

Informational Hearing Remote Learning – in person
House K-12 Budget Committee
Dave Trabert – CEO
February 3, 2020



Chairwoman Williams and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share thoughts from parents and students about the ineffectiveness, and in some cases, very detrimental impacts, of school districts not offering full-time in-person instruction.

Many parents, especially from Johnson County, have contacted Kansas Policy Institute for assistance and guidance on getting their children back in school over the last year. Our litigation center, Kansas Justice Institute, intervened in Blue Valley and Olathe when school officials tried to make parents believe their children were under quarantine orders; after reminding district officials that only county health officers are legally permitted to issue quarantine orders, kids were allowed back in school.

Parental concern in districts that are not allowing full-time in-person learning runs deep, touching on a plethora of educational, emotional, and economic issues.

You should also know that this is not a partisan issue. Parents who vote Democrat, Republican, and Independent have sought our assistance; they've also expressed gratitude that someone is listening to them, often saying many school board members seem uninterested in what they have to say. And having attended a number of school board meetings over the last few months, I've personally witnessed that frustration.

Many parents and students have made their concerns and frustrations known when they spoke at school board meetings; a small sample of their comments are listed in Section 1 of my testimony.

Other parents and students shared their statements with us privately because they fear retaliation against their children. A sampling of their statements are included in Section 2.

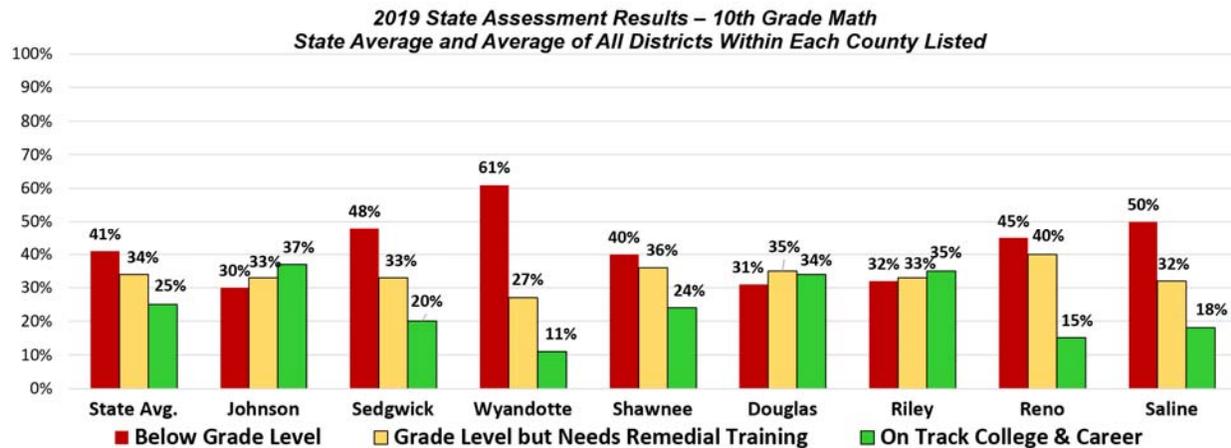
The attached article published by our media subsidiary, the Sentinel, explains that in-person learning restrictions are tied to depression and suicide; a Blue Valley mother whose son attempted suicide is quoted in the story.

"Every single mental health person I've talked to—every single one— has said, this is a kid that under normal circumstances this wouldn't have happened," she said. "This is because of the isolation and all of the things we've done to try and protect him. We've hurt him, and it has to stop."

The 'science' clearly says kids should have always been in school, and we congratulate the many school boards in Kansas that have allowed that for about 166,000 students since the beginning of the current year. But other school boards representing about 285,000 students have inflicted untold educational and emotional consequences on the kids they have kept out of school since August, and it has to stop.ⁱ

Student achievement was already disturbingly low before some schools denied full-time in-person learning, and it will most certainly will be worse as a result.

The 2019 state assessment shows that statewide and in some of the counties shown below, where full-time in-person learning hasn't been allowed, there are more 10th-graders below grade level than are on track for college and career.



On behalf of the parents and students in districts that are not permitting full-time in-person learning, we appreciate your attention to this important issue and thank you for your consideration.

Section 1: Quotes from public comments at school board meetings

(note: we may have some of the names misspelled)

Linda Migliazzo, Blue Valley parent – “I’m pleading for you to allow them to return to school full-time due to the massive detrimental effect the lack of in-person schooling has had on our youth.”

“...parents’ pleas to send kids to school in person full-time feel like they’re falling on deaf ears.”

Amy Thomas, Blue Valley parent with a sophomore in honors Geometry – “This is information he needs to know for the ACT. Chemistry & Algebra II – critical to his success on the ACT. This year is critical for him and the implications of not learning this material is long far beyond this year.”

Carrie Paschke, Blue Valley parent who opted for in-person learning, with two kids still hybrid said “...that’s not good enough.” That’s an adequate way to describe the hybrid model, isn’t it, it’s not good enough.”

Kerri Rayfield, Blue Valley parent – “I’m here tonight to advocate for the kids who are not typical but still have a right to an education that is accessible.”

“We’re scared. We’re scared for our not-typical kids on IEPs and 504 plans...” if remote-learning is reinstated. “These kids don’t have the luxury of being able to learn in a distance-learning mode.”

“...if we are forced to do more distance learning, my family will be forced to leave the school district since it’s unable to provide for our learning needs.”

Julie Hamlin, Blue Valley parent, oncology nurse practitioner at KU Hospital – “There is no substitute for in-person learning, full time.”

“I am here tonight to urge that the gating criteria be, if not changed, completely gotten rid of.”

“The gating criteria was established mid-August with the best data available at that time. There’s 3 months of new data that’s not included specific to our district and student population.”

“These students (middle and high school) are at a vulnerable age; they need to be with their peers and teachers. Isolation and increased time on technology most likely is causing more damage than the potential for contracting COVID.”

Maryanne Worhay, Blue Valley parent – “As I stand before you today, my kids have attended school in person for a total of 10 days this academic year.”

“Bright kids are struggling. Well-adjusted kids are struggling. Kids who pivot easily are struggling. They’re struggling to submit assignments online. They’re struggling to get counted as present online. And they are not able to self-advocate online.”

Mickey Canizarro, Blue Valley parent – read the Blue Valley mission statement and the mission of the Blue Valley BOE.

“How are we stacking up to the world if we’re not allowing our children to be education in person?”

To the board – holding up the BOE handbook “Your job is not to protect the community, your job is to protect our children and to ensure they’re getting an education, and they need to do that in the classroom.”

“We’ve already lost 4 children in the district to suicide but there’s hundreds more that are suffering and many that are being hospitalized. We haven’t lost anybody to COVID.”

