

**Dewar, Aldith**

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**From:** Rebecca Dwan <rebecca.carter1@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 10, 2020 10:57 AM  
**To:** StateBoard, SDE  
**Subject:** Letter to the State Board of Education  
**Attachments:** BOE June 2020 Letter-State.docx

Attached please find a letter I have written that I would like read aloud at the next State Board of Education meeting.

Kindest Regards,  
Rebecca Welsh

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*"Fingerprints do not fade from the lives we touch."*

June 10, 2020

Dear State of CT Board of Education,

I am writing to express my opposition towards the guidelines that are being discussed to reopen schools in the fall.

In March we were told that we were closing our schools to keep our children “safe.” We, as parents, did not oppose this decision at the time because our first priority, of course, is the safety of our children. I will be the first to admit that I supported this decision because I was worried that not enough was known about the coronavirus, and we were warned daily that it spread quickly and discreetly, with carriers possibly not showing any symptoms at all. Nobody knew who would be affected or how bad, and there was mass confusion and fear across most of the world. That fear, coupled with the lack of data available at the time, made closing schools a decision that made sense. Fast forward three months, and the theories and data that was available when schools were initially closed and the country was locked down has been repeatedly proven to have been grossly inaccurate and inflated. And the decision to even lockdown and close our schools in the first place is now being questioned by experts across the world.

But decisions were made and we cannot go back in time. We can only move forward. We must somehow look past the grievous error that took children away from the things they need most: family, friends, and a positive learning environment. We must support our children with overcoming the toll the current environment has taken on them, not add even more damaging circumstances to their plate, which is exactly what the suggested guidelines will do.

I would like to first address the guidelines that students and staff would be required to wear masks/face shields and social distance. There is zero scientific evidence that wearing a mask, especially for extended periods of time, protects us. However, there is mounting evidence that mask wearing is detrimental to our health and actually puts us at greater risk of contracting

viruses by hampering our oxygen intake and weakening our immune system. Our body and immune system requires optimal levels of oxygen to feed cells and fight off illness, and wearing a mask is counterproductive to that. Masks also become wet with respiratory and oral secretions, trap that moisture inside, and it is like carrying a petri dish in front of your face. That is not something I want for any child or staff member of our school.

Masks are not only ineffective but actually pose a significant threat to our health by causing an increase of respiratory illnesses, viral infections, and even irreversible brain damage due to CO2 rebreathing and lack of sufficient oxygen levels. OSHA, the leader in health and safety guidelines in workplace safety, states "Cloth face covers are not protective equipment and do not protect the person wearing a cloth face cover from COVID-19." OSHA standards also require that any mask does not decrease the wearer's oxygen level below 19.5, and people wearing face masks output oxygen levels at 18.5. Not only is this a violation of OSHA standards but puts the wearer at risk of permanent brain damage. Furthermore, The New England Journal of Medicine states that "We know that wearing a mask outside health care facilities offers little, if any, protection from infection...In many cases, the desire for widespread masking is a reflexive reaction to anxiety over the pandemic." The health of my children and of our school staff will not be compromised to decrease the anxiety in others, nor will their rights be trampled on to comply with a comfort prop.

There are also developmental concerns with mask and face shield wearing. There are many children in our school system and across our country with speech delays or hearing impairments. Children need to be able to both see mouths as words are pronounced and hear words without obstruction, neither of which are possible when the population around them is wearing masks or face shields. Children simply cannot successfully practice phonics with their mouths covered. There are also many children in our school and across our country who have sensory processing issues. They cannot tolerate a tag on their clothing let alone a mask on their face. Many students with special needs rely heavily on the support of others around them in order to interact with their world appropriately, and this is not possible when the individuals around them are hiding behind a mask or face shield, or when they're told they have to keep a distance of six feet or follow some arbitrary arrows on the floor.

