



Congress of the United States
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4907

August 12, 2020

The Honorable Tony Evers
Governor
State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Governor Evers,

As a parent of a school-aged child, I believe that our schools are essential institutions, the education of our children is an essential function and our teachers are essential workers. I was encouraged by recent statements you made suggesting that you do not plan to block the efforts of local school districts to return to 5-day, in-person student instruction in September. Now more than ever, people in our state need you to show leadership by making a firm commitment to getting Wisconsin kids back to class on time without unreasonable restrictions.

As you know, numerous health experts, local teachers and parents are deeply concerned about the long-term dangers we face if our schools remain shuttered and if kids are prevented from returning to in-classroom instruction this fall. A growing body of science and data indicates that the risks of keeping schools closed far outweigh the risks associated with reopening. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), for example, cited recent school closures as a risk factor for increased substance abuse, physical abuse, depression and even suicide – concerns echoed by Dr. Robert Redfield, the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The data is clear: Open-ended school shutdowns have harmed our children, made it more difficult for our teachers to teach, and is pushing Wisconsin parents to the breaking point.

Moreover, research indicates that distance learning, while a useful tool, has failed to make the grade as a replacement for conventional in-person instruction for many students. Inconsistent internet access, a lack of adequate technology and teacher difficulty with remote platforms continue to hamper the effectiveness of distance learning – with rural and low-income families facing the steepest challenges.

Over the course of the last two months, I have spoken with teachers and administrators across my congressional district. All have expressed well-founded fears that many students could fall hopelessly behind if politics are permitted to further delay schools reopening. It is well-known that students tend to regress during summer break – even under normal circumstances. Extended closures will only exacerbate this problem. In fact, one educator warned me this week that a delay in the resumption of normal class schedules in September, coupled with the spring closures, could cause students to fall *years* behind the academic curve. In short, we could lose an entire generation of our children.

If misguided shutdowns remain in effect, it is not an overstatement to say that we could see the demise of public schools in Wisconsin. Parents expect their kids to get a world-class education and will not sit idly

by as politicians tell them that their kids must stay home. They will do what is best for their children and find a way to educate their kids – even if the public school system remains in limbo.

Government should not position itself as an obstacle between parents seeking a good education for their kids and the teachers we rely on to provide it. To that end, I would encourage you to stand with Wisconsin parents and remove barriers to school districts that plan to reopen next month. At the same time, I would suggest that you ask districts who seek to delay the resumption of in-person classes to conduct a Social Impact Assessment that explains exactly how they plan to address the very real scholastic, psychological and physical threats that have been outlined by health professionals at the AAP and CDC. Those seeking to keep our schoolhouses closed should be required to “show their work.” Wisconsin families deserve nothing less.

The parents I have spoken to overwhelmingly want their kids back in school, and the teachers in my district are eager to return to the classroom. I hope you will take the initiative to ensure that they are able to do so.

Sincerely,

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Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress