, those needing counseling, struggling with homelessness, the ones with not enough food at home. So many people forget to think what a privilege it is not even consider those needs essential to children but the cold reality is they are. School is an escape for many children and they need and rely on the resources it provides. There are a host of other problems distance learning poses. In our rural area internet is mediocre at best. Some days it crashed all together. Children don't always have access to devices. Our school provided one device to our fifth grader. The other three had to share one laptop we already owned as we couldn't get the websites for school to work on the other devices we had.

Open the doors back up. Resume school this fall. For the children. For the parents. For the employees. For the economy.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to the voices of the parents. I pray for peace in your decision. I know it is not an easy one with one clear solution.

Hi,

Just wanted to put my input into schools opening in the fall. Please open as usual. Our kids have little evidence of getting the virus, please give them back their classes, held as usual. Extra care in staying home if you're sick, but no need to social distance or wear masks.

Thank you

Cherie

612-990-5913

Good Morning,

Thank you for allowing the public to have a voice and the willingness to hear about our experiences with distance learning.

Both of our children were high schoolers for distance learning. Both of them did not enjoy the experience for very different reasons. Our daughter was a high school senior and watched as everything she had been looking forward to for the last 13 years went away. She did not get the opportunity to play her final high school season of lacrosse and be one of the team captains, she missed seeing her friends, enjoying the outdoors for her Outdoor Adventures class, prom and graduation. Although she maintained A's and B's though out distance learning, she felt it was a waste of time. Nothing was truly gained from the experience, nothing was learned. This is not the fault of the teachers as they quickly transitioned to a new way of teaching.

Our son was a different story, he was up everyday at 7:30 to log in and attend his five classes. During this time he was in Geometry and Chemistry, two classes that require in person hands on lessons. He struggles with school as it is, he needs to be in the setting to fully focus, he learns better when engaged with his peers and teachers. Even though his intentions and habits were awesome, he barely passed these classes. We reached out to teachers, one was very willing to help and the other did not respond to our son or us when we emailed for help. We did have a para that reached out and offered her guidance, she was amazing. However, after all of that, school was still a struggle. He doesn't learn the same way as most kids do and that is ok. He has requested that if MN continues with distance learning that he be able to attend school in person elsewhere. He will be a junior this year and is willing to leave his friends, the sports he loves and go to school out of state if need be. We are looking at all options but distance learning is not one of them.

Finally, this has been a great learning opportunity for our kids. We have been able to discuss what is being said in the media and how data is skewed. How individuals need to do their own research and not follow what is being dictated to them. We are human beings, born with brains and we need to use them. Not everyone has our best interests in mind when decisions are being made and we need to be prepared with facts to make the best decisions for ourselves.

Sincerely,  
Michael and Carrie Johnson

Please vote to let our children back into their classrooms. My children were miserable at home, missed their friends and felt like they were not learning very much. If they are not back in their classrooms, they will miss out on even more learning. As a parent, I am not afraid of Covid-19. According to information out of Italy, it's losing it's strength and isn't near as deadly. 80 year olds are now recovering without help. Plus, if kids get this, they will recover, or be asymptomatic. To us, it's a non issue and we want our children back in school, full time. I have a nephew and his girlfriend at the U of M, Twin Cities and if they don't go back to classroom learning and are stuck with online, they are not planning on going back. They are going to just work their jobs until the at home learning is lifted and then return to their college education. I know others who have kids at the University of St. Thomas who are going to do the same. So, many colleges will be hurting financially too if the kids are not going back to school.

I have a son who goes to college out-of-state and their school is reopening in the fall in person classes. I strongly recommend the state of Minnesota does the same.

Thanks,  
Jennifer Franz

To whom it may concern:

While my family is privileged enough to live in the suburbs and have easy access to Internet for distance learning, I cannot stress enough how emotionally draining this Spring semester was for my children.

I have one child who struggles with anxiety as well as speech. Her speech therapist was so great during the lockdown. She helped her with her school work and met with her every week via Zoom. Even with that my daughter still felt sad that the best part of school was taken away from her.

I feel like we have one shot at getting our children to fall in love with learning and this is definitely not the way. The teachers are gifted to teach, let them teach the kids in person at school. With a Kindergartner going this fall I am petrified that her first experience will be wearing a mask in the classroom. I don't want that for her. I don't want for her to dread going to school which will already be challenging since it's her first year away from me for an entire day.

Please let the kids go to school the way they were going before COVID-19 happened - all day, every day, without masks. If I'm concerned about the health of my family let me make that decision as the leader of my family. Let my child succeed with the teachers and admin in school.

Please confirm that you've received this correspondence.

Thank you,  
Elizabeth M. Anderson

Hello Ms. Fritz,

I am writing as a concerned parent over what the upcoming school year may look like and I wanted to share my opinion due to the hearings that will be coming up and I hope that my voice will be heard as a parent of 2 school aged boys, ages 10 and 8. **I absolutely support kids going back to school and absolutely support the fact that they SHOULD NOT be wearing masks to school.** My background is in nursing and I have been working as a nurse for over 15 years.

Regarding masks;

- 1). kids will not keep their masks on. I cannot get my kids to do many things, least of all wear a mask for a 20 minute dentist appt. Teachers will spend most of their day telling students to keep their masks on or not play with them than actually teaching.
- 2). they will play with them all day long, loose them etc. The schools will be held responsible for handing out so many masks and it will end up costing the school and state money just to keep the supply up.

- 3). Kids will not keep their masks clean. We all know they "share" germs all year long! The idea that the masks will keep any of them from bringing anything home is ludicrous. The dirty masks will also trap other bacteria close to their face making them more susceptible to other viruses.
- 4). Masks decrease your O2 levels which in turn challenge your natural immunity from building up. We will be dealing with many more illnesses just from kids wearing dirty masks than actual COVID cases.
- 5). Kids will not wear their masks correctly so it will be a waste of resources and will cause more stress for faculty and the students being scolded all day long.
- 6). We do so much communication that is non-verbal which aids in growth and development in children! Instead of seeing encouragement from a teacher's smiling face or a frown to tell them to not do something, it will be covered with a mask so they will no longer receive this kind of communication.

Regarding going back to school and social distancing:

The social distance guidelines WILL NOT help, kids and humans are not designed to interact this way. Instead of teaching to share things, they will suddenly be told they "can't share". Kids going to school is a right of passage and I fear that this upcoming school year with the changes that are rumored will in turn ruin the crucial development of these young children.

I know it is also rumored that there will be the possibility of some kids attending school in shifts and this also has me concerned b/c I just don't know how parents will be able to shuttle kids on non-school days back and forth, afford day care on non school days and continue distance learning while working full time!

Thank you for listening to me.  
Renaë Sloth  
Andover MN

Alyssa- It is very important to have our children back in school this fall for the learning environment suffers without the personal interaction of the teacher and peers!

I had 4 boys at home distance learning this last March and 2 were fine at putting in the extra effort on their own and gleaning all the information from videos or books, but the other 2 were not! They learn differently and need to be back in the classroom, to physically use paper and pencil vs. the computer and to be surrounded by the material verse a small window to peek through.

Please get my children back in the classroom!

JMJ  
Carrie Havlicek

We live in Edina and are HUGELY in favor of full re opening in the Fall.

With children at lower risk, and the need for consistent education we urge the legislature to vote in favor of 5 day in school, in person classes

Dan Miller

We would LOVE to see our kids go back to school. We had 3 at home this Winter/Spring. One in her first year of college, one in 6th grade, and one in 3rd grade.

I graduated from Bethel College (University now) with a teaching degree. So I felt pretty equipped to make this transition. But that wasn't always the case. Children are social beings, so not only was the curriculum difficult to follow - and I would like to add our Teachers need to be COMMENDED for the effort it took them to make this move - which made it really difficult to keep them structured enough to enable continued learning, but they lost the socialization of other children around them. And we can all agree that our kids need socialization.

We work from home; I cannot begin to imagine how difficult this was for the parents who were essential and needed to work outside the home every day. While their children were at home, no structure, trying their best to keep up with their learning. And although we work from home normally, we are still working. And did not have the time to give our kids what they needed to further their education.

We feel strongly that our kids need to get back in the classroom 5 days a week. These kids are our future and right now they are not getting the education they need to secure a solid foundation for that future.

Thank you Alyssa for your time!

I am writing to you today as a concerned parent of two children who attend St Croix Preparatory Academy in the Stillwater School District. I do not support distance learning nor do I support any changes to environment of our schools for the upcoming year.

-Children are not dying from the Covid virus, are rarely hospitalized, and rarely transmit the virus to others. To put this another way, their health is not negatively impacted by getting this virus, and they build natural herd immunity which protects our larger community!

-Masks have not been studied or approved for safe use in children. What we do know is that they reduce oxygen to the brain, and that touching them contaminates the hands, and surfaces the hands touch, and conversely, touching the mask contaminates the mask itself. Kids are going to touch their masks...a lot.

-Children rely on facial expression to develop important social skills including empathy. This is particularly important for they many children in our school district who are on the autism spectrum and for our young grade school children.

-There are many children who are not able to wear masks due to physical, mental, or emotional conditions. How do you accommodate these children's needs?

- Social distancing is cruel and unreasonable, especially for young children. Physical touch is necessary for proper brain growth and improves the function of the immune system.
- The CDC recognizes the fire risk that is inherent in healthcare facilities that regularly use hand sanitizer. CMS requires healthcare facilities to follow the Life Safety Code. Will Schools be following the Life Safety Code? Will they be working with the local fire marshall in regard to safe storage and use? Will teachers be trained to reduce the fire risk? Will fire extinguishers and fire blankets be readily available in all classrooms?
- I am unable to find studies that show that the chemicals contained in hand sanitizer are Generally Accepted as Safe (GAS) or Generally Accepted as Effective (GAE). This despite the fact that the FDA stated in 2016 that they needed to evaluate both of these criteria in hand sanitizers. I am certain that we haven't established safety criteria for repeated use in children. How much exposure to the chemicals included in these formulations is safe for a growing body?
- Hand Sanitizer is drying to the skin and leads to cracks in the skin, allowing an opening for pathogens to enter the body. This creates a increased risk of many types of infection.
- Hand sanitizer kills germs indiscriminately, and will kill "healthy" bacteria necessary for proper immune function.
- Do we have an established list of chemicals that will be used to clean classrooms? How will children with asthma, allergies, and chemical sensitivities be impacted by the increased exposure? Are the chemicals being used going to be on an improved list that include only formulas that are non carcinogenic and non mutagenic?

Please, do not allow fear to overrule common sense. Our children deserve a low stress, HEALTHY classroom that focuses on learning. Our teachers deserve the same.

Respectfully,  
Heather DeVaughn  
10095 Brookhaven Drive  
Woodbury, MN 55129  
651/485-9011

I wanted to send you a note to chime in on the school situation. We need them open in the fall.

Our kids are at risk of being made "stupid by screens" if we don't get them in school. My wife and I don't have televisions, nor do we allow screens in our home because we know (and studies show) that screens are horrible for children's development. Now we are being faced with a forced educational system that would ensure our kids learn on a screen only. It isn't right and it needs to stop. The schools must open and the Governing authorities in Minnesota need to get on that same page.

The data DOES NOT show that children are at ANY risk. Like ZERO. You can't treat them as if they are and you can't expect to have kids stay at home and have their parents be forced to stay at home and not drive the economy.

Please consider all the real facts and the real death counts as to who this impacts and don't make this about the kids. It is NOT about the kids.