Dr. Christine White, pediatrician and Blue Valley parent – “Blue Valley schools are not meeting the Kansas Statute 72-1111 which states every child must receive 1,116 hours of academic instruction per year.”

“Currently, the kids in hybrid, which is the majority of our kids, have 3 days a week with their teachers in person and 2 days a week where they log in for attendance, log off and then teach themselves Chemistry, Physics, Algebra, Geometry, History and English. Our kids are only getting 3/5 of the instruction they are by law supposed to be receiving. How is this even legal?”

“The job of schools is to educate our children; children should not be expected to educate themselves. It’s time for Blue Valley to do its job.”

Andrew Warhay, Blue Valley student – “I am in favor of full-time, in person school and here are the reasons why:

1) When we’re in-person school, we get face-to-face interaction with our teachers and our questions can be answered directly.”

“2) I feel when we are online we get little to no learning. Instruction over Zoom is not as thorough as it would be in an in-person class.”

“If we stay in hybrid or remote learning it will have a detrimental effect on how kids learn and the future of our academic success.”

Jodi Havens, Blue Valley parent – “My concern lies in the mental well-being of both our staff and our students. Are the virtual and hybrid modes of learning really keeping our kids healthy? Are they mentally well?”

Dr. Caroline Danda, Blue Valley parent and Licensed Child Psychologist – “The weight of the social and emotional fallout due to isolation, disconnection and academic challenges associated with the hybrid and distance learning is absolutely enormous. I see it in my own house.”

“Every single day I get more calls from parents who are distressed about the mental and emotional health of their children associated with distance learning.” “The children are not alright. The families are not alright.”

“We not only have a COVID pandemic, we now have a mental health pandemic on our hands.”

“COVID 19 statistics cannot be the only sole determinants of gating criteria.”

Kennedy Campbell, Blue Valley student – “I’ve never had a difficulty with motivation in school and I’ve always been very involved and been very willing to take advanced and honors classes. But, with less in-person instruction, I found that I have a difficulty with communication with my teachers and a lack of connectedness with my class and other students.”

“Hybrid is confusing and inconsistent and very difficult for students.”

Amy Thomas, Blue Valley parent – “It is unacceptable that you continue to push a learning mode onto parents who’ve chosen in-person learning.”

Carrie Paschke, Blue Valley parent – “The Blue Valley School District insists on keeping our middle and high school students remote despite multiple suicides, an overwhelming number of students failing classes, and a high rate of absenteeism.”

Dr. Caroline Danda, Blue Valley parent and Licensed Child Psychologist – “Distance learning is not working for so many and is not developmentally appropriate.”

Jody Jones, Blue Valley parent and ICU RN – “We have a very large population of COVID-19 patients at my hospital.”

“I can assure you, I have seen the worst of the worst that COVID can bring.” “...you may think I am here tonight to encourage you to keep the schools closed, but that could not be further from the truth.”

“I would like to tell you about another trend we are seeing. We are seeing drastic increases in drug overdoses and suicide attempts in teens and young adults.”

“School is a lifeline for so many kids, as any teacher will tell you.”

Ally Arenholtz, Olathe student – “I invited Olathe high school and middle school students to take a survey I created. 1,778 kids took their time to share their feelings on virtual school.” “85% of students said they were a very good learner in person. However, only 10% of students think they’re still a good learner online.”

Doug Billings, Olathe parent – The Right Side podcast. What the media has told us about COVID is not true. Media creating fear.

“These kids are suffering more emotionally, socially, psychologically, academically than the virus will ever touch.”

“Contractually, the IEP ... (assigned to his son) ... can’t be met on Zoom.”

Karen Rawlings, Olathe parent – “We cannot wait for COVID to go away or to change for our students to get back into the classroom.”

“In the name of safety and balance, we must get all grade levels back in school full time.”

Lexie Dockstatter, Olathe student – “This is what I am forced to call school.”

“Will Student View work today? Will Zoom work today? Will Google Classroom work today?”

“We as students who willingly want to participate in in-person school deserve better.”

“Overall, students’ grades are falling. Before you know it, GPAs will start to crash. The cost of continued online school not only will be detrimental to students’ education, but it could also result in thousands of dollars lost in potential scholarships.”

Blaire Smith, Olathe student – “I want to go back to school full time, I do not want the hybrid option.”

Kathy Weimers, Olathe parent – “This format is not working. The gating criteria is not working. Our kids are being asked to bear a burden far higher than any other demographic in the pandemic. This needs to end and our kids need to be back in school.”

“Using a single flawed metric as the gating criteria is hurting our children.”

“My daughter is 17 and a senior ... on Saturday as she worked to make a Power Point ... she looked at me and demanded ‘Why are we even having school, this is stupid.’” “In what should be a semester filled with the culmination of all her hard work for the past 12 years, she is stuck sitting in a chair in front of a computer wondering why she is even bothering to get out of bed.”

Bryan Connell, Olathe parent – Not in favor of the hybrid model being considered.

JT Weimers, Olathe student – “I’ve been talking with all of my friends and they all agree that we want to go back to school and going back to school is the best for everyone. However, they’ve also all agreed that Hybrid is not the way to do this.”

Kathy Weimers, Olathe parent – Two kids in school, the one who just spoke is doing well online. Her other son is not a good student, is not doing well online.

“There are other states who have their kids in school. There are private schools that are in school. I don’t understand why Olathe, which is supposed to be one of the best public-school districts in the Johnson County area...are not putting their kids in school.”

Jennifer Anderson, Olathe parent – 3 kids, older 2 are on the Autism spectrum, high functioning.

“The kids in the district have been out of school for too long, they need their peers and the social interaction practice that school provides.”

Kelly Hewitt, Olathe parent and mentor for middle and HS girls – Girls are depressed, suicidal. Unenrolling her son from the Olathe school district.

Cindy Holshier, Olathe parent – Not in favor of hybrid learning.

Blake Souls, Olathe student – “Bored, confused, unmotivated, stressed and isolated. This is how I and many of my peers are feeling, and this is not at all how I thought my Freshman year of high school would go.”

Heather Terranova, Olathe parent – Kids are really struggling, they need to be in school.

Tammy Mathen, Olathe parent – The kids are not getting a quality education.

“Our reality right now is the public health grand ambition to mitigate the spread of the Sars CoV2 virus is actually causing undue harm to the overall wellbeing of our students, their families and the entire community.”

Anna Falassio, Olathe student – Sharing feedback gathered from students throughout the district. These are the answers to ‘what would you like the Board of Education and our Superintendent to know about virtual learning.’

1st Student: “I am scared I won’t score well on my AP tests because of virtual learning which will mess up my college credits even more...I don’t feel like I’m learning anything this year.”

