

Questions Remain Unanswered for Schools

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31

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<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/schools-reopening-2020-cnn2-s5.jpg>



With the COVID-19 pandemic spreading, school districts are wrestling with questions to safely bring students back this fall. Schools need answers fast for educating students, supporting teachers and helping parents stay employed.

MADISON - The first day of school has always been an exciting time for children. About this time of year, heading into August, families begin to plan their schedule and stock up on school supplies. For some it might mean new supplies or even new clothes. Kids want to make a good impression that first day and parents want a routine in their busy life.

That was then, and this is now.

Since school buildings closed last spring to protect families from the spread of COVID-19, schools districts have been figuring out the best way to educate our children while keeping them safe. Of course, that was always the objective, but now we're facing new challenges and school districts are forced to look at this school year through a different lens.

In March, school buildings closed because the COVID-19 epidemic was just beginning in Wisconsin. Now, at a time when many districts are preparing for the students' return, the crisis only seems to be getting worse in the state. Balancing physical and mental health concerns can always be tricky, but now the public health pandemic presents a difficult element for balancing

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mental and physical health needs for children.

We also have to consider an economy that has taken a severe hit. Parents are struggling to make ends meet and they are concerned their kids' education may fall behind. Families want normalcy; parents want to go back to work and kids want to go back to school, but many questions have to be answered before we can get there.



During these past several months, we've been encouraged to stay safer at home so we don't inadvertently contract the virus and spread it to others. Now, many are demanding children return back to the classroom. What will a classroom look like this fall? It's clear that schools have a responsibility to keep children at least 6 feet apart whenever possible, which means smaller class sizes spread out in the room. Public health experts have also made it exceedingly clear that the best weapon we have to slow the spread is wearing a mask, but I think many parents know all too well how difficult this will be for young children.

Starting this new school year, how do we transport kids to school in buses that are typically packed shoulder to shoulder? School districts will have to get creative in spreading kids out in buses and covering the additional costs, or leave it to the parents to drive their kids to school themselves.

There's no doubt in my mind that our teachers love what they do and love their students. They always put their best foot forward and place the students' interests above their own. But, this decision whether to open schools has caused quite a dilemma for teachers who will soon be in classrooms with multiple children who may very well bring the virus without realizing it. What happens if a teacher becomes sick? What does that mean for their family?

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