It isn't even about people that are the age of most teachers... this is about people 65 plus. Start putting efforts on getting that subset of the population protected, they are the most "at risk", not the kids.

We have to open the schools and get the kids back into the educational system are tax dollars are designed to support.

Thank you for considering.

**Kerby Skurat**

p: 651-261-7456

We need our kids back in school!

Debbie Jung

Dear Ms. Alyssa,

Please send kids back to in-person schools in the fall.

It is the only place of haven for kids in abusive homes and kids who need food.

The kids need each other to thrive emotionally. The suicidal tendencies and depression are too high to count for kids sheltered.

Please vote to kids back into schools.

Blessings, Lynn Heeren

**Dear Minnesota Education Officials:**

**The goal of this letter is to advocate for Minnesota K-12 students by asking Governor Tim Walz local government leaders, school district leadership and school boards to remove restrictions that will prevent students from returning to a full-time, in-classroom education in Fall 2020.**

Distance learning served as an acceptable solution to an unprecedented situation. Since mid-March when the decision to cancel schools was made, we have come a long way in understanding this virus, and we must not let old data and fear dictate our children's education future. Therefore, as a

constituent in the state of Minnesota, I am asking for restrictions to be removed so that K-12 students will be afforded a full-time, in-classroom education in Fall 2020. That being said, it is understandable that precautions are necessary and should take place. Reasonable measures such as good hygiene practices, support for students who stay home when ill, temperature checks and **VOLUNTARY** use of PPE should be implemented.

I oppose plans that include distance learning based on these concerns:

1. Mental Health and Physical Health/Safety
2. Academic Effectiveness and Healthy Brain Development
3. Exacerbated Inequalities and Economic Loss

**Mental Health and Physical Health/Safety:** concerns surrounding distance learning or hybrid models

a. **Mental Health**

i. Dimitri Christakis, MD, MPH, is one of the nation's most prominent pediatricians. Christakis, who directs the Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development at Seattle Children's Hospital, is the editor-in-chief of the journal JAMA Pediatrics (JAMA = The Journal of the American Medical Association). In a new piece titled [School Reopening – The Pandemic Issue That Is Not Getting Its Due](#) published in the journal on May 13, 2020, he argues that the risks to children's learning, social-emotional development and mental health need to be better balanced with the risks of spreading the coronavirus.

ii. In an article titled [With School Buildings Closed, Children's Mental Health Is Suffering](#) published by NPR on May 14, 2020, Christakis is quoted as saying: The social-emotional needs of children to connect with other children in real time and space, whether it's for physical activity, unstructured play or structured play, this is immensely important for young children in particular.

iii. Appearing in JAMA Pediatrics on April 14, 2020, [Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) and Mental Health for Children and Adolescents](#) by Ezra Golberstein; PhD; Hefei Wen; PhD; Benjamin F. Miller, PsyD: Most mental health disorders begin in childhood, making it essential that mental health needs are identified early and treated during this sensitive time in child development. If untreated, mental health problems can lead to many negative health and social outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic may worsen existing mental health problems and lead to more cases among children and adolescents because of the unique combination of the public health crisis, social isolation, and economic recession. Economic downturns are associated with increased mental health problems for youth that may be affected by the ways that economic downturns affect adult unemployment, adult mental health, and child maltreatment. Furthermore, among adolescents who received any mental health services during 2012 to 2015, 35% received their mental health services exclusively from school settings. School closures will be especially disruptive for the mental health services of that group. It is important to also understand that school closures will be relatively more disruptive for the mental health care of some youths. Adolescents in racial and ethnic minority groups, with lower family income, or with public health insurance were disproportionately likely to receive mental health services exclusively from school settings.