2nd Student: “This is the worst thing ever. I have been an A / B student for my whole life and I have a D in Geometry. It’s frustrating to have computers lock up, downloads not work, and not have someone explain to me how to work the problem without audio cutting out or freezing up. I hate this, the platform is horrible.”

3rd Student: “I don’t know my teachers. I don’t know anyone in my classes and I hate it. Too many different platforms to use and keep track of assignments.”

4th Student: “As a person with high anxiety, the stress is hard because everything is unorganized.”

5th Student: “Not only is virtual learning a work in progress, it’s also causing the majority of my stress.”

6th Student: “Virtual learning is stressful because it’s harder to learn things. Social interaction between classmates is awkward because you don’t have a lot of chances to talk to them.”

7th Student: “Virtual learning is a good idea, but not for a long-term plan.

Holly Falassio, Olathe parent – Online not working for dyslexic and special needs students.

“My 17 year old said it best, ‘it should not be this hard.’”

Brennan Stelting, Olathe student – Reading more comments gathered from students throughout the district.

“I want things to be to be like they were, online is stressful. Everything is rushed and I never get a chance to ask questions. In my opinion, this sucks.”

“I feel lonely and shy.”

“I’m a very outgoing person and this is painful.”

“I want to go back to school. I’m struggling at home trying to learn. I have bad grades, and I’ve never had bad grades.”

“I have always been a straight-A student. Virtual school has caused my grades to drop, my worth ethic to go down and my stress level to go up. I am doing my best, but the longer the virtual school continues, the harder it is to stay motivated.”

“I’ve never really liked school, but now I truly hate it. It’s so hard to get help if I am having a hard time.”

“I’m terrified that I’m becoming depressed. I am mad and sad all the time. I’m yelling at my family a whole lot.”

“I’m embarrassed to ask for help.”

“I am more scared of my mental health than the virus.”

Carter Stelting, Olathe student – Reading comments made by Olathe students.

“At the end of a virtual learning day, I feel more mentally, physically exhausted than when I am in person.”

“IT SUCKS, PLEASE LET US GO BACK TO SCHOOL.”

“Kids need school. I have no motivation for school at home.”

“I am less likely to ask questions, I don’t think that most of the teachers even know my name.”

“I feel like I am slowly dying, sitting all day in front of a computer.”

Reagan Stelting, Olathe student – Reading comments made by the recent survey of Olathe students.

“You just feel alone. We miss so much interaction with our fellow students.”

“It sucks, I hate it.”

“It’s really hard to learn, and the technology is hard to figure out.”

“There’s nothing enjoyable about this experience, and I’d rather drop out and prepare for college rather than spend one more second being a puppet for this unreliable and unbelievable school district that not only has ruined my senior year but ruthlessly dragged it threw the mud and stomped on it.”

“My eyes hurt. I get headaches. I miss my friends.”

“I feel like people have forgotten about us.”

Lauren Smith, Olathe parent and ICU nurse – “We need to look at more than one number.” for the gating criteria.

Robert Stuart, Olathe parent – “I got a kid that wants to quit school, get his GED, and be done with this crap.”

Julie Kellerman, Olathe parent – “How long are you willing to say ‘one COVID death is too much’ but not acknowledging that one suicide is too much?”

Brett McFall, Olathe parent/teacher and coach at SM South – Messaging “I’m standing up here fighting for my kids and for other kids, we’ve had numerous teachers that are arguing to keep the kids out of school. I don’t know about you, but I got an education to help kids and to do what’s best for them, and what’s best for them is to be in school.”

Brian Connell, Olathe parent – “I’ve said a lot of things over the past 3 or 4 months, I honestly don’t think everyone is listening. I think you’re hearing, but I don’t think you’re listening.”

Jennifer Gillmore, Olathe parent – “Our mayor makes a public statement ... ‘Olathe is the best place to live, work and play’ ... why is the word learn missing?”

Karen Rawlings, Olathe parent – “Schools were not created to meet the employment needs and wishes of teachers and staff.”

Gretchen Howard, Olathe student – “As teachers have unions to advocate for them, us students are forced to advocate for ourselves, and our voices have proven to be less powerful.”

“Every day, I watch as my friends and neighbors head to their private schools, to get a real education.”

Jody Schroba, Olathe parent, pediatric nurse practitioner – “Mitigation strategies work. The teachers are not getting sick from the students.”

“It’s frustrating as a parent, I can’t send my kids to school, but I can go to a bar?”

“Stop making decisions out of fear and intimidation.”

Brett McFall, Olathe parent, teacher and coach – “\$2,100 of my \$4,100 property tax bill goes to Olathe USD 233 schools, which is ok, but not for my kids to do remote learning.”

Adam Carston, Olathe parent and educator – “As a special educator, during our Zooms, I have observed kids crying and or shut off their computers...and most importantly, no emotional support that can only be given from face-to-face contact.”

Anna Falasio, Olathe student – “We have lost too much, we have learned so little in the past 9 months that our motivation is down, our happiness is at all-time lows, and we are literally fighting to stay alive.”

Peyton Cook, Shawnee Mission student – “This is my first year of high school. I was well aware that it would be different than middle school because of COVID, but this is not in the realm of what I expected.”

“When there are A/ B honor roll students getting Fs, Ds, and Cs, there is an obvious problem.”

“We are on our computers for 7 hours in a row. You do realize how awful the headaches can be from technology, and it has been proved that screen time often leads to blurred vision, eye strain and long term vision problems like nearsightedness.”

Matt Heitz, Shawnee Mission parent – “My son, who is a senior, like many seniors, has a pretty light schedule this year. His schedule includes woodworking, weights, and foods. These classes are very difficult to conduct online and he has been left with an extreme amount of time on his hands because they pretty much turned him over to figure out something to do.”

“I’ve seen his motivation decrease over the past few weeks.”

“My freshman is frustrated, confused, disappointed, and often depressed. Connection issues...teachers dismissing class 20 minutes early, and overall lack of interaction are just a few things they struggle with.”

Dr. Lisa Madson, Shawnee Mission parent & general practitioner – “Healthcare has had to adapt to having COVID-19 present in our world. We have had to listen and learn quickly and be adaptable at every step in the game, without ever changing how we approach healthcare.”

“At no time have I stopped seeing patients, we are running well. The hospitals are running well with routine care, elective and emergent surgeries. The mitigation strategies are working well.”

Dr. Chris Bowser, Shawnee Mission parent and ER doctor – “Shawnee Mission School District has aligned itself with the Johnson County Health Department, its data and gating recommendations. An important metric used for gating decisions is 2-week positivity rate. This metric has issues limiting its usefulness. First, those tested are mostly sick or exposed patients. Because it is not a random sample, the tests may be positive more often; this is called sampling bias. Secondly, only 25% of the recommended testing amount is obtained.”

