

Should The U.S. Open The Schools?

As the second wave of COVID-19 is rocking our country, one of the great debates going on is the one about opening our nation's schools this fall.

A number of countries around the world have already announced their intention to do so and there are a few which never shut down.

The president has called for the opening of the schools this fall and is reportedly pressuring state governors to follow through. I don't know his reasoning, but I imagine it's something like that of reopening our businesses. At some point we have to come to terms with this new world we're living in and figure out how to thrive. Keeping everyone locked up at home doesn't do that.



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At the same time, I happen to live in the county which has recently been recognized as having the highest COVID growth rate. Not only that, but my two daughters are teachers. So, I'll have to say, this debate has definitely caught my attention.

It makes sense to try and reopen our schools if the pandemic is more or less over. But I can't see where it is. What I do see is that there are states which are doing better than others right now. If you compare the daily infection rate

between the various states, you can see some marked differences. New York, which has led the country in overall cases, is seeing a very clear decline in cases during this second wave. On the other hand, California, which had a much lower case count in the first wave, is seeing a much higher rate of new infections now.

This contradicts what many pundits are saying, pointing to red states opening up “too early” in their viewpoint, as being the reason why some states are suddenly seeing a spike in COVID cases. If all you look at Texas and Florida, you might come up with that conclusion; but California? They’ve been one of the most restrictive on opening up and right now they’re running almost as many new cases per day, as either Texas or Florida, besides still having way more total cases.

Looking at this, it seems clear to me that the debate about opening schools shouldn’t be a national one, but rather a whole bunch of local ones. Even trying to do it at the state level is unrealistic, as the percentage of cases in the big cities is much higher than in smaller communities.

Schools = Germ Factories



I don’t have any specific statistics or studies to point to, but I seriously doubt that there is anywhere else where the

disease spreads as rapidly as a school. A couple of months ago meatpacking plants were shutting down because of the spread of COVID-19; but the spread they were experiencing was probably nothing, compared to the spread we will see when our schools open again.

Many are saying that the disease doesn't affect children, but that's just not so. The reason we've seen so few children come down with COVID-19, probably has a lot to do with parents are keeping their children at home, where they are not interacting with other children. Do people actually think that's not going to change when we put those children in classrooms?

While there are clearly fewer children who have contracted the disease, than there are adults, a lot of that can be attributed to lack of risk. Many adults are going to work, going shopping, picking up take-out at restaurants. Children aren't. Yet in California, 8.4% of all COVID-19 cases are children under 18. That's not an insignificant percentage. If we project that nationwide, we're looking at the potential for 6.19 million children coming down with the disease. While children are apparently much less likely to die, what about the long-term effects of the disease? It's already known that COVID-19 can cause limited long-term lung capacity and kidney complications. Is that the legacy we want to give our children?

I get it; parents and administrators want to get the kids back in schools. I just don't know that it's practical to do that right now. How much risk are we putting our children in, if we send them back to school?

Let's throw this into the equation as well. We all know parents who have sent their children to school, even though the kids were sick. Does anyone actually think that nobody will do that with COVID? All it takes is one child who has the disease and a whole classroom can come down with it, just like the flu. Children aren't focused on being sanitary and they're

not suddenly going to become that way. Some might actually try to spread the disease.

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Have you heard the new game that teens are playing? They're having "COVID parties" where a group gets together and invites someone who has the disease. They all contribute to a pot and whoever comes down with the disease first gets the pot. Great idea if you want to risk dying for a few bucks.

If this is what our teens are doing, what do you think grade school kids will be doing? I'll guarantee there will be those who "jokingly" chase each other around, pretending to try and spread the disease. What if a child who is asymptomatic does that and it turns out they actually get others sick?

It's not only the children, it's the teachers as well. Depending on grade and school district, our schools run a ratio of from one teacher per every 20 pupils to one teacher per every 35. With the current rules about self-quarantining if someone comes into contact with a suspected case of COVID, how long do they think it will be before all of a school's teachers are out on quarantine?

Making Our Schools Safe



The concept that people are trying to push is making the schools safe so that our kids can go back to school. That sounds good, in theory; but I just wonder how good it is going to work in practice. Who is going to disinfect all those classrooms; the teachers? How is any teacher supposed to disinfect an entire classroom in a five minute passing period between classes?

School administrators and school boards are doing a lot of talking about how to make the schools safe. Not surprisingly, teachers are not being invited to these discussions. So the only people who really know what it is like to deal with those children in the classroom, are being kept out of the process.

The general philosophy in the schools is to dump every new requirement on the teachers and this one isn't going to be any different. Keeping our kids safe is going to become their responsibility and they're probably going to be given very little support in doing so. What will really happen is that teachers will become the scapegoat when there's a surge in cases amongst school-age children.

Let's take a look at some of the measures that are being discussed to "make our schools safe"

- **Lowering classroom capacity to 15 students** – The average classroom is 900 feet square. In order to have a social distancing of six feet between students, the maximum capacity is 9 students, not 15. For classrooms where tables are used instead of desks, that is probably more like six students. What are we going to do with all the other children who don't fit in the classrooms?
- **Teachers social distancing from students** – How is a kindergarten teacher supposed to tie a student's shoes, while staying six feet away?
- **Masks** – Does anyone really think that kids are going to keep masks on all day?
- **Students not sharing materials** – Who is going to buy all

those materials? Where is the money going to come from? Most teachers have to buy their classroom materials out of their own pockets because the classroom budget is only \$200.

- **Disinfecting classrooms** – Without any extra staff to do that, how will it get done? As I already said, teachers don't have time between classes. Besides, where are the disinfectants going to come from? Teachers were already having to ask parents to send Clorox wipes and Kleenex for classroom use.
- **PPE** – Are the schools going to provide masks for the children who don't bring their own?
- **Teacher quarantine** – Are the schools going to pay teachers who are required to quarantine? If they don't, wouldn't some still go to work, if they just have a minor case? Who is going to teach those classes while the teachers are at home? There was already a shortage of substitute teachers, there won't be enough to go around.
- **Online education** – How are teachers supposed to teach in the classroom and prepare online classes for students who are staying home, at the same time?

Of course, all this ignores the risk to the teachers, some of whom are already immunocompromised. How are the schools going to protect those teachers, or are they expected to be willing to risk their lives to keep their jobs?

Obviously, the debate isn't over yet. Just trying to answer the questions I've raised above could keep it going on for months. It's going to take a lot of work and a lot of good ideas to make it possible to open our schools, without creating a situation where we are putting our children and our teachers at risk.

Perhaps the solution is to reinvent school. COVID-19 isn't going away anytime soon, especially considering that antibodies only stay in the system for a few weeks. This means

that the infamous “herd immunity” that’s been talked about is impossible. With that being the case, it looks like we need to come up with a different way to educate our children.

What Should You Do?



I don’t have an answer for the educational system in general unless it is to switch over totally to distance learning. That’s working well for college students, so it might work for primary and secondary education as well, with some appropriate modifications.

But right now I’m concerned about you and me, what we’re going to do with our children. Mine are grown now, but two of them are teaching in the schools, as well as one son-in-law. So I’m just as concerned about their safety, as you might be about your children’s.

Most of us who are preppers are conservatives by nature. That goes beyond our political beliefs and covers how we look at life in general. We’re not the kind to take a risk, at least not without weighing those risks pretty carefully beforehand. With that being our nature, it just doesn’t make sense that any of us would be in a hurry to send out kids back to school before there is some definite proof that it is safe for us to do so.

That means opting to keep our children home and taking charge of their education ourselves. Since most school districts are going to be offering some sort of online instruction, this is a very viable option. But I'll have to say, I'm not so sure that what the schools are offering is enough for our kids to keep up; we may need to augment that.

I'm a retired homeschooler, so I know something about educating kids at home. First of all, it doesn't take eight hours a day. It doesn't even take five hours a day. Most kids can get their work done in two to three hours if they're at least somewhat diligent. You don't have to be sitting there with them that whole time either. The idea is to get them doing as much on their own as possible so that all you have to do is plan their lessons and make sure they do them. That shouldn't take more than an hour a day.

There's a plethora of educational material available online. You can probably find enough educational videos on YouTube alone, to make up a 12-year curriculum or more. There are also a lot of teacher resources, which are available for anyone who wants them.

The idea is to find things that will teach your children what they need to learn and then let them take their lessons online. Use a variety of videos, both to increase the likelihood of having an instructor who will teach it in a way your child will understand and to reinforce the lessons. Then print out a few worksheets for them to do, so that you can check that they've learned. That's it.

For high school students, you're going to have to go a bit farther, coming up with assignments for them to do, specific assignments that require them to do a bit of research. But that's a necessary skill anyway, especially for those who are going to go on to college. Assign them a paper on whatever subject they are interested in and let them loose on the internet to learn about it on their own. In other words, let

them self-educate, rather than trying to be their teacher. Trust me, it works.

The one thing that might cause some problems in all this is discipline. Families who homeschool their children tend to be families where parents discipline their children. Through that, they teach their children to be self-disciplined. That's what's needed for them to educate themselves.

Maybe sometime down the road, we'll be able to send our kids back to school. I'm not sure. It may end up being that we, as a society, opt for distance learning, reinventing our school system. If that's the case, then you'll be ahead of the curve. If not, and the schools are actually able to get back to "normal," then you might find that your kids ask to be kept home, as they end up preferring learning at home, over being in a classroom. You never know.

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