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Public Comment

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To: sbcob
Subject: Open schools



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Hello!

I am the parent of two children in Santa Barbara Unified School District, in 1st and 4th grade. In my line of work I focus on children and childhood. I care deeply about children’s well-being and issues of equity. I am deeply concerned about the welfare of children in these coronavirus times. I do not think children’s needs and well-being are being taken into account sufficiently as these Santa Barbara public school closures go on so long, leaving children and families to suffer the consequences.

My children have not had in-person schooling for almost a year now. I am very concerned for them, and their social and emotional well-being, but I am even more concerned for underprivileged and disadvantaged children, not to mention working families and the women who typically bear the brunt of challenges families are facing.

From an equity perspective, things are going very badly: Schools are becoming more segregated, where disproportionately white children are receiving excellent education in person in private schools and rich school districts, while disproportionately non-white children are being taught only remotely in poor school districts, suffering distractions, lowered engagement, and loss of learning, mental health, and social development. Achievement gaps are growing vastly, inequity is exacerbated, poor children go hungry, at-risk children are suffering abuse, disabled children and English language learners are not having their needs met, young children are being failed completely by remote learning, mental health is seriously harmed, and high school students are committing suicide at unprecedented rates. Lawsuits against schools for failing to meet their mandate to educate and meet the needs of children have begun.

What really bothers me is thinking about the scale of the impact of these decisions. If a school district has 14,500 students and children’s schooling is severely compromised for one year, that is a loss of 14,500 educational years of in-person schooling. Then multiply this for the county, state, country, or world. This is a huge educational loss for a generation of the world’s children at critical developmental stages for their academic, social, and emotional development. The impact on children, not to mention working families and women (who have been forced to leave the workforce in droves because of school closures) will be felt for a generation at least. It is this kind of thinking leadership must engage in right now and to navigate this new situation on the basis of information, evidence, and science and with a sense of the consequences.

Other countries and states have successfully prioritized the well-being of children and families (instead of bars and restaurants) and studies overwhelmingly show schools do not contribute to the spread of coronavirus. In fact, I increasingly think that open schools would more safely regulate and limit exposure, since health and safety is something schools can handle well (as private schools are showing), instead of producing a free-for-all of pandemic pods and other desperate childcare arrangements where inequity propagates and exposure is rampant, while working families suffer without childcare or support services they usually count on getting from schools.

I think policy-makers and leaders right now need to keep their eyes on what is morally right and not bow down to special interest groups, including teachers' unions. Someone must take into account the needs of powerless and voiceless children here. I am hoping that you can be a powerful voice advocating for Santa Barbara’s school children.

Sincerely,
Sara