“Returning children to school is urgent. There are not extra years for children to learn. The pandemic is not expected to end soon and may last beyond 2021.”

“We believe opening schools with proper precautions has the support of the district medical community and the majority of students and parents prefer in-person learning.”

Chad Reed, Shawnee Mission parent & teacher – “The nightmare that so many kids live in right now, at least when they are in school they can find a respite. Right now, those children do not have a break from that reality, with no end in sight and no one to advocate or protect them.”

“I work with so many teenagers who are right now trying to navigate isolation, life, and literal mental anguish. Our secondary level kids are really struggling.”

Carrie Fischer, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “I hope you see the inconsistencies and frustrations (elementary in school, middle and high school not). Who is deciding what is safe and when?”

Mr. Glover, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “They (my kids) are on their Chrome Books from 8 am to 3 pm and then they need to do homework for another 2 to 5 hours afterwards on that same device. That’s between 9 and 12 hours of screen time, every day.”

Shiloh Harlen, Gardner-Edgerton parent & elementary teacher – “It’s impossible for her (my daughter) to get into a routine which adds stress and anxiety to her day. It’s a lot to manage for an 11-year-old.”

Diane Owen, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “You and I both know we will never make everyone happy, I do, however feel that as elected members of the Board of Education you are obligated to make decisions based on the needs and wants of the community members who elected you to serve. So I have a hard time understanding why 83% of our school district parents enrolled their students in in-person learning and we are still remote.”

Brandy Sand, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “These kids need to be back in school, please, get them back in school.”

Bree O’Gara, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “We need to keep moving forward. Problems happen every day, we need to focus on the solution.”

Nate Brummet, Gardner-Edgerton teacher and parent/ wife also a teacher – “After teaching all day, I have to go home, and with a lot of help from my wife, have to help my son (with ADD) do all of the things he was supposed to do during the day.”

“He’s not ready to manage his own education at age 11.”

“My wife is planning to work with H.R. and take leave ... because our son needs one of us at home with him. Which will take a teacher out of the district.”

Marissa Stone, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “My son is on the Autism spectrum, and he needs to be in school. He is able to be in school (part-time), however, his peers are not. Part of his goals on his IEP is peer interaction.”

“There weren’t trained on how to use a Chrome Book, they were just thrown out there.”

Nick Robinson, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “We are now playing fall sports, but our children are not allowed to receive an education in person.”

Nick Robinson, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “The board of education, district, and the district superintendent, Ms. Pam Stranathan, all came to the same conclusion: in-person sports are safe and in-person education is unsafe.”

“Why did you make athletics a priority and education a virtual bust?”

“We are trailblazers; however, you Ms. Stranathan, the district, and the board refuse to blaze any trails. We stand by and let Olathe, Shawnee, and Blue Valley make these difficult decisions, and then we follow suit. This is not what leaders do, and this is not how leaders lead.”

Ethan and Ian Rimer, Gardner-Edgerton students – Ethan: “I wanted to start with...you are ruining my life, but my mom said I shouldn’t, so my brother will start.” **Ian:** “I was nervous to speak because I thought you might not listen to us because we are kids. Then I realized that we are the ones impacted by your decisions and it is important that you hear our voices.”

Ian: “Our parents leave home around 7:30 and then until at least 4:30 we are on our own, managing our whole education independently. We are not adults, but adult responsibilities are expected from us. We don’t even get to interact with each other because our schedules are completely different. We even eat lunch alone.”

Ethan: “I miss my friends. I miss live interactions with a teacher and the fun learning experiences that come with in-person learning. By the end of the day, my legs hurt cause I’ve sat in front of the computer all day with very little movement. I have experienced anxiety and stress as I waited multiple times for a teach to let me into a session, only to find out later that the teacher is no longer with the district, but no one thought to notify me or my family. I am 11 years old, shouldn’t you be setting me up for success instead of forgetting about me?”

Brie Ogara, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “Gardner needs to get our (gating) criteria friendly to Gardner. The recommendation should be that each district do what is best for them.”

“We did a survey ... I have over 700 comments from kids, and you can’t unsee that. Our kids are suffering.”

Melissa McGill, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “My daughter is one of the 3 gifted students who helped win almost \$20,000 of technology for our high school last year. ... she is now receiving 10 minutes of her (gifted IEP) services.”

Quinton Wallian, Gardner-Edgerton student – “I’m the senior class president at GHS. The social aspect is arguably the most important part of school. It allows us to meet new people, have new experiences and most importantly, develop social skills that will help us in the future with things interviews and just normal day to day conversations. Online schooling has made this impossible. Students are not making personal connections with teachers or even with each other.”

“Students are spending more time than ever alone, sitting on screens. I can say from personal experiences, online school has made me feel mentally drained and less motivated than ever.”

“Why don’t we give hybrid on in-person a shot for the betterment of the student body’s mental health and development. Schools all around us have been doing it, and yes, some of them are having to go back to remote, but can we at least give it a shot?”

Ricky Thom, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “241 days. 241 days was the last time my daughter was in the school classroom. She left Pioneer Ridge for spring break, never thinking that would be the last time she would step in that school, there would be no 8th grade graduation, no Worlds of Fun trip, no dance.”

“I used to be proud that my daughter went to this school district. I’m no longer proud. I’m no longer proud of the board and a superintendent that are more concerned about a lawsuit than the wellbeing and education of their students.”

Jennifer Whitlow, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “Why is every other (Johnson County) district in school in some form when Gardner is not.”

Karen Higman, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “My son is a senior this year, and up until last Spring, he had about a 3.3 grade point. As of today, he has 4 Fs and 1 D- and he’s completely indifferent about it, which breaks my heart.”

Megan Miller, Gardner-Edgerton parent – Single mom with 5 kids. “I chose this district to bring my kids to.”

“You need to listen to your parents and your students. There needs to be more meetings right now when we are in this crisis with our schools. Please open your hearts to listen to what the kids have to say.”

Chase Walker, Gardner-Edgerton student – “These past few months have been outrageously stressful for teachers, students and myself.”

Flower Sauder, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “My in-person kiddo is thriving, he is so happy to be back in person with his teachers and peers. My middle schooler is struggling academically. He struggles with comprehension and has always required extra help from teachers. This is so hard to do in a remote environment. My son and I have both shed tears of frustration, this is not what school is supposed to be. My high schooler is normally a straight-A student and in many AP classes. Remote learning has affected him in so many ways; his grades are suffering. The biggest issue for him is his mental health, he struggles with depression.”

Christy Province (parent and nurse) – “My children at home are constantly stressed, they are overwhelmed, and they are exhausted from the amount of screen time they are getting every single day.”

“My daughter at the high school level is failing classes, which she has never done before. She cries daily due to the stress level that she has with failing classes, not understanding material, and feeling defeated this year.”