**b. Physical Health/Safety**

i. Cameron Rosenthal, MD and Lindsay Thompson, MD, MS published an article in JAMA Pediatrics on May 7, 2020 titled [Child Abuse Awareness Month During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic](#). In it, the authors state the following: Social isolation, the public health measure now in place across the world, is also a proven risk factor for child abuse. Other risks include stress, uncertain access to food and housing, and worries about making ends meet. Owing to the current COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize that parents and caregivers feel overwhelmed with these stresses. They may be experiencing job loss, childcare struggles, and schedule changes. With schools and daycare centers closed for weeks or more, children are no longer in the watchful eyes of their community. Teachers, counselors, extended family, and friends who routinely see children are now physically separated and unable to provide the same social and emotional support. Many school or community programs that prevent child abuse are currently on hold. The vital social distancing that attempts to flatten the curve for COVID-19 hinders these prevention efforts. Research shows that all types of child abuse increase during school holidays and summer breaks and worsen during natural disasters such as hurricanes. We expect that throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, when emotions are running high and children are more socially isolated than ever, child abuse will surge. Much of this abuse will be unreported.

ii. In an article titled [With School Buildings Closed, Children’s Mental Health Is Suffering published](#) by NPR on May 14, 2020, Christakis is quoted as saying: With schools closed and activities canceled, adults who are mandatory reporters, such as teachers, are less likely to catch wind of abuse or neglect. Hospitals around the country are reporting a rise in admissions for severe child abuse injuries and even deaths — a rise that coincides with lockdown orders. And a sex-abuse hotline operated by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network reported that half its calls in March came from minors, for the first time in its history.

**Academic Effectiveness and Healthy Brain Development** : concerns surrounding distance learning or hybrid models

**a. Academic Effectiveness**

i. Dimitri Christakis, MD, MPH, published an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Pediatrics on May 13, 2020 titled [School Reopening-The Pandemic Issue That Is Not Getting It’s Due](#). In it, he states the following: The phenomenon of summer learning loss has been well established, with children losing a mean of 1 to 3 months in varying subjects. Some estimate that there will be a 9-month to 12-month loss when children return to school in the fall, and this will only be compounded if distance learning continues. No credible scientist, learning expert, teacher, or parent believes that children aged 5 to 10 years can meaningfully engage in online learning without considerable parental involvement, which many families with low incomes are unable to provide because parents must work outside the home.

**b. Healthy Brain Development**

i. Also appearing in JAMA Pediatrics, original investigation [Associations Between Screen-Based Media Use and Brain White Matter Integrity in Preschool-Aged Children](#) by authors John S. Hutton, MS, MD; Jonathan Dudley, PhD; Tzipi Horowitz-Kraus, PhD; Tom DeWitt, MD and Scott K. Holland, PhD find that extended screen time, which is consistent with total or hybrid remote learning models, found: an association between increased screen-based media use and lower microstructural integrity of brain white matter tracts supporting language and emergent literacy skills in prekindergarten children.

**Exacerbated Inequalities and Economic Loss:** concerns surrounding distance learning or hybrid models

a. **Exacerbated Inequalities**

i. JAMA Pediatrics article [School Closure During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic An Effective Intervention at the Global Level?](#) written by Susanna Esposito, MD, and Nicola Principi, MD argues the following: Moreover, school closure can cause risks of deepening social, economic, and health inequities, particularly in limited-income countries. In the countries where the Ebola epidemic took place in 2014 to 2016, school closure was associated with increased child labor, violence, and socioeconomic problems. Finally, the distance learning through digital technologies that has been planned by several countries to replace traditional school can be difficult to implement even in some industrialized countries. In Italy, a 2015 survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics showed that in the poorest areas of the country, 41% of the households did not have a tablet or a personal computer and that among families with at least 1 child, only 14.3% could guarantee distance learning. This means that a relevant group of children may remain substantially excluded not only from learning but also from any form of socialization with peers and with the surrounding world. All these limitations explain why some experts suggest that the potential advantages of school closure, if any, have to be balanced against the secondary adverse effects.

ii. JAMA Pediatrics article [Low-Income Children and Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in the US](#) written by Danielle Dooley, MD, MPhil; Asad Bandealy, MD, MPH; Megan M. Tschudy, MD, MPH claims the following: Chronic absenteeism, or missing 10% or more of the school year, affects educational outcomes, including reading levels, grade retention, graduation rates, and high school dropout rates. Chronic absenteeism already disproportionately affects children living in poverty. The consequences of missing months of school will be even more marked.

Compounding the loss of educational time is the challenge of accessing school resources. More than 30 million children rely on school nutrition programs. With schools closed, emergency food assistance is reaching only a fraction of the children previously served. Schools also provide access to consistent and caring adults who can help build resiliency and offer holistic support. School-based health centers, nursing services, and mental health programs help alleviate disparities in access to health care services.

b. **Economic Loss**

i. Also appearing in the JAMA Pediatrics article [School Closure During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic An Effective Intervention at the Global Level?](#) The authors state: While the efficacy of school closure is debatable, the potential negative consequences of this measure cannot be ignored. Some consequences regard the family. To take care of the youngest children when daycares and schools are closed, parents must remain at home, with inevitable economic consequences.

ii. An article appearing in Business Insider titled [Closing every school in America because of the coronavirus would cost the US economy \\$51 billion a month](#). The authors, Mark Abadi, Sara Silverstein and Jacqui Frank explain: In fact, if every school in America were to close its doors, it would cost the economy \$51.1 billion a month. That loss translates to .24% of the US economy. It would be due to lost productivity because of absenteeism, according to Joshua Epstein, an NYU epidemiology professor and one of the authors of the analysis. Epstein noted that keeping children at home will likely impact single parents and low-income workers the most, and could add strain to a healthcare system that depends on healthcare workers showing up to clinics and hospitals.

I understand that certain children and families may have vulnerable members, or may not be comfortable. To this I would say they could have the option to continue to distance learn, or use PPE more diligently at school. To try and do a hybrid situation where children are in school various days and distance learning the rest will be a logistical nightmare for families AND schools. Families who are comfortable should have the right to send their kids to school full time without masks and the ability to socialize with their peers and teachers. I ask you to be brave enough to use the data and information we have learned to make the right decision for our children this fall. They are counting on you.

Sincerely,

Lesley Bonin

We are writing to express our support for a full, unhindered school opening this fall. Our kindergartner at Woodland Elementary in Eagan was devastated by the closure. The disruption to our work, family, education is not sustainable. We need schools to open this fall, no masks, no fear mongering. The science and data tell us we have nothing to fear. If some feel insecure about sending their children taht is their choice, but those of us who feel schools should open should also be accommodated. Including many teachers we have spoken to.

We prefer to stay in public schools but will be forced to leave if they will not reopen fully and let kids be kids. No masks, no distancing, no shaming, no fear. We are all in this together and can make this decision for our own families accordingly. Let us.

Thank you  
The Rassmussens  
Eagan, MN

we want our kids back in school, no hybrid, no PPE

Barb Felt  
Rolling Oaks Goldens

dear Alyssa My name is Deb Philipp and I am. A head Start Home Visitor working with birth to 5 year olds and their parents, I will be starting my 20 th year this fall. I'd have to say the last 2 months of the school year was my most challenging with doing zoom calls with families instead of being there with them. It was very difficult to engage the kids and the parents were trying to juggle my zoom calls and their other school age kids zoom calls as well as working or keeping up the house. These families need kids to attend school for social and academic reasons. Please advocate for us to have kids attend school in Minnesota this fall. Deb Philipp. From Minnesota valley action Head Start

Our children are losing their childhoods. There is not one reason that can justify kids being kept out of schools:

-Distance learning was a disastrous way to end the school year. It was a joke. Kids weren't learning. Kids that were behind are falling further behind. Kids that weren't, now are. Teachers are suppose to get paid to teach our children, and this did not happen. As a tax payer, this is disturbing.