When you combine mask wearing with social distancing, the detrimental effects are profound. There is no reputable scientific evidence to support that social distancing reduces transmission. In fact, there is plenty of scientific evidence that proves we are healthier when we are in contact with others because close contact with each other strengthens our acquired immune system. Professor Michael Levitt, a Nobel Prize recipient, stated on 6/5/20 that social distancing and lock down “saved no lives, and may have cost lives.” And he is not wrong. Deaths due to domestic violence, child abuse, and suicide have sky rocketed in the past few months. Suicide is especially on the rise among children as opportunities for social and emotional development through socialization, exercise, sports, etc. have been eliminated. Suicide has recently plagued this town and already brought us to our knees on more than one occasion, and we cannot bear another resident taking their life, especially a child.

Children cannot develop socially and emotionally if they remain distant from friends and school staff, either through social distancing or taking part in a hybrid model. Our frontal lobes develop in childhood. This is the area of the brain responsible for decoding and comprehending social interactions, taking nonverbal cues while talking to friends and adults, and learning how to read the hundreds of unspoken signs-facial expressions, tone of voice, etc. It is where we learn to empathize, read social cues, and appropriately interact with others. Forcing children to social distance, look at people communicating with masks covering their faces, and drastically increase their screen time through partial or full distance learning, all impedes the development of their frontal lobe, resulting in dulled or fully eliminated empathy and the ability to interact socially in a healthy way. In the context of mental and emotional health, this is the perfect storm to create a generation of Sociopaths. We thought we had a problem with school shootings and bullying before, it will be nothing compared to what is in store if we do not stop this now.

Never have schools subjected children to such an unhealthy, uncomfortable, damaging, and anti-educational environment as what has taken place the last half of the school year and what is being proposed for the return of school in the fall. When a child spends too much time in front of a screen or seeing people behind face coverings and not enough time getting required stimuli through social interaction, their development becomes stunted, and their ability to focus, concentrate, to lend attention, and appropriately communicate diminishes. These current circumstances and future guidelines teeter on neglect to be quite frank.

If the mental and emotional toll on our children is not enough to convince you, then let's look at data. Deaths from COVID at nursing homes/assisted living facilities account for at least 80% of COVID-related fatalities. Over 95% of positive cases develop mild to no symptoms at all. Even in global "hotspots," which New Hartford most certainly is not as demonstrated by our infection rate, the risk of death due to COVID for school and working age individuals is in the same range of the chances of death during a daily car ride to work. A study by scientists at Cambridge and Oxford determined that children under the age of 15 are more likely to be hit by lightning than die from coronavirus. That's right, your child will more likely be struck by a bolt of lightning than die from COVID. And what about school staff? They matter just as much as students, right? According to current data obtained by NCBI, teachers and staff are at greater risk of contracting COVID at the grocery store or while running errands than they are in a school building full of children. That's because it has been proven, through contact tracing and increased testing across the entire world, and acknowledged by WHO, CDC, and NCBI, that children and asymptomatic carriers pose little to no threat of contagion. This means that children seldom, if ever, transmit COVID to adults, including their own parents who they live with. So teachers and staff are actually safer returning to traditional school than they are during a trip to Target.

The suggestions outlined in the guidelines proposed to reopen schools are just that, suggestions. Guidelines are not law and they are not enforceable as law. In fact, many of the guidelines being proposed violate actual laws in the CT Constitution in regards to educational rights and laws set forth by the ADA. The language used is the word "should," and the word "should" does not mean the same as the word "must." And the leaders of our school district must not let fear and guidelines devoid of scientifically accurate data destroy our school system and ruin the lives of our children. Our Superintendent has the authority to 100% disregard every single guideline proposed and return to the traditional school environment completely without fear of liability or reprimand. And that is what I am calling you to do. The mental health and overall well-being of our children and overall society is depending on it.

This is not the first challenge our school system has faced, and it certainly will not be the last. Only a few short years ago the parents of students in New Hartford were told that one of our elementary schools was going to be closed and there was "nothing" we could do about it.

We were told we had “no choice,” and it was a “done deal.” We saw a problem, we identified a solution, and we came together as a community to make it happen. WE STOOD UP. We said you are not going to do this to our children. And we won. It was not an easy feat by any means but we did it nonetheless. And we should be proud of the influence we have as residents, as parents. Because at the end of the day it is our children and our school staff that matters, and we will stop at nothing to do what is best for them. Mentally, emotionally, and academically.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kindest Regards,

Rebecca Welsh

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New Hartford, CT