“My kitchen is now an art classroom, a math lab, a chemistry lab, and I am not set up for this.”

“In middle school, the kids are muted so it’s hard to ask a question in the moment or get a timely response. I’ve tried to address this at conferences and I was told ‘well your kids are getting Cs, they’re fine, they’ll be ok.’ No, no they are not ok, my kids don’t want Cs.”

Andrew Thomas, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “I ask that someone make a motion tonight that our kids go back in person, that’s the only way that’s going to happen.”

Tyler Thomas, Gardner-Edgerton student – “As a student, I’m telling you that remote learning is not working and we need to go back to school.”

“Our classes are supposed to be 82 minutes long at the high school level, but because we are online and teachers have to give screen breaks in all but one of my classes, I am in class for a maximum of 30 – 40 minutes. Being in class for only ½ of the day does not prepare me for the next few years of high school or college.”

Brian Higginbotham, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “My junior continues to struggle to concentrate at a desktop, unsupervised.”

“The school system is better than this. We can provide a safe environment for everyone.”

Liam Strahan, Gardner-Edgerton student – “Since March 17th of this year, my life has just felt like a blur. My motivation has dropped dramatically, I’m constantly asking questions and feeling very uneasy about my future.”

“The overwhelming majority has found that this online schooling is very difficult. They’re finding it very hard to pull enough strength and motivation together just to get assignments in on time.”

Janelle Chaffey, Gardner-Edgerton parent – “What’s the real reason for delaying school? And I don’t mean the scripted ‘we’re going by Johnson County Health Department’ answer.”

Carson Chaffey, Gardner-Edgerton student – “I know I am only 16, and that’s not very old, but I have never felt so unmotivated in my life. I had goals. Now my only goal is to get through every day without giving up.”

“Statistics show up on surveys, mental health doesn’t.”

Amy Blake, Gardner-Edgerton parent & critical care nurse – “I know COVID well. While all precautions should be utilized, a positive COVID case is not synonymous with hospitalization and death. What honestly clogs up my ER are patients waiting for an in-patient psychiatric bed. When I went into work last night, 35% of my patients were on a psychiatric hold for suicidal thoughts.”

Erin Davis, Spring Hill student – “My sophomore son continues to struggle with online learning. Yesterday, he took 4 naps yesterday. He does not get up and get dressed for the day because he has nothing to look forward to. His grades are worse than they have ever been. I feel like we’re having school just to be able to say we’re having school.”

“The school is not just a building to my son and his friends; it’s their community, it’s their social life, it’s their extracurricular activities, it’s their structure, it’s their routine, source of food for some ... it’s their reason for getting up and getting out of bed every morning.”

Laura Higginbotham, Spring Hill parent – “I’ve seen emotional stability in my 3rd grader who has had the opportunity to go to school every single day through this. He feels safe at school and he continues to excel in all areas. On the other hand, I have a (6th grade) child who is far from being emotionally stable. He has diagnosed anxiety disorder and separation anxiety. Being at home for the past few months has not helped the separation anxiety. He needs a schedule that does not keep changing. He is losing sleep every night.”

Lauren Cirulus, Spring Hill parent – “It’s amazing that we’ve been in this mess for nearly a year and not much progress has been made. Please help me understand why middle school and high school are still out of session. Why are we dragging our feet on this?”

“How can you sit here and justify that the kids are ok to do their sports and extracurricular activities, which many of them are doing without a mask, but you can’t open up your schools for kids to go to school? What kind of message are you sending?”

Laura Vogelbarker, Spring Hill parent – “I fear that complacency has crept in and replaced the push to return our children to school. Professionals are being ignored as it pertains to the importance of in-person education.”

Peyton Vogelbarker, Spring Hill student – “I’ve always been an honor roll student and a good student in the classroom but online learning makes it very difficult for me to learn while staring at a screen. I’m easily distracted by the virtual learning and not being in the classroom along with the distractions I have at home.”

“I find it concerning that I see some of the following during my classes: sleeping past first hour, joining calls up to 30 minutes late, kids joining while laying in their bed with no intentions to learn. Students that have been fired up about being in remote no longer have any hopes of going back and feel no one is listening to the struggles of online learning.”

“We have only 4 years of high school to enjoy all of our experiences and I feel that I have had multiple memories stolen from me.”

Debbie Donovan, Spring Hill parent – “My husband and I have to work. My kids are left home unsupervised and without any other positive support system around them.”

“Anxiety and depression is real and these kids are sitting at home, a lot of them without the support of additional adults in their life.”

Amy Bruce, Spring Hill parent – “Our kids have done everything that has been asked of them this school year and enough is enough. This virus is not going away and it is time to put their mental health and education first because both are being compromised the longer we continue remote learning.

“Even the best teachers cannot combat the challenges of remote learning.”

Section 2: Anonymous quotes from parents and students

“Remote learning is a complete failure in the school systems. It has put every kid behind in some way and has prevented the success we need for college and life beyond that. Each day, we are being cared for less and less and I worry for what the future is going to hold for us. We need our normal in person lives back so we can have an effective way of life in the future. We need to be able to be successful just as you all were when you were kids. Please reconsider your thoughts and change how you are treating each and every one of us. We need our education if we are ever to have a bright future.”

“My daughter is 17 and a junior. She is grateful for hybrid. However what I see is that she isn't spending much time learning. Today and yesterday she just had to check into seminar at 12:50. Today she painted with a friend. Fabulous paintings but missed a chance to learn from her teachers. She tested gifted in 1st grade and is college bound but I'm worried this year will hold her back. She works at a grocery store, I'm sure she could attend school full time and be exposed there as well. She had already had COVID in early December and recovered just fine.”

“If I have a question or need help, I can't just raise my hand and get help, I have to email the teacher and hope I'll get a response before the next test or before I forget about the assignment” This student's mother adds, “I also have had one of my kids in and out of treatment for major depression.”

“My sophomore hates it. He got 3 D's, 1 F and a couple of C's. This is a kid that normally makes A's and B's. He is overwhelmed and overloaded. There is more homework this year than normal years. He feels this year is a joke and a non academic year.”

“My daughter has been quarantined twice now just this semester! A couple of her teachers just flat out do not care that she isn't in class and I just received a report card yesterday that she has a F (0 for a class participation assignment) SHE IS IN QUARANTINE! The child has never had anything but A's.”

“January 29th. My high schoolers' 10th day of in person school. They were both giddy this morning to go to school. My daughter usually wakes up at 7:37 so she can school from bed by 7:40. But this morning she was up at 6:15 fixing her hair and putting on make up and having some pride in her self. When are these school districts going to get their act together and open the doors? Explain to me how Kansas City Christian, Sion, Aquinas, St. James, Maranatha, Bishop Miege, St. Theresa's and

several other private schools have been at full capacity, five days a week, in-person since August with minimal, if any, issues. I simply don't understand why the Shawnee Mission school board does not look to these high schools as example. Get your act together Shawnee Mission school district! Get the kids back in school!"

