

Scientific Panel Recommends Schools Open

The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine issued a report stating that children should return to school wherever possible. The committee stated that for younger children as well as children with special needs, online learning is virtually ineffective.

Emphasis was put on “common sense” precautions like handwashing, social distancing, and minimizing group activities including recess and lunch. Additionally, the committee called for all teachers and staff members to wear surgical masks and for all children to wear cloth face coverings.

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Schools are in need of upgraded ventilation and air-filtration systems, which should be funded by the state and federal governments, according to the report. These upgrades are estimated to cost \$1.8 million per school district with eight school buildings and an average of 3,200 students.

Parents and teachers alike have spoken out in favor of both reopening schools and keeping schools closed, for a multitude of reasons and they both bring up very valid points. Unfortunately, this is a very complicated situation and there isn't necessarily a correct answer.

Most studies suggest the virus poses minimal health risks to children under 18. And the report said that evidence for how easily children become infected or spread the virus to others, including teachers and parents, is “insufficient” to draw firm conclusions.

Citing Educational Risks, Scientific Panel Urges That Schools Reopen

On one side, schools offer valuable tools for many kids like social and emotional support, child care, nutrition, and many more things that adults often overlook. Many families don't have access to wifi at home or only have access through smartphones. However, in poorer areas where families don't have wifi, it is likely that those communities have been disproportionately by COVID-19 and may not have the ability to safely educate students.

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Experts in favor of returning to school keep pointing out that children aren't getting adequate socialization. Experts also keep talking about the importance of social distancing, wearing masks, and limiting unnecessary social activities. Even in school, children would likely not get the proper socialization they needed even if they were in school again. Nearly 30% of the 3.8 million full-time teachers in America are over the age of 50, putting them in a high-risk category.

It's difficult to look at the ways other countries have handled the pandemic and say what we should've done differently. With the poor health of the population of our nation and our lack of trust in the government, it is likely that we would've had high cases no matter how we handled it.