-COVID cases are not going away. We know this virus is low risk to over 99% of the population, especially to young people. ZERO people under the age of 30 have died. ZERO!!

-Mental health issues have increased at an astronomical rate since the shutdown. For the health and well being of all children, we cannot allow schools to stay closed or have restrictions. Let kids be kids!!

- There have been 210 deaths of "regular" people who do not live in LTC facilities. This means our children are not at risk and neither are teachers and staff members.

-Kids need to be in school WITHOUT restrictions! This means NO MASKS! As a nurse and understanding science, masks only increase the risk of kids and faculty getting sick. Masks spread more germs, COVID or otherwise, than no mask at all.

There is not one reason to keep these kids out of school or to restrict them anymore than what has been done. IF SCHOOLS HAVE RESTRICTIONS, MY CHILD WILL NOT BE RETURNING TO THE MN SCHOOL SYSTEM.

I appreciate your time and hope you make the right decision for all of Minnesotas children and their education.

Rebecca Hamilton

Dear Ms. Fritz,

It is with great sincerity that I write you regarding Minnesota's Education plan in the fall. I have 2 high performing daughters that consistently score in the 90+ percentile for the standardized tests. They will be going into 8th grade and 5th grade respectively. I believe there are 2 major factors to assess the path forward for distance learning as a lifelong Minnesota resident. 1) Risk of disease 2) Risk to our youth in compromising their rate of learning academically, but also just as importantly, socially if isolation continues.

1) Risk of disease- There certainly are risks if you have pre-existing conditions. We now have the luxury of knowing how to minimize the spread of this disease, and also understanding that it poses a very low risk to the average, healthy child. Educators and children with pre-existing conditions should have separate programs that provide them with paths to both contribute and partake in distance learning to keep them safe. As Americans, individual liberties should allow families to make this choice where necessary. Effort should be made toward these programs to allow for both academic learning, but also the ability to socially interact with classmates as much as possible.

2) Risk to our youth development with further isolation- As you can maybe relate to, preteen and teenage girls are at an especially impressionable age regarding all aspect of their lives. They are at a time when they build confidence and start to define who they are. A mental snowball can be built in both a positive or negative way. My girls are bright and they will do fine academically. However, no matter who you are, we all go through these times of learning social norms, developing self-identity and confidence. Going to school and interacting with your peers and participating in activities is a significant contribution to this development to enable positive contributors to our society by building communication skills and self confidence. You can also appreciate that once you affect one generation, it can have a cascade effect for generations to come.

Months and years of isolation will cause significant impacts to their mental health. Vaccines are not a certainty. The Department of Education must look at this aggressively to set the tone of how school can go on, independent of the virus, because we do not know what the future holds. If school is done in permanent isolation, this will certainly snowball with children's ability to function, maintain a positive education path, a positive confidence path, and potentially even into the ability to be a positive role model for the next generation of children. As Americans, individual liberties should allow families to make this choice to allow for our young ones to continue on this positive journey of development. Do we bring an entire generation into risk by impacting their mental health development? Absolutely not! I can't imagine that the State of Minnesota wants to be held accountable for the negative impacts that this would certainly bring over time.

I am confident that the Minnesota Department of Education is intelligent enough, based upon the data available, that it will be a very simple decision to bring children back to school and back to their activities. However, it will indeed take extra effort to understand what protocols should be put in place, and what resources are available to put these protocols into practice on a broader scale. I am confident you and your team will embrace this effort and hard work to enable the school year in a safe way. Anything less would be a travesty and send a clear message to every child in MN that the Department of Education gave up on them, and couldn't get creative when times got challenging. We cannot leave this generation behind, and owe it to them to make every effort to keep them on a positive

academic and social track! Thank you very much for embracing this effort during these challenging times. You truly can make a big difference.

Sincerely,  
Nate Groneberg