"50 things I worry about more than COVID: I worry about depression. I worry about anxiety. I worry about rape. I worry about them having strong relationships with me. I worry about them having strong relationships with their dad. I worry about them having a strong relationship with God. I worry about car accidents. I worry about smoking. I worry about juling. I worry about texting and driving. I worry about suicide. I worry about grades. I worry about ACT scores. I worry about drugs. I worry about alcohol. I worry about shoplifting. I worry about cancer. I worry about their acne. I worry about their friends. I worry about their relationships with the opposite gender. I worry about their relationships with their siblings. I worry they are on their phone too much. I worry about unsupervised parties. I worry about bullying. I worry about peer pressure. I worry about the latest "x" challenge. I worry about their happiness. I worry about them fitting in. I worry about if they should get the flu vaccination every fall. I worry about them being too opinionated. I worry about date rape drugs. I worry their every move is being recorded and going on social media. I worry that they have 'potty mouths'. I worry about their ability to focus. I worry that they are not very athletic. I worry that they are at home too much without an adult supervision. I worry I'm too hard on them. I worry about kidnapping. I worry they don't take school seriously enough. I worry their friends aren't good drivers. I worry when they are out past dark. I worry if I've pushed them enough. I worry about if they'll be asked to the dance. I worry that they feel inferior. I worry they won't make the team. I worry that they aren't brushing their teeth twice a day. I worry about them going too fast down our hill on their bike. I worry about them drowning. I worry about what they are exposed to on the internet. I worry they aren't eating enough vegetables. I worry about my son's bunions, my daughter's eyes and my son's platelet disease. I worry I won't be able to afford them the latest shoes/clothes. I worry about human trafficking."

"My children are currently 6-12 Hybrid 2 days/week in person attendance. Wednesday's are only 1 check in with study hall teacher where the teacher ask if student is ok and counts them as in attendance. High school is the same, except if a student is failing a class, they have to attend that class on Wednesday. Our high school has not been providing substitutes to students during remote days stating that the substitute can't do zoom calls. The teachers are just flat cancelling class on those days they aren't at work. How are schools able to do this and meet the hours/ day requirements for the year? I don't understand how the district is getting away with the complete lack of accountability. When we were full remote, we had teachers cancelling classes for dentist appointments, shopping and just flat no reason at all. We can't get our superintendent or board to

get our kids back full time face to face. They're living in fear, yet our kids' education seems to be the least of their worries."

"A lot has been written lately about a school to prison pipeline, disproportionately disadvantaging primarily boys of color and boys with disabilities. As the mother of a son with Tourette Syndrome, this theory is terrifying. Remote learning reminds me of the story of Pinocchio. As the semester progressed and I watched my son sit idly in his room primarily goofing off with an occasional "check in" with his teachers, I realized remote learning was his Pleasure Island, the place where mischievous young boys are turned into jackasses. Given the opportunity to be idle without the supervision of teachers all day, but provided with the excuse, "I'm in school," to avoid work at home, my son has turned evermore into a jackass as each day has passed. First, too busy (with the pretense of school) to clean up after himself, later finding inappropriate or dangerous activities to fill his down time (between "remote learning" or more appropriately named "teacher check-in") until finally I had him repeat the ACCUPLACER test at a local community college that I had him take before the semester began and saw that indeed he had become less proficient in math following a semester of "remote learning" than he probably would have during a summer vacation when he went to work and made change from the register.

"Remote learning has exploited my son's natural tendency to childish foolishness to tempt him away from work, study, and growing into a self-sufficient adult and into ignorance and stupidity -- an ideal laborer to be scooped up by an exploitative workplace or even, not having the sense to avoid it, providing yet another youth fed into the prison population or simply lapsing into a life of government dependency.

"In fact, I have now withdrawn him from public school after a particularly bad "remote learning" day where I found him goofing off so many times he was supposed to be "in school" that I told him to get into the car so I could take him to his father's workplace to be supervised. Instead, indignant that he was suddenly expected to work, study, and be good after ten months of little expectation in these matters, he ran away. I went to the school to report this to the principal (as it happened in the middle of a "school day" during "remote learning") who responded as if to say, "What do you want me to do about it?" I asked what he would do if it had happened on school property to a teacher and he got the school resource officer (who was on campus while students were not...begging the question of why he was needed there). The resource officer outlined how he could find my son, take him to KVC, and from there he could be held in juvenile detention. I was so desperate for my son to finally have an education, I immediately asked, "Would he finally be instructed there?"

"However, when the officer returned my son after an afternoon of searching (he had been hiding in a drain pipe near our home rather than attending school, but the school marked him present nonetheless), I decided I had had enough of the public school and it's "remote learning." I don't like

what my son is learning there...or more specifically here, in my home, under my watch, learning to disrespect his own parents and sit idly on the Internet all day.

“Meanwhile, district employees' children are offered on-site attendance so that they can grow up and provide another crop of government workers willing to accept low wages and benefits in return for something to which they already should have been entitled (a public education for their children unavailable to non-government workers; our kids have to attend remotely). The non-employees kids, though, are prepared for other uses.

“The district spokesperson told me that employee's children can attend on-site more frequently (75/25% on-site to remote compared to 60/40% for non-employee) so that the school can continue to operate. Operations for the sake of operating has become more important than existing to educate. Meanwhile, the district has for many years contracted with Greenbush to provide direct virtual learning that requires no local employees and could have easily been used to continue educating remotely without necessitating the local employees to be available for continued operation...also eliminating the downtime of "synchronous remote learning" and freeing up my son to finish his instruction early in the day and be put to some worthwhile task for the rest of it instead of practicing a life of idleness and calling it study.

“Please do what you can to provide alternatives to parents and children who are suffering from the one-size-fits-all approach designed to keep district employees paychecks coming even when they are no longer doing their jobs. It's bad enough that they are not educating, they should at least be required to do no harm.”

“Remote has been terrible with 5 days of instruction. Hybrid decreases the instructional/teaching/interaction time and leaves more free time for mischief. My children, 7th and 11th, are less than enthusiastic about this schedule and neither one want to go to school part time in this manner. They would rather see their teachers daily, than deal with the madness of this schedule Gardner-Edgerton created.”

“Parent: “don't you have a quiz/test tomorrow in the science, why aren't you studying?” 8th grade student -“well if I don't know it I can just google the answer” ...

“That's some good learning skills and that can not happen in inperson school! Both parents are working outside the home and child is home alone all day...wrong on so many fronts Hybrid - "well I really only have 2 days of school - the others are off days and fridays are kinda in session"... again quote from 8th grade boy, but again hybrid is better than full remote because at least 2 days a week he gets to engage. Algebra teacher has said multiple times he is so happy they are back in school because it is too difficult to tell on remote if they truly understand the concepts if he can't see them

doing the work. There are teachers that actually know the benefit of in person learning and are not in line with the unions.

“My sister is a grade school teacher in Texas and was online for 4 weeks and then full in person. She stated that even though she thought her kids were doing ok but when they returned in person she realized they had not really been doing ok and had not picked up the concepts very well.

“As a full-time working parent, I am working 2 jobs as teacher and parent making sure my child does not fall behind and does his work - never an issue when he was in school in person.

“I have three boys in SMSD, two in secondary schools that are learning in the hybrid model. Neither of them have ever gotten such awful grades as they did this last semester. My high schooler, thinks there is "no point" in schooling. He says he can't learn at home, so why should he even try. He is struggling to keep up and continues to have missing assignments and poor grades. Not only is he is missing out on his freshman year of high school and all of the social actives that come along with it, he is worried about his GPA and how this year will affect him going forward academically. We are already planning to hire tutors for the summer.

“You know things have gotten bad when an 8th grader wants to go to school! My middle schooler has never missed an assignment or turned anything in late prior to this school year. He was so far behind last quarter he began to withdraw from the family and social activities, hiding in his room “trying to get caught up”. When I reached out to teachers I was told several saw a "change in him”, yet not a single teacher reached out to me with concern or to discuss.

“Moving here from out of state several years ago I was excited to be part of SMSD, I had heard great things about this district and felt good about enrolling my children in SMSD schools. I can no longer say the same. I am so disappointed in the lack of concern for our children’s educational and emotional well-being, lack of response form the Board of Directories, lack of effort by the schools. Midway through the first quarter, my high schooler had three Fs. I was told by the associate principal that my son wasn’t "on their radar because he ONLY had three Fs.”

“Disappointed is an understatement. We feel helpless and neglected.”

“Two of my sons, a middle schooler and a high schooler, have suffered uncharacteristically lower grades and worse, they are falling behind their private school peers. There has been a paucity of information about when school will resume and how they plan to recuperate what the students have lost.

“We feel neglected and helpless as we attempt to advocate for their education. Our attempts to communicate our concerns to NW high-school have been met with impersonal “that’s the way it is

and that’s the way it’s going to be” types of responses that have not even held a hint of regret or empathy. I personally have regretted our choice of schooling.

“My middle school and high school students have only negative things to say about this entire ordeal. They both feel the process has been frustrating and a barrier to learning. They have demonstrated the negative effects of social isolation and forced screen time. They sleep much less, they interact much less with family and friends and seem to take less joy in things they love doing. If not for organized sports, I feel they would be clinically depressed.”

“The days my daughter has home learning..... gets up at 8:40 to check in at 8:45. Has advisory, then right back to bed when she is excused from that. Sleeps a while. Watches tv. Does this and that. 3:00, does her assignments for the day. 4:00 goes to soccer. Really productive school day.”

“My 10th-grader has lost all interest in school!!! Has been failing most classes only because of boredom, distraction, no faith in ever returning to “normal” again and not due to his ability to achieve higher grades. Remote leaves him isolated, bored, overwhelmed with loads of homework at times. Hybrid is a complete joke! Even though he enjoys the time he gets to see some of his peers....2 full days with no teacher instruction while remote students get teacher instruction 5 days a week! He spends more time emailing teachers multiple days of the week to correct why he was marked absent on remote learning days. And still he has so many absent days listed... they may be looking for me for breaking truancy laws at this point”

“We have three high school sons currently enrolled in the hybrid learning model in SMSD. As a former educator, I am saddened and horrified at how little learning they have had since last February. I do not put the blame on anyone specifically, I am truly just shocked. We have spent thousands of dollars alone in ACT prep for our junior just to get him up to par in math concepts and reading. Beyond the lack of learning is the fraying emotional stability of our youngest son. Here is a direct outcome of a personality/anxiety test he had to take for an elective class: “ You feel empty and isolated from others and wish to overcome this feeling. You believe life has more to offer you than what you are experiencing and you don’t want to miss out.” The isolation has been debilitating for him, and has caused a severe depression that we constantly monitor. I hope this is useful in letting the legislation of the great state of Kansas know how serious the schools being shut down is for our kids.”

“It’s a disgrace that the district (Shawnee Mission) has let our students down at this level.”

“While I understood the initial response to COVID-19 last March, the reality and the response since from our state, local and school district leaders is shameful. We are sacrificing a generation of kids and robbing them of time they will never get back, not to mention the detrimental effect this will have on their educational future. My kids are usually straight A students taking advanced and honors courses. Not only have we had to deal with C's, D's and a few F's but they have lost their joy, excitement, and motivation to learn.

“We are told this isn't political and that we're following science. I would argue it is nothing but political and "the science" can be used to support any position desired. The CDC has said numerous times that all kids, K-12, should be in school. Yet, it appears we are more inclined to follow the National Education Association.

“If other states, private schools, and school districts within the state of Kansas can figure out how to get ALL students and teachers back in school full time, then there is no reason for any school district to deny those that want to return to the classroom full time to do so immediately.”

“I have been a mom to four daughters for almost 29 years and am a home childcare provider and have been for a little over 23 years, 14-1/2 of those years being in the Shawnee Mission school district, Shawnee Mission South area schools, specifically. I actually grew up in the same neighborhood I live in now and went to Oak Park elementary, Indian Creek junior high, and Shawnee Mission South High School. So I know the district very well. Three of my four daughters went through the school district, one of them going all 13 years. In fact, other than middle school, the three of our daughters who have gone through Shawnee Mission School District, went to the same schools as I did growing up. I know several people who went to Shawnee Mission South High School and chose to move back to the area to raise their children in the same district they grew up in. So it has been rather disappointing to many of us how it has turned out.

“I have six full-time children who come to me during the day who are anywhere from birth to school age. Once they start kindergarten, they have the option of continuing to come to me for after school care as well as care during the summer and other various times off school during the school year. During the summer months, I continue to do summer enrichment with them so they do not lose what they learned over the school year over the course of the summer. This last year when school ended in March for spring break, we expected the children to go back to school after spring break was over. Much to my surprise, school was completely done for the remainder of the year. The children and parents were essentially told that fourth-quarter didn't count and that whatever grade they had by the end of third-quarter would be their grade for the year. To my understanding, if kids in middle and high school wanted to continue doing their schoolwork, they could to try to increase their grade. Otherwise, school was done until at least August. The district had no plan in mind they posted publicly. all they ever put out publicly, for the most part, was how they were

watching what other districts were doing. Being proactive, I decided that I was not going to have any children in my care, on my watch, not learn anything for the next five months, so I chose to go with the school curriculum we were given to use for them the rest of the school year. It was a hot mess to say the least. I don't altogether blame the teachers for that though, but many of the assignments given were frustrating.

"I finally had to go "rogue" and start doing some things differently than what was assigned because it was frustrating the children. And children in their class who would get on the Zoom meetings were never really "ready" to be in class. It was a complete joke of a situation. I brought this up to the teacher but was told they can't do much about what happens when the child is at home on the Zoom meetings. Kids were logging on in pajamas, eating their breakfast, bringing younger siblings on the meeting with them, bringing their pets. It was a nightmare! I continued to work with the children in my care throughout the summer and all through the month of August until the children were able to return to school after Labor Day this past year on Zoom. But it was still me facilitating it. The district didn't seem to care about the hardship it was placing on parents or the tech issues families were having. President Ousley even boasted about how when her son had issues with his computer, a technician actually CAME TO THEIR HOUSE to provide the needed repairs. No other family in the district gets that type of service but the SMSD Board President and her Kansas State Representative husband sure do!!!

"The children in my care were ahead when they started school by the time it started back up in September, or at least on track for where they should have been when they started back to school. But when they started back, because the district allowed kids and parents to essentially "check out" for all of fourth-quarter and all of summer, there was a lot of makeup work the kids had to do when they re-started school in September. The daycare parents I have thanked me profusely for continuing to teach their children so that they could go to work. Pretty much all of the children for whom I provide care have parents who were considered essential workers. Some work in the medical field, some in the food industry, some in banking, and some in construction.

"This district was irresponsible in allowing parents and children to check out for an entire quarter of school and to have start back three weeks late when they finally started school back up in the fall. They should have had a plan in place to start online on the day school was originally supposed to start, so they wouldn't be three weeks further behind than they already were.

"This district doesn't seem to care about the suicides which have occurred in the area by our teenagers. They care about votes and power and that's about it.

"At least some districts are finally listening to the real people who count and are getting their kids back to school."

“My two sons have been either virtual or hybrid since September. My oldest has always hated school and has never been at the top of his class academically. He says both hybrid and virtual are a joke and he’s learned nothing. My younger son has always loved school and is in the Gifted Program with an IEP. He says both hybrid and virtual are a joke and he’s learned nothing. Two totally different personalities and academic abilities share the same sentiments about virtual and hybrid.”

“My high school son has been virtual/hybrid/virtual/hybrid since the school year began. The inconsistency of his schedule, the daily internet issues, the spotty Zoom calls, the isolation from his peers, the inability to learn well online, the inaccessibility of his teachers, and the sheer number of hours he is forced to spend on a device everyday has taken its toll. We watched his grades plummet from As and Bs to Ds and Fs. He quit showing up for online classes and had so many missing assignments I finally stopped counting. My once social son became withdrawn from our family and his friends. He lost any motivation for school and grew disinterested in anything he cared about before. This started when the school year began, and I wish I could tell you this story had a happy ending but I don’t know yet because, sadly, we are still in it.”

“Hybrid or virtual - I don’t know which one is worse. They’re both terrible. I’m not learning anything, I don’t get to see my friends, I can’t ask my teachers questions, and I sit in front of a computer all day. My pediatrician always tells me I should limit my screen time because too much is not good for me. I see why now. But it makes me wonder if all the adults know it’s not good for kids, then why are the adults at school forcing us to sit in front a computer screen for 8 hours a day? School sucks now.” - 7th Grader

My 8th grader went from principal's honor roll to mostly D's and Fs, no longer wants to play sports bc he has no motivation, and spends too many hours doing school work on the computer. He'd love to be back to school in person, every day. It seems like a pipe dream. He has told me that there have been murmurings that school won't be back in person in fall, either. Who knows

“The school system is failing our children on multiple levels. My senior is usually full of life and energy is now withdrawn and depressed and feels life sucks. She has no hope for her senior year. My freshmen has increased social anxiety and is struggling mentally and physically. It’s criminal what the teachers union is doing to these kids.”

Both my kids each said to me separately when discussing their grades for first semester. “Mom, you just don’t understand how hard online school is. It’s really hard. I learn much better when I’m in school.”

That broke my heart as a parent to hear how much they are struggling with school this year. It’s not working and needs to be given top priority over passing bonds and discussing changing school mascot names.

To say that school has been an epic fail this year would be an understatement. I have a daughter who is a middle schooler and my son is a sophomore in SMSD. So far, my children have been in-person 10 days for the entire school year and that is just plain wrong. SMSD learning model for hybrid is the worst in JoCo. My son gets one 90-minute teaching period for each of his classes once a week. He has two full days learning on his own, and then one day remote where all his classes meet. School started 3 weeks late and is now ending 2 weeks early. So it doesn’t take a math genius to figure out there is no way these teachers are covering all the material, which means he is behind compared to his peers in the BV and Olathe districts, not to mention all the private schools that have been in-person since August.

As a parent this is extremely frustrating. My daughter’s learning model is slightly better in that she at least has every class the two days she’s in person and the one day she’s remote. It’s the two days where both kids are completely on their own that is really terrible. On these days, it’s a struggle every day to get them up to do any of their work. In contrast, on the days they go to school, they are up and ready and ready to run out the door. As a parent it’s heartbreaking to see what’s happening to our kids and for the school district to think it’s okay. My kids love school and remote and hybrid learning has made them dread school. Last Fall they were begging me to be able to go to school. They were so happy to go the handful of days, but then the district changed back to remote until January.

Our superintendent says he’s meets with the other districts, so then why are we not learning from their models of learning that seem so much better. At least in the Olathe district, the kids go every day, but half in the morning and half in the afternoon. If we have to be hybrid, this seems like a much better model. Also, we all live in the same county and are interacting in the community, so why are the schools not all following the same model? I get that there are people with health risks that can’t come in person, but then let’s figure out a way to accommodate them to learn at home where they feel more comfortable. The overwhelming majority of kids in our district want to learn in person. In the Fall 700 or 800 students at my daughter’s middle school chose in-person learning, I would bet that number increased as parents chose their learning model for second semester.

As a community, we have failed our children to be creative thinkers and figure out a way to get the students who want to be in school back there. The only place you can't go in JoCo is middle school and high school and to me that's criminal. We have allowed HS sports and we can figure out how to host an AFC Championship game, but not get our kids in school for more than 10 days for the school year? Where are our priorities?

Sorry, that was a long rant, but as you can tell this is a subject that I'm extremely passionate about. My kids are suffering and I'm at the mercy of a school board who has chosen to be a "follower" not a "leader or innovator" this year.

¹ Calculations based on SF21-023 spreadsheet of districts providing onsite learning for all students as provided by the Kansas Dept